2018 The Joy of Writing

Stories written by the adult students of Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle
Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle (LVCA) provides one-on-one, confidential tutoring in basic literacy and English as a second language to adults living or working in Charlottesville and Albemarle County. Our talented tutors work closely with our students to help them succeed.

*The Joy of Writing* is an annual publication which provides an opportunity for adult students, who are learning how to read and write, to have their stories published in a collection of writings with their peers. This activity builds confidence in our students and allows many of them to share their stories of perseverance.

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For more information about LVCA, go to:
www.literacyforall.org

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My name is Parveen Ghulam-Zakrya. I am from Afghanistan. I graduated from high school in Pakistan. I started my first year of college studying Liberal Arts.

After that we moved to the United States. I am now living in Charlottesville, Virginia with my family. I started my studies again in the United States. I take classes from PVCC. I have certificates from PVCC and other schools. My major is pharmacy technician. I am proud of myself that I did not give up my studies. I have a job, nice home, my sweet family that is gifted from God, and my hard work. My mother always advised me to never give up my education and I continue my education and my life is going successfully. I am thankful to the United States for giving me these opportunities.

“Successful people are not gifted; they just work hard, then succeed on purpose.” — G.K. Nielson
An Empty Fridge

by Aura Vivas Molina

Forty years ago I did not imagine living in a different place than my beloved and wonderful Venezuela. Moving to the United States was not an easy decision for me, leaving my culture, my tasty food and the rest of my family. But everything changes with passage of time. A wonderful idea brought me to the U.S.: to live near my beautiful daughter and enjoy my grandchildren. I thought about how difficult it would be for me to learn a new language at my age. Today, almost 3 years later, I am still learning. I lived with my daughter a year and a half. During that time the hardest part was getting used to the food. Her fridge was always full, but not with Venezuelan food. I did not know stores or restaurants with Venezuelan cuisine when I was with her. I was eager to eat Venezuelan food!

As I said before everything changes. Now I do not live in my daughter’s house but in my own house. She and my grandchildren lived with me for 2 months before moving to Israel for work reasons of her husband. I bought the food, and I bought new food little by little for my needs. My fridge was always empty. I still remember the face of my granddaughter, Sabrina, when she opened the fridge one day to see what there was to eat. When she saw the empty fridge, she asked her mother, “Why is the fridge empty Mom?” “Ask grandma,” my daughter answered.
Today I am getting some products in Latin stores and I am preparing a little more Venezuelan meals. But my fridge is still empty and in my mind I can see the little face and hear the voice of my granddaughter. So when they return to visit, I must fill the fridge, but with their American snacks.

Beautiful Summers

by Paw Meh

I am from Myanmar. I live in Charlottesville with my family. My husband works at the laundromat and is happy with the work. He works in the morning, and in the afternoon cooks in the house. My children play games and they are happy. My family watches TV and goes shopping. My son goes to school in the morning at 7:30 AM and comes home at 3:30 PM. My daughter goes to school at 8:30 AM and comes home at 2:30 PM. I like my children and my beautiful family. My children like to go to summer school. In the summer we travel to North Carolina to my friend’s home where we go swimming. My family likes the summer, it makes us happy. I love my family. I cook dinner for my family.
A Story of Two Young Beijing Migrant Workers

by Li Zhang

One night of the month, when the coldest winds hit Beijing, Meimei stood alone at the exit of the Beijing North Railway Station waiting for Yanyan, her fellow villager, to pick her up. An hour passed, but Yanyan did not appear. Her fingers rubbed the crinkled-up address in her pocket. She wondered if she should go search for it by herself, but the rush of people and the complicated street signs overwhelmed her courage.

She heard someone call her. It was a young man instead of the girl. He stood taller than her, but around the same age. “You must be Yanyan’s friend. My name is Aming. We live in the same place. She can’t get off from work today, so she told me to come pick you up.” He picked up her suitcase from her hands. As Meimei released her suitcase, she released her stress. She followed him out of the busy train station. Ten minutes passed, and they came to a stop. In front was a parking lot. Aming strode toward a scooter. “Come on, squeeze on the back. I’ll take you to where you’ll be living.”

High buildings and neon lights splashed as they rode past. It seemed a long ride. Meimei couldn’t feel her hands. Their scooter turned corners, leaving the main streets. As they came to a dimly-lit alley, stopping before a shack, she suddenly felt worried.

“I live on the first floor with the other five guys,” Aming said. “You
women live on the second.” Meimei entered the house. A puff of warm air and mixed smells calmed her. The girl’s bedroom was small. Three sets of double bunks filled up the space. Six girls lived in this room. The other girls in the room told her that the bathroom and kitchen were shared, and the empty bed was hers. Aming left. Yanyan was still at work. Meimei thanked the other girls and sat down on her bed. Finally, she had come to Beijing from her small village. It was an okay journey. All of a sudden, she felt hungry. She hadn’t eaten anything the whole day, but she was embarrassed to ask the other girls in the same room.

A knock came. It was Aming again. He held two boxed lunches. “I figured you hadn’t eaten yet. Shall we eat together?” She followed him to the kitchen. A table stood in the corner, sticky with oil. The light was dim. “I’ve been living in Beijing for four years,” Aming said. “My parents worked in a garment factory in Guangzhou since I was six. I lived with my grandparents until I turned sixteen. I didn’t want to stay in school anymore, and I had a big fight with my grandparents. Then I ran away. When I first came here, I had to work as a day laborer. It’s only now that I found a stable job: delivering takeout food. One delivery pays six RMB. Sometimes I get 5000 RMB each month!” He smiled for a second. “But, when business is bad, all I can afford is rent and food. They also take off 600 RMB when there is a bad customer review. I must be very careful. That’s a waste of one week’s work, but people these days order a lot of takeout anyways. When the weather is this cold, nobody wants to go out. What about your family, Meimei?”

“My mom is sick, and all these years my dad is the only one working to support us; however, Dad hurt his back at his construction site. He couldn’t do his job anymore. Their boss didn’t buy them insurance, so we don’t have any income right now. I have a brother who is in college. I want to earn money for his tuition, so I dropped out of school and came here.”

Aming told Meimei of a job opportunity as a dishwasher. “I know the guy; he’s very nice. I’ll introduce you. Let’s go together tomorrow.” The next day Meimei got the job. The salary was pitiful, and the work was
hard. Still Meimei was happy, because she could earn money to support her family.

The city grew bigger and bigger. The restaurant where Meimei worked boomed with business. The manager saw that Meimei was eager to work, so he elevated her to a waitress. Aming crossed from street to street, delivering one meal after another. Time passed by quickly. These two young people went together naturally. Meimei believed in this hardworking boy. Aming worked toward someday being able to marry this kindhearted girl.

Soon it was the third winter that Meimei lived in Beijing. It grew exceptionally brutal. One morning before Meimei left for work, she told Aming: “Maybe you should stay at home today. The weather is too bad, and the traffic will be terrible. There is a snow storm.” Aming protested, “because there is a storm, people will order even more! You go to work. Don’t worry.”

That night Aming came back after midnight. He looked miserable and depressed. He told Meimei he couldn’t ride, but walked in the snow for one hour to deliver the last meal. Unfortunately, the delivery was still five minutes late. The customer was unhappy about the delay and complained the food was cold. He gave Aming a bad review. Aming would get a 600 RMB fine for that bad review. Meimei wrapped her arms around Amei. At that moment the night was silent for a moment. They left the shack and came to an inn around the street. It was their first time staying with each other, only the two of them in a room.

It was early in the morning when the sound of firetrucks woke them up. They came to the window and were shocked to find that not far away their home was on fire. Fire trucks could not get into their small alley. Too soon, the fire swallowed the shack. Except they two, the other thirteen young people who lived in that shack lost their lives.

A few days later, at the restaurant where Meimei worked, they had a simple wedding ceremony. “Meimei, I don’t have any money, but I will
give you the best I have. If I have porridge, I will scoop out the rice inside for you. Believe me, I will give you a home here in the city. The first thing I will do is to find a room of our own."

It was a quiet wedding. When people blessed the couple, they avoided talking about the deaths of thirteen young people but couldn’t help worrying about a rumor: because of the fire, the government would purge this whole urban village in three days. All the shacks would be pulled down. Then where would they go in this cold winter?

My Week
by Najiba Taheri

I stayed home this week. I cooked, cleaned, washed clothes, and watched TV. I went to my doctor’s appointment. I got my eyes checked. I went to Food Lion to buy onions, potatoes, rice and chicken.

My friend went to Pakistan and will come back in 2 months. I will be happy when she comes back.

I relax and watch TV in my apartment. I like the quiet there.
After a long trip by plane arriving at Dulles Washington DC Airport my husband and I were very excited. At the same time nervous and sad because we left our beloved family and our country. We were at the airport to hear that all the staff spoke English and we asked ourselves if we could ever speak and understand this language.

After being attended by immigration we left to meet with our son-in-law and travel to Charlottesville to see our daughter and our grandchildren.

It was already early morning. My daughter and the children were already awake. Hugging them, kissing them, and that reception of love are moments that can not be forgotten. Above all that, my grandson told me, “Grandma, do not go back to your country, otherwise I’ll miss you.”

These words he told me in English and I did not know what he had told me. My son-in-law and my daughter told me at the same time what it meant. I hugged him very strong. I told him that I will not return and that I will take care of him and his sister.

Since that time we are very close and we always give love and
affection. To see them grow and see that my daughter is achieving her goals is very happy for us.

We thank God for this life opportunity given to us and also thanks for the opportunity to meet many people from different countries. We have come to this place, Charlottesville, that offers educational and work opportunities and to be able to get ahead. I thank my teacher for her love and dedication to teach me and all the staff of Literacy Volunteers for the help given to the immigrant. Thank you very much. God bless you.

My Family
by Yesica David

My name is Yesica. I’m from Honduras. I have been living in Charlottesville, VA for 11 years.

I have 4 children – 3 daughters and 1 son. The names of the daughters are Alexa, Dilicia, and Hillary. My son’s name is Ivan.

I know that learning English is important because my daughters ask for help with their homework. English is very important for my work because in my work my co-workers only speak English.

I love Charlottesville because it is very tranquil and I have many friends. I’m very happy. I go to church. God is number one in my life.

Thank you Literacy Volunteers for your help.
Changes
by Juan Carlos Morales Ordonez

I’m Juan Carlos. I was born in Mexico. My parents are from Guatemala. I remember my first day here in Charlottesville, U.S. It was confusing because the language is English and I only knew a little bit of English – just colors and numbers.

My big brother has been here in Charlottesville for 15 years. I had not seen him since he moved. It was amazing to see him again. I stayed with him for two months and I found a job in construction. I did not like this job for a couple reasons.

First, I had a long commute. I needed to wake up very early and I got home late. Second, I had no schedule. If it was raining, then there was no job. Third, I did not like working outside in the winter. It was cold. But most importantly, I couldn’t learn English. My coworkers were Hispanic. So we spoke Spanish and I could not practice English.

I left this job and I started to work at a restaurant. For my new commute, I needed to take the bus. The bus driver and my new coworkers did not speak Spanish. I needed to learn more English in order to speak with them.

I looked for a place to learn English and I found LVCA. Thank you so much to everyone at LVCA. Now, my English is much better. I have more friends and my life is better. Thank you.

This history is dedicated to Elliott Lant, my tutor. Thank you.
My Life as a Refugee
by Deo Rai

I was born in Bhutan in 1974. In Bhutan, my family owned a house and land. We planted rice, corn, mango trees, banana trees, orange trees, cauliflower, and many other vegetables. We had domestic animals like cows, goats, sheep, and chickens. We were very happy in Bhutan because we had permanent citizenship. Then there was a big meeting and they told us, “You are Nepali people because your grandfather came from Nepal to Bhutan. You have to go back to Nepal.”

Many people said, “Our country is Bhutan, not Nepal.” But we had to go to Nepal. We lived in a refugee camp, Goldhap. It was very hot and the weather was bad. It was a small place and many people lived together. People got sick and many people died. Lines and lines of people went to the hospital in the night, in the morning, and during the day.

We came to America on July 9, 2014. Now we are happy.
Sabina
by Udelio Pena

Sabina was the name of a farm that my grandfather had to the north of Bani, the town where I was born. It was mountainous land. My grandfather had more farms, but Sabina was his favorite farm.

I was eight years old when he invited me to go to Sabina. I was very happy. We left in the early morning hours. In those times we were transported on horses, with a bright moon and a beautiful starry sky. We were accompanied by my father and a worker of my grandfather. I remember that on the way I could see for the first time shooting stars and my grandfather told me to make a wish.

Halfway to Sabina, we stopped for the horses to drink water and rest, and we had breakfast. We had coffee and milk and corn cake.

We continued our trip now by a more difficult road, crossing a creek. I could see the birds, and listening to their songs was really a great adventure for me.

We arrived at Sabina at sunset. The farm was on a hill and, at the bottom, it crossed a beautiful creek with crystal clear water. In the night we made a bonfire, and my grandfather told us stories and played the guitar. It was nice to hear the waters of the creek and the singing of the frogs.

The next day we walked through the farm where there were cows, horses, dogs, ducks, chickens and other animals. After running around the
farm, throwing rocks down the hills, I took a bath in the crystal clear waters of the creek.

Grandpa, thanks for the memory that was recorded in my mind and my heart. I hope you have Sabina in Heaven.

I Love to Learn English
by Fatima Smajic

Hi, my name is Fatima Smajic. I was born in 1959, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I came to the United States in 2012 because I followed my husband here. In America I am learning the English language. I go to school to be educated, because it is good for me and my job. My goal is to be a good English speaker. In school, I make lots of friends. My teacher is very nice because she helps me learn English. Now I work at the Omni Hotel. My job is in housekeeping. I meet a lot of good people. They are so friendly to me. Now I can understand when they speak English. Thank you to all the people who help me. I love my teacher so much—she tells me I do a very good job speaking English. I love you all always.
A Better Life
by Elena Contreras

I’m a 53 year old woman who emigrated to this country in 1984 from Honduras. My wish was always to study, but I had to work hard to help my family back in my country.

After I got married, my daughters were born and I never had time to study. I had to work two jobs. But now my daughters are grown and married. I thought that now is my time and I decided to learn English.

My goals is to get my GED because I think it’s never too late to learn. I want a better life and to find a better job than what I have at this moment. With the help of God, I know that I’m going to achieve my goal.

I want to say, special thank you to my tutor Donna Otis, whom I call my angel because she not only helps me with English classes, but she also has time to help me with my personal stuff. Thank you and may God bless you forever.
The Worst Job
by Taher Barbari

At Skyline Tent Company, every day I went outside to work.

I start to work in January. It’s very cold. I can’t feel my fingers because I have no gloves. Snow and cold, cold and snow.

In the spring, it is good. It’s hot like summer. The trees are blooming.

In the summer, it’s too hot, and the white color of the tents burns my eyes. I sweat into my eyes which is a big problem.

It’s better in the fall when the leaves fall.

Helping My Children
by Ree Mo

I am from Myanmar. I have four children, one son and three daughters. My son was born in Thailand and my three daughters were born in the U.S. We’ve lived in Charlottesville for eight years. I don’t work. I stay at home watching my children. I make dinner, clean the home, and wash the clothes. I go to class at PVCC. I know a little English and it’s very difficult for me. My husband works at the Omni Hotel right now. I’m happy to go to school because I need to learn English. Sometimes, I help my children with their homework. It’s not easy because I can’t help my children.
Growing up in Tibet
by Jamyang Nyima Taga

My name is Taga. I was born in the village of Dagyab, in eastern Tibet. I have a big family of four brothers and four sisters. They are still living in Dagyab. It is a beautiful land and it has four seasons. Winter is very cold with lots of snow. It can get as cold as minus zero!

I was raised as a Tibetan Buddhist. We believe in Buddha and his teachings about life, religious harmony and reincarnation. The town of Dagyab has two big monasteries named Magon and Bugon. A few hundred monks live at the monastery all year. The monks that live there teach about Buddhist philosophy and logic. About 2,000 monks come to pray through the year on special celebration days.

Before 1980, when I was a boy, there were no paved roads and we raised all our own food. We raised barley, buckwheat, wheat and three different kinds of beans and lots of vegetables. We also raised yak and dri (a female yak), zo and zomo (a cross between an ox and dri). We raised cows, goats and sheep too. We bought only tea and salt from the city.

We had all that we needed but some families bought meat, butter and salt from the nomads. The nomads need barley and wheat and the farmers need meat, butter, and salt. The farmers and nomads help each other as business partners and they have a good working relationship. There were no phones and no cars when I was growing up in Tibet, but when the barley seeds were ready to harvest in the fall the nomads would
come every year because they knew it was harvest time and that winter was coming.

There is a special connection between the nomads and farmers. The nomads depend on their animals for life. Most of their income comes from the animals. Nomads sell cheese, butter, meat, wool and leather to the farmers. Farmers spend most of their time on the farm raising crops. Agricultural work is not easy in Tibet but they do it everyday. They get different grains and vegetables from the farm. When the nomads come to the farms the weather is starting to get cold and winter snows will come. I remember when days were growing colder. People in the village and my mom would worry and pray for the nomads since they were traveling long distances and it was so dangerous.

Some groups of nomads have lots of yak, dogs and horses with them. When they came to my village, all the farmers take care of them and feed all of them.

In Tibet, we have different kinds of butter because we have different kinds of milk. Milk comes from different animals. We use cow milk, dri milk, zomo milk and goat milk. We make butter using different milk and we have two different colors of butter. In the summer and fall we have summer butter. Summer butter is yellow. In the spring and winter, the butter is white. This is because animals eat different grasses in the different seasons. They eat “medicine grass” and many field flowers. The flowers change the color of their milk and butter. All of the milk and butter are organic!

When I was a child, we didn't have playthings like toys, balls, or movies and cartoons. We played games with small stones and mud. Sometimes we played with different animals. I was a very happy child because I had parents and I did not need to take responsibility. My mom’s name was Tsultrim Lhadon. She had ten children. I was the seventh child. At that time, there was no medical treatment for childbirth. My mother delivered all of her children at home with no pain pills. Nothing bad happened and all births were very good.

Continued...
I can remember being young and when my mother stayed home I was very happy. If mom didn’t stay home, I wasn’t happy and our home looked empty. I thought my mom was the most beautiful lady in the world. When she had time, Mom told us nice stories at nighttime. She was very strong and kind so I miss Mom all the time.

Time Runs Fast
by Jose Zaragoza Herrera

In this month, many things come to my mind. Two years ago, I left my house and part of my family in Mexico. One day, on February 18, I arrived here. Sometimes it is hard for me stay away from my family because we were always together. I miss them a lot, but here I have the opportunity to improve myself. I think that in this country I can learn something new every day. Also, I’m taking a class because I want to learn English. In this country, English changes your life. I hope in the next two years, I can improve a little bit more.
My Favorite Holiday

by Maria Zaragoza

My favorite holiday is The Virgin of Guadalupe. It is every year on December 12th. It is a Mexican-Catholic holiday.

In Charlottesville, it is celebrated at The Church of the Incarnation. We start walking at Southwood Mobile Home Park at 2:00 in the morning. Four people are in the front and carry a five-foot tall ceramic Guadalupe. About 300 people follow. It is 6.6 miles and takes three hours.

When we get about 1/2 mile from the Church, some people put on costumes and we all start dancing. At the Church we start to sing Mañanitas which are special songs. We also dance and yell, “Viva la Virgen de Guadalupe!” which means live. I am filled with many emotions like happiness and sadness, and joy. Sometimes I smile and sometimes I cry.

When it’s finished, it’s breakfast time for everyone. We eat tamales, sweet bread, coffee, Mexican chocolate and Atole. At the end of the celebration I am tired but thankful for the miracle of Guadalupe.
When I found out that I was pregnant, I really wanted to tell our families and friends who live in South Korea face to face. Instead, on my eighth week of pregnancy, I told them through a video call. Our families were crying and they were heartily pleased. If I were in Korea, I would share these emotions with them and have a good time with some delicious Korean foods.

Although, I am having a wonderful experience of pregnancy here, if I were pregnant in South Korea, my life would be very different.

First, because my friends in Korea have already given birth to their babies, I think they would pass on—for free—some beautiful handmade infant clothing that their babies have outgrown. I have been so surprised that I will need so much baby equipment. Fortunately, there are many places in the Charlottesville area where I can buy clean used baby products at a low price. If I were in Korea, it would have been a good time to talk about raising a baby while they showed me their gifts and explained everything I would need.

Second, in Korea we have sonogram tests every month so we can check our baby’s condition and heartbeat. Here I have had only two sonograms so far which leaves me feeling curious about my baby. I know that too many sonograms are not good for a baby because a baby feels stressed. A sonogram every month would make me feel more
comfortable, but maybe that sounds a bit selfish? Also, I would have only one doctor in charge. One doctor to do all of the ultrasound tests and to teach me about this new and all-absorbing condition of being pregnant. Now, I have a total of eight OB/GYNs, several sonogram doctors and many nurses. Although it is a little strange to me, it makes my care feel more professional.

Third, in Korea, I would have mother-care in a postnatal care center. A postnatal care center is a specialized nursing hotel for new mothers to take care of them after the birth of their child for two or three weeks. Many mothers choose this center because it can provide breastfeeding education, some interesting programs such as postpartum yoga, making a mobile for the baby’s crib and massage services as well as basic items such as baby care, cleaning and laundry. Meeting with their peers helps prevent depression in mothers that can occur after giving birth.

Although the culture in Korea is changing a lot now, it is still difficult to get help from a husband. This is because most Korean companies do not provide paid paternal leave, so fathers cannot miss work. That’s why most mothers choose a postnatal care center instead. But because it costs a lot of money, some mothers don’t choose the centers. If mothers can’t or don’t want to do that, they are taken care of by their own mothers. If I were pregnant in South Korea, my mother would not be free to come with me. She and my father have their own business and she is very busy with work. Therefore, I would choose a nursery hotel even though it costs a lot. I wouldn’t need to think about every meal or any housework for three weeks.

Although the cultures of Korea and America are slightly different, I am looking for some different pleasures here during pregnancy. I think this place where I live is good for prenatal care because the air is so nice and I am surrounded by nature. Thanks to that nature, my husband and I can go to some great park or river to relax. Of course there are lovely sites in Korea, too, but I think Virginia has more quiet places than Korea. I will read many books that I have been wanting to read and I will make
many things such as a baby mobile or a blanket and so on. If I were in Korea, I would continue my job as an accountant during pregnancy. It would exhaust me. On the other hand, I still want to work someday here in America, but I will put that off until after the baby is born.

Did I say that if I were in Korea, my mother could not help me after the birth because she works full time? Here’s the great surprise: in December, she will come to Charlottesville to meet the baby and to pamper me and cook and clean while I learn to be a new mom. Whether I am in Korea or not, I see that the most important thing is the heart of a mother who thinks about her children. I want to be that kind of mother.

My New Life
by Zheng Wang

I don’t know where to start writing about my story. First, I would like to introduce myself. Everyone calls me Zheng!

When I first arrived to the United States, I didn’t understand when people spoke some simple greeting to me. Terms I didn’t understand. They spoke too fast. And when I wanted to reply the people were already gone.

Here in America I can get fresh food. I enjoy a variety of food every day. I work at Sam’s Club and study English in school. I have met new friends at work and at school. They come from different countries.

I study English at school. I try to communicate with all people. I try to express my feelings and intentions. Since I arrived here my English is not good. It is hard to come up with a lot of jokes in English!

It was not easy for me to really understand my parents after I came
here. In my previous years in China, my parents never mentioned hard work about this. Now I understand the profound experience of my parents in the past years of hardships. This is why my parents worried about every little thing about me!

Now my parents are old. A Chinese proverb says, “Bring up children so they can take care of their parents in later years.” I am happy I have the best parents!

I am not a very good son, and I am not a very understanding husband. But, I want to be the best son and best husband!

My Family
by Khatira Mukhlis

My name is Khatira. I am from Afghanistan. My father is named Jantgul. My father’s job in Afghanistan was engineer. It was a good job. Here, now his job is at Walmart. My father is sad because his job is not good and he is very tired. In Afghanistan he had a beautiful job.
Christmas Eve, The Good Night Day, is one of the most significant and popular holidays in our customs and traditions. In the Dominican Republic, this day is the most colorful, familiar and cheerful of all the celebrations of the year.

In my family, we met at our parents' house all day, cooking the traditional dishes of the occasion and other favorite snacks of some members of the family. At night we all sat down at the table: parents, children, grandchildren, nephews, nieces, brothers-in-law and some friends. After giving thanks, we all ate, and at the end, we met on the terrace of the house. Children ate fruits, raisins, almonds, etc., while adults talked and remembered old stories and events from the past.

One Christmas Eve, my mother said, “If we had a van, we would go for a walk on the city boardwalk.” My sister said that would be very amusing because there are fireworks and a sea breeze. Another said: “There will be many people at this time on the boardwalk.”

My dad said, “I am not leaving. I’m not going to go to the boardwalk. I’m going to bed.”

My mom said, “You’re a killjoy! At this time, the city is quiet, and we’re just going to drive on the boardwalk.”

Dad: “No! I’m not going.”

Sister: “If Daddy goes, we’ll make it very fun.”

Suddenly, everyone began to talk at the same time. Another said yes. Another said no. Another said that a different day would be better. In the middle of the argument, I got up and said: “Everyone get out of the van. No one is going to the boardwalk. Wouldn’t it be good to buy the van first?” At that moment, everyone was silent. We looked at each other and all started laughing.
The Time
by Yolanda Perez Guerrero

I grew up in a small town on the shores of the Caribbean Sea. The city radio station was located on the shore of the city’s beach. Every opportunity to announce the hour was preceded by the phrase, “Time is the factor that determines everything in life.”

Time is the expression that defines a range of occurrences or physical events. What we started a thousand years ago might end one hundred or five hundred years later, the time goes on. We are born, and we die. Yet time goes on; it is infinite.

Considering this phrase, I grew up understanding everything that might not make sense now, over time becomes reasonable, logical and understandable.

Time gives us the opportunity to live with family, friends, teachers, pets, knowledge, properties, etc. It is this coexistence during time that teaches us to appreciate and value all that we have acquired. What moments come to mind when we feel joyful or sad, successful or defeated, alone or accompanied? The people come to mind who were part of our lives, not the things we have had but living beings.

Time teaches us that happy moments are made of all the good that we have done and given the opportunity to repeat again and again. The
memories that remain of prominent men and women in history, are not due to possessions or their intellect but what they did with them.

Time also teaches us to love. Time teaches us to express this feeling by embracing, kissing, listening and sharing moments with others. We come to realize that the hugs we never gave, the words we never expressed, and the time we never devoted, are moments we lost of incalculable value. But while there is more time, we can start again. We can collect the pieces and build a new life. We can begin to express the love not expressed, the forgiveness not given, and the smile not smiled before. These moments we share can multiply and become what we take and what we leave at the end of life. Because the current moment is the fact that determines everything in life. Time is a patient teacher.
My name is Gopal. I am from Bhutan. I was born in Dagana, Bhutan. I am 47 years old. I moved from Bhutan to Nepal. I lived in Nepal for 19 years, then me and my family came to America on August 23, 2012. Now, I live in Charlottesville, Virginia with my mom, dad, wife, and three sons. My dad’s name is Dal Magar and my mom’s name is Bhisnu Magar. They stay at home while me and my wife go to work. My wife’s name is Badam Magar. My oldest son, Dil Magar, goes to PVCC college. My middle son goes to high school. My youngest son goes to elementary school. I have 3 generations in the same house. We are very, very happy because we can celebrate Thanksgiving holiday. We make turkey, potatoes, onions, tomatoes, rice, green beans, and hot peppers mixed. I cook and we eat.
I Love My Niece, Saphia

by Farida Qimat Sha

I have a niece, named Saphia. My niece is very good. She never does anything wrong. She is very good all the time. She does not cry. She does not complain. She is always relaxed. We love her. My whole family loves her because she is easy going and good natured. But Saphia has a problem. My little niece is sick.

When Saphia was three months old, she cried and cried. She coughed and sneezed a lot. We brought her to the hospital. At first, no one knew what was wrong with my niece.

My sister shouted and cried. “Please! Tell me what is wrong with my daughter! What happened? Why can you not tell me anything about my daughter?”

The doctor did not say anything. He had no answer. He only said to wait for her test results. After the lab tests were completed, the doctor found the reason why Saphia was sick. He said that Saphia had the flu and pneumonia. The doctor also said she had a low blood reading. My niece needed blood quickly. We did not understand. Everyone was very shocked. We asked the doctor, “What is her illness?” He answered that my niece has Thalassemia, an inherited blood disorder where her blood cells cannot carry oxygen well. The doctor also explained that another child had the same disease. Some children die from the disease. But if a child reaches his or her seventh birthday, that child will be all right.

When she heard this information, my sister cried and became very depressed. We were all very sad for my niece. We prayed. We just needed her to be healthy.

During my niece’s stay at the hospital, we visited Saphia and my sister. Every day my family brought food for my sister to eat because my
sister stopped eating. Saphia could only drink milk and juice, but we also brought her toys to play with. We wanted Saphia well and tried to keep her feeling good with toys. After fifty days in the hospital, my niece came home. All my family was happy that she had gotten better enough to return home.

One day, I was preparing to go shopping, and Saphia asked me to please buy her shoes. I teased her and told her, “Give me a kiss, and then I will buy you shoes.” She hugged me, kissed my lips, and kissed all over my face. I asked her, “What color shoes do you want?” Saphia answered, “I want red shoes!”

Since that day, Saphia would always keep her red shoes near her. Saphia loved her red shoes. When people visited, she would show every visitor her shoes. “These are my shoes,” she would proudly smile. Even when we ate, she kept her shoes near her.

I love my niece, and she loves me. When I got married, my niece was upset. “Why do you marry?” Saphia asked angrily. After I left for America, my niece asked to go to America with me. She sends me messages every day and tells me, “I miss you.” In America, I remember my niece every day.

Today, Saphia is three years old. Saphia still needs a blood transfusion every month, but she is a happy, sweet child.
The Mid-Autumn Festival
by Yan Lin

In a year there are many traditional holidays in China, Spring Festival (Chinese Lunar New Year), Lantern Festival, Dragon Boat Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival. One of my favorites is the Mid-Autumn Festival. It is also the second largest traditional Chinese festival next to the Spring Festival. The time of the Mid-Autumn Festival is the 15th of the lunar calendar of each year. August 15 is in the middle of the fall, so it’s called the Mid-Autumn Festival.

On the day of the Mid-Autumn Festival, no matter how busy people are, they have to go home to see their parents and relatives. So it’s also called Reunion Festival. The whole family gets together to eat moon cakes and watch the moon.

In China, there is a custom to watch the moon from ancient times. There are many beautiful legends. Such as the Story of Chang'e going to the moon. It’s the story of how Chang’e stole her husband Hou Yi’s magic fountain of youth and flew to the moon. Mid-Autumn Festival also has the tradition of eating moon cakes. Because the shape of the moon cake is round, it symbolizes reunion. The taste is also different, sweet, salty, red bean paste, coconut, yoke, etc.

People eat delicious food, they enjoy the beautiful moon, and talk about happy topics. Everyone is immersed in this festive atmosphere.
I am from El Salvador. I remember when I was a child, my life was very difficult. I grew up with my grandparents because my mom and my father did not want to be responsible. So that’s why I grew up with my father's parents. My grandma was 62 years old, and my grandfather was 61 years old. They had to work so hard to bring food for me and my brother, too. We were alone all the time because they needed to work. It is very difficult to feel alone. It is hard to feel like nobody loves you.

But time was passing, and I was growing every day, and my emotions were growing, too. One day, I talked to God, asking him to give me a husband and babies. I promised I would never leave my babies because I didn’t want them to suffer like me.

But let me tell you something. I met Jesus Christ when I was twenty years old. My lord gave me hope. My lord changes all my loneliness and sadness into joy. I have my handsome husband and my beautiful children. I love them. They are my motivation to continue my life in joy.
Hi, my name is Havva. I’m from Afghanistan. I have a big family. My husband and I have four children, three daughters and one son. My daughter’s names are Zahra, Kobra, and Tuba. My son’s name is Mahdi. My daughters Zahra and Kobra go to high school and my son will go there next year. My youngest daughter goes to daycare. My husband works at Wegmans. I work at a small company in Crozet and I study English. I take four classes to learn English every week.

I lived in Iran with my family for a long time. My family and I moved to Turkey and we lived there for five years. People in Turkey are very good and kind. My children went to school there. My daughter Kobra finished eighth grade, my older daughter Zahra finished ninth grade and my son Mahdi finished fifth grade there. My youngest daughter was born there. My husband worked at a plastic factory. I worked at a restaurant. I love Turkey.

My family and I came to the United States two years ago to live in Charlottesville. I like Charlottesville because there are good and kind people here, it is a safe city, and it has clean water. I also think the traffic is much better than Tehran. I’m happy here but I miss my parents and siblings in Iran.
My father is sixty-five years old. He is sick because his brain has a blood clot. My mother is sick too. She has high blood pressure and diabetes. I have three sisters and two brothers. They all live in Iran. I have two nephews and three nieces. I have only met two of them.

My dream is that my children will go to college and they will be successful. I also want to visit my parents and siblings in Iran. My dream for my husband is that he will be healthy and successful in his job and during his life. My other dream is to learn English because learning English will help my family and I reach our dreams.

Working at Wegmans
by Bagher Alizadah

My wife's name is Havva. I live in the U.S. I was born in Afghanistan and I have four children. I have three daughters and one son. My wife is a housewife. I have two brothers and three sisters. I am from Afghanistan. I work at Wegmans as a dishwasher.
Many people in the USA probably don’t know what life is like in a refugee camp. That’s why I want to share my story. I was a refugee living in Zambia, but my home is in Congo DR. Life in a refugee camp was difficult because I didn’t have my mother and father with me to give advice and support. In my home, I would occupy my day with school, soccer, and family, but the refugee camp was boring. I would wake up early in the morning and pray to God to give me strength for the day. I would then prepare breakfast, take a shower, and rest for a moment. As the time passed, I looked for something to occupy my thoughts and I longed to continue my education by going to school. When I thought about my life, I cried bitterly and asked God why I had to suffer so much instead of going to school. Sometime I wished that someone would ask me if I would like to go to school.

Life had become very difficult since my parents were killed in Congo. They sponsored me to go to school and provided for me so that I could focus on school. At school, things were very easy and within my reach. But now things were different because of the crisis in my country. I wondered why I had to become a refugee and live in a camp like animals in the zoo that long for their original habitat. For me that habitat includes school and I could do nothing about it. The refugee camp seemed like a place for prisoners who had committed very big crimes. I do not understand why this happened to me. Of course, my instinct tells me that the guilty men, instead of the people of my country, belong in a refugee camp. However, to this day I do not understand why the
innocent people in the camp were treated as guilty.

I had no way to work or earn money to buy food, which I really needed. But I am thankful to God that I was provided with some food, health care, and many other things. But not for school. After four years in Zambia, I moved to the United States as a refugee through IRC. I am thankful to the IRC and other organizations for helping me escape from the refugee camp, which felt like a jail. Here, I am trying to rebuild my life and to continue my education. I have a job, a place to live, and I can drive. I am thankful for the City of Charlottesville for supporting the Adult Learning Center and for the University of Virginia for giving the opportunity to all Facilities Management employees to take ESL and GED classes. These classes give us a chance to continue our education. I’m so happy to be here and God bless America!

From Syria to Michie Drive
by Huda Ismail

My husband’s name is Yaser. I like my family. I have 3 children, but no daughters. I live on Michie Drive and have been here one year and four months. I like America. I have four brothers and three sisters. My mother is in Turkey but my dad has died. My two sisters are in Iraq. I’m from Syria. My husband has no work because he has disability in Iraq.
The Civil War and a Long Journey

by Ghulam Mohammad Mohammad Hakim

I am 69 years old, and I am from Afghanistan. The War started in Afghanistan in 1975. Daud Khan was the President of Afghanistan at that time, when the Mujahideen came to Afghanistan. In 1992 the Civil War became worse. In 1994 before Taliban came, 70,000 innocent people were killed. My life and my family’s life was in danger, so we had to escape to Pakistan. We were nine family members. We were stuck in Peshawar for 15 days until we received our Visas for Tashkent Uzbekistan. We flew from Pakistan to Tashkent Uzbekistan. After 15 days our Visas expired, and a couple of police officers came to our rented apartment and took me to jail.

I was kept in jail for seven days under very harsh conditions. It was very inhumane treatment. There were ten of us in the same prison cell. In that cell, there were five bunk beds. These beds were made of metal. There was no mattress, pillow, or blanket. There was only one open bathroom. During the 24 hours, we only got one 15 minute break. We would only get two meals a day. During that week I lost 11 pounds. Fortunately my friends helped me to get a Visa to Moscow for me and my family.

When we arrived to Moscow, we registered as immigrants. We started our life in Moscow, and I opened a store in (Lozneky) market. I also worked as a taxi driver. In 2005 my competition next door conspired against me by telling the police that I was selling an illegal knife, even though three other shops sold the same item. The police took me to jail. I was in jail for three days and three nights. This jail reminded me of Tashkent’s jail. On the fourth day I was taken to court and I was on trial. I was lucky that I got a really good judge, and I was proved innocent. I was able to go home to
my family and catch up with my life and I returned to work.

After two years, the immigration office of Moscow contacted me and decided to send me with my family to USA, and that is how we came to Charlottesville, Virginia in 2008. After five days of our arrival, I went to the IRC and started to learn English as a fourth language and studied for three months. There I was able to learn the English alphabet. After three months I joined the Adult Learning Center, and I continued to learn English there for two years. In the end of 2009 I joined the Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle which was located on 7th Street. I continued to study there for four months and then in 2010 I found an opportunity to work, and couldn’t continue my studies with them. In 2016 I also joined the Albemarle school of Charlottesville. It was not until 2017 when I was able to rejoin the Literacy Volunteers program and continued my journey to learn English.

I want to thank all the teachers and all the tutors for their hard work and their patience for helping students like me. Without you we would not be able to reach our goals.
Shouting Hen

by Marzia Abdul Aziz

When I was seven years old, we had many hens. One of our hens was red. She was very noisy, and she never laid any eggs. One day when she started to ca-ca-ca, I followed her. I saw her go in a hole under our living room. I was very nervous and I thought oh, my mom is not at home. How can I get the hen out?

When I went to the hole, I saw that it was very dark inside. I couldn’t see anything. Because I often played with a mirror trying to catch sunshine on it and bounce the sunshine off the walls, I thought I could use a mirror to get some light into this hole. I got a mirror and used it to catch the sunshine. I was able to see into the hole. It was really long like a tunnel. At the end of the tunnel was the hen and many, many eggs. I was very happy and excited! Since my mother was not home, I ran to my neighbor’s house and called her to look into the hole. When she saw the end of the hole, she started laughing and said: “Oh! Your mom said that her hen goes ca-ca-ca, but never lays an egg! But look, here she has laid many eggs.”

I asked her how I could get the eggs out of the tunnel. She said that it was a long tunnel, about six meters. She measured our living room. It was five meters plus one meter of another room. She told me to dig at a specific spot in that room after removing the carpet covering the dirt floor. I dug around the spot and found a big, flat rock. I called my neighbor
again to help me move the rock. When we lifted it, I saw sixteen nice, brownish eggs.

When my mom came home, I told her: “Mother, you always told me that the noisy hen never laid eggs. Today she laid sixteen eggs!”

“You’re lying to me,” said my mom. So, I showed her the eggs and told her what had happened that day. When she heard the story, she was very upset and worried about me. She told me it was very dangerous to open the hole because some snakes might be living in there. She said to never do anything like that again. Then she told me if I had left the eggs inside the hole, some other day they would have become little chicks. I felt so sad about getting the eggs out of the hole. I thought to myself that if I had left the eggs inside the hole, they would have given me cute little chickens and that would be better than having these eggs.

After that, my mother closed the hole. We made a small nest for the hen, but she never laid eggs there because she was always looking for a dark place to lay them.

Eight Grandchildren

by Maryam Yousefi

My family is large. I have six children, four daughters and two sons. Three daughters live with me, and my other daughter lives in Iran with her husband and three children. My sons live in Europe. I have eight grandchildren, five of them live with me. I love having some of my family here, but I miss my children and grandchildren who do not live here.
My Family and then Citizenship Day!

by Met Reh

My family is good. Every day every thing is good. The children call us Mother and Father. Sometimes I say, “Where is your father?” Then I say, “I am the father.”

My wife’s name is Ree Mo. She is 29 years old. She was born in Burma. We met each other at the refugee camp in Thailand in 2007. She loves me. I love her. We married at the refugee camp. I gave her a ring.

My youngest child is two years old. Her name is Emily. Her hair is a little bit long. Her hair is the color black. She goes to school three days a week. School starts at 11:30 and finishes at 1:30. She will soon be three years old. Emily likes to go to school. She likes her friends. The school bus comes and picks her up. The school bus is yellow.

I have two more daughters. My oldest daughter is six years old and her name is Angelina. My other daughter is Mary May and is five years old.

My son’s name is Soe Reh. He is nine years old. He is in the third grade. He likes to ride the bicycle outside. I like to ride the bike, too. All the family likes to ride bikes in the park. At home he likes to look at pictures on the iPad. He likes to play games on the iPad.

Saturday and Sunday children exercise. They wiggle with the hula hoop. The hula hoop is blue and yellow. Then they go play outside. We go to the park. They play every day and every night. They ride their bicycles. All the children like to do the hula hoop outside at school.

Then Citizenship Day came!

I woke up at 9:00 a.m. on Friday, March 16, 2018. Many people came
to the courthouse. Many people from different countries spoke different languages. I finished getting my citizenship papers. I felt so good. I felt so happy.

Thank you so much for helping me become a citizen. Thank you everyone.

Everyone speaking good. I listen. I understand.

My wife is not a citizen yet. She has to take the test again. Three of my four children were born in Charlottesville, VA. My oldest son was born in Thailand.

We are a very happy family!

I Was a Little Kid in Russia

by Alex Mohammed

I am from Russia. I was a little kid in Russia. I lived in Moscow. I studied in Russian school there. It was a very hard education and not comfortable for studying because there are no school buses, only parents pick up. In Moscow it is very cold. In Russian school, they don’t have regular classes, like in USA. They stay in the same room with the same teacher for all subjects.
New Hope

by Farida Haidari

My name is Farida, and I’m from Afghanistan. When I was in Afghanistan, I was studying computer science. It was my second year that I was studying, but I moved with my family to the state of Virginia and I thought that I couldn’t continue my education. I was very sad, but when I got to Virginia, I found there were lots of chances or ways to go to college. Now I hope to begin at PVCC studying Business Administration.

Three years ago, I went back to Afghanistan and got married to a wonderful man. Now we have a two year old son—his name is Ahmad Uzair. I have lots of hopes and dreams and goals to accomplish, and I am committed to persevering until I succeed.
My Memories of Tibet
by Pasang Drolma

My name is Pasang. I was born in Tibet. I grew up in a small village called Nemo. When I was nine years old, my parents took my brothers and moved to Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, to find work. I stayed behind with my grandmother. I helped take care of her. We lived in a traditional round house made from rocks and dirt called “jak-ka.” I took care of our animals on our farm. We had chickens, donkeys, and yaks. We raised all the animals we ate, and we ate all the vegetables we grew. There are not many things we could grow on our land, because Tibet is very high and the climate is very cold. Tibet is known as the roof of the world. We grew mostly carrots, potatoes and beans. Other fruits and vegetables like apples, tomatoes, and onions came from the outside, and so we did not eat them very much. They were very expensive. Rice was another food we had to buy from the outside. We mostly ate barley which we grew, and made into flour. Many Tibetan foods are made from barley. We also add barley to our tea to make a meal.

The yak is a very important animal for Tibetans. We ride them and use them to help us work the land. We eat their meat. The meat is hung outside to dry and lasts all year. We also eat all the insides of the yak. We make rugs and clothing from their skin, and fiber. In Tibetan the word yak only refers to the male animal. The female “yak” is dzomo, it is a mix of a yak and a cow. We drink their milk and make butter from it.

One of my jobs was making butter tea, called “bhoecha.” Tibetans drink butter tea all day long. It is very good for keeping you warm, protecting your lips and throat from cold and dry air, and dipping bread. If I don’t drink butter tea, I feel like something is lost. To make butter tea, you need to have water, salt, black tea, yak butter and milk. I make butter tea in the traditional way. I first boil the black tea with salt and water. Meanwhile I churn the milk in a wooden churn to make the butter.
It takes a lot of work pushing the churn up and down to make the butter. But it is worth the work because dzomo butter is very delicious. Once the tea, butter, and milk are all ready, I blend them together to make the butter tea. Roasted barley powder called tsampa is added to the butter tea to make it a meal. Together with the tea, salt, and butter, this drink gives me energy and keep me warm all day long. If I don’t drink butter tea, I wouldn’t feel right. I wouldn’t feel comfortable.

Today I make butter tea using Lipton tea, salt, cow butter and milk. It does not have the same flavor, but I still think of my home. I use an electric blender to make the tea. It is very nice and so much easier. When I made butter tea in Tibet, we always made a lot of it. But a small blender is very nice for making just one cup. But these days when I make butter tea, I miss my hometown and how I made it there. For a long time I was looking for a wooden churn like in Tibet. One day, I was shopping with my husband and a friend at Bed, Bath, and Beyond, and I was so excited and surprised. I thought I found one. I called them to come look. But then it turned out to be a fancy toilet brush! We all laughed so much and they still remind me about it.
When I first went to the primary school, my family’s economic situation was very bad, because only my father worked and couldn’t support all of my family. We had a big family, we were ten brothers and sisters, and I am the youngest boy. Sometimes when we went to school, we had nothing to eat. But I was a child and I didn’t know the situation. I went to school together with my brothers and played soccer. We were a happy family.

Then I went to the secondary school, but this school was very far and every day I walked to school for two hours.

Besides these problems, I faced another problem. The government regime changed, some parts of my country started fighting and the security situation became dangerous. Sometimes we couldn’t even safely go to school. The security situation of my country became worse day by day. In this situation, I completed high school.

In my country there is a rule that after high school every student takes a general test for college admission. During my last year the high school government announced we will not take the test for college and the students had to go and serve in the military. All of the students were frustrated and we said to ourselves, “We didn’t need more studies, because when we become soldiers, we go to fight and die.”

Finally, one week remained for the final test of my high school. Suddenly, the government announced any person who is under 18 years of age did not need to go for military service. The government will permit them to test for college admission. When I looked at my national ID (Tazkera) I was 17 years old, I became very excited! After I took the final test for college, I came home and stayed at home for 3 months like a prisoner because at that time when I left my home the military round up young men who were not in the military. After 3 months the government
announced the results of the test. I sent my brother to see my result, did I pass or not? When my brother came back he was very happy. He told me congratulations; you passed and were accepted in to the university school of engineering. I was so excited at that time. But the next day, with more fear, I went to the university, because I did not have a university ID and I had to go on a public bus for one hour. How terrible it would be to get so close to my dream and be caught by the military.

After I got the ID, I continued to study for 6 years at the university. I completed my degree in civil engineering.

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**Enjoying Company**

by Nilofar Mahmood

Last week our friends invited us for dinner and we went to their house. It was so fun! My kids were playing with their kids. They cooked five different kinds of food for us. It was very delicious food. And the next day, we invited them for lunch. I made rice, meat, spinach, okra, and salad for them, and they liked the food very much. Today, I will cook homemade pizza for my family. They LOVE pizza!

I also enjoy my children’s company. When my kids come home from their camps, I will take them to their swimming lessons. They LOVE swimming! I would love to swim but I can’t. In the future maybe I will learn to swim!
Why I Didn’t Learn to Read

by Joyce Peck

When I was seven years old me and my brother were playing horses and I fell and broke my leg. They took me to the hospital and the doctor said I had broken my leg up to my hip.

I had a cast put on from my foot to my waist. I was in the hospital for three or four months and had the cast on for nineteen months. I did not go to school until I was nine or ten.

The cast was taken off but later another cast was put on for another nineteen months.

I am learning to read now.

Growing Up on a Farm

by Joyce Peck

When I was young I lived on a farm. It was fun. I helped Dad pick tobacco. We then put it in the barn until it turned yellow. Then Dad and my uncle would take it down, tie it up and then take it to the stock market to sell.

We had cows, horses, and chickens on the farm. My brothers fed the animals.

My family had a big garden. We grew tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce and cantaloupe. I helped pull beans off the vine.

We also had apple trees. I helped pick apples off the trees.
My Family
by Fengqiu Wang

In August 2016 my family moved to the Stonefield apartments in Charlottesville. My name is Fengqiu. My husband’s name is Hua and my daughter is Endia. We moved to Charlottesville because my husband has a job in IT. He and his American friend opened a small company in Charlottesville, part of a big company in China. We are happy here. Our city in China is very cold. Charlottesville is warm. My daughter likes her school. She plays tennis. I like American food.

My Dream
by Freshta Sadat

In the future my dream is a very good job and education because in the future I want a good job in the office. I want to be a lawyer. My city, Kabul, needs good female lawyers because there are more male lawyers than female lawyers. To be a criminal lawyer in Kabul is important because right now the government is not fair and everyone gets bribed. It’s also not safe because of the Taliban.

Now I am a student. I study, learn English. I want to go to college but now I need more practice with English. I try because being a criminal lawyer is my dream.
All Muslims in the world have two festivals in a year. The first festival’s name is small Eid and the second festival’s name is big Eid. The small Eid is after Ramadan. The Muslim people have one month fasting in a year. During the fasting month Muslims pray and help poor people. That month is called Ramadan.

All Muslim people are happy because of Ramadan. Each family cooks many kinds of food and brings some to their neighbors and shares with them. The children also are very happy. They celebrate with their parents. Muslims have at the end of Ramadan month a festival for three days. During the festival’s days Muslim people wear new clothes and visit their family and friends.

The big Eid comes two months after small Eid. The big Eid is celebrated because of the prophet Ibrahim tradition. The Muslims sacrifice sheep or cows on the first day of the Eid for God.

The women cook different foods from that meat for their guests and respect for their friends.

I missed those days last year. So I hope to be in my country this year and celebrate Eid with my lovely family.
To Be Strong
by Khadija Hemmati

I had a difficult childhood because my father passed away, so another person in my family, my brother, had to get a job. He was in sixth grade at the time. My mother was the only person who encouraged and supported us to be successful in our lives.

My mom encouraged us to do everything. She said if I have some problem, open my eyes, look around, and look for positive things. I’m not a successful person, but I have a lot of dreams. I have arrived at the conclusion that I should enjoy everything in my life. Don’t just growl because you tried, failed and you couldn’t do something correctly.

I am trying to follow these rules throughout this existence. Don’t say I have to do them. The incentive to do and start projects is necessary. But if I fail, I must be realistic.

Nobody, after failing, feels good. Failure can cause you to feel paltry and destroyed. You feel weak and like you’re worthless. And it causes you to want much less to be around other people.

My life is full of challenges that cause me to try hard. All of these have taught me how to confront my challenges.
My Life in Bhutan
by Sancha Man Rai

I was born in Bhutan. When I was a child I helped to plant rice. Every morning we milked the cows then led them outside to eat grass. In the evening we led them back in and milked them again. Sometimes I played soccer with my friends. We made a soccer ball with plastic bags and cotton strips.

When I got older I was a farmer. I planted rice, oranges, corn, tomatoes, potatoes, onions, garlic, cauliflower and many more crops. It was hard work but I liked it because I was outside.

I lived in Bhutan for 10 years. Then the army came and said we had to leave Bhutan so we all moved to Nepal.

Where I Come From
by Hong Yu Wang

My name is Hong Yu Wang. I am from China. My family left China 8 years ago. At first we lived in Oklahoma City for 3 years. Then we went to the United Kingdom. We lived in Belfast for 3 years. Last year my family returned to the United States. Now we live in Charlottesville.
Born Into a Family of Teachers

by Marzieh Mohaghegh

Education is important to me because of my family history and the future of my family.

I was born into a family of teachers of Islamic history. My grandfather was both a teacher and wrote many famous books of Muslim history, as many as ten. My father was a teacher in Pakistan. Because I grew up around teachers, I learned that education was very important. My family had to leave Afghanistan because of dangers when I was five or six years old. In Iran, it was hard to go to school. School was far away, and the walk was far and dangerous because the government of Iran did not protect young girls from predators. I did not get to go past fifth grade, but I always read a lot of books at home.

Even though I couldn’t, I want my children to continue their education so they can go to university. My children came to America with me 7 years ago and started school to learn English right away. They did not know English, but they learned. My daughters are 14 and 17 years old, and they want to become doctors. My son works in the hospital now and he is looking for more jobs. I am very proud of my daughters because this is a hard life, and they want to go to university and continue their education for their futures. My father and grandfather would be very proud of them too because they continued their education.
I am from Iraq. When I was young, I went to school in Iraq with my friend.

She was the best friend I ever had. We read together and we often went shopping at our favorite place. It’s called Alkarrada. We enjoyed shopping there because it has beautiful clothes and restaurants and streets and then we would come back home. Sometime we went to visit our friends and read together and did homework together.

After that, I moved to Jordan and I lived there and didn’t see my friend any more. I only talked to her on Facebook. I miss her very much. When I moved to Jordan, I didn’t have any friends as I only lived in Jordan for a short time. I lived there for three years and then I moved to America. When I moved to America, at first I didn’t have any friends here either but I saw my sister again and her children. I was very happy to see them again. When I moved here, it was very difficult for me to communicate. I currently come two days a week, which helped improve my communication. When I come to the Adult Learning Center, my favorite activity is writing. I also enjoy that time when we have a break, and somebody makes popcorn. I like to eat popcorn. I enjoy learning English and making new friends from around the world.
When I was 7, I had to start working. My grandfather picked me up after school. I helped pick weeds and fertilize and water the plants.

I helped my grandfather with other jobs also. We sucked out the nectar from the agave, and my grandmother used it to make pulque. My grandfather had a flock of lambs. We had to take them to the pasture to graze.

I helped with whatever my grandfather needed. He paid me with beans and corn and sometimes money. My mother used the money to buy chicken legs and heads and livers. This is when we ate meat. Even though I was very young, I helped feed my family.

Some people made fun of us for being poor, but I didn’t feel poor because I had my family. We were together and we were healthy. That was more important than having money.

Even though life is hard, you can choose who you want to be. You

by Ofelia Abundio Alonso

Even Though Life Is Hard, There Is Always a Reason to Smile
cannot blame your past or other people for how you live. Nobody is responsible for your life except you!

Thank you Grandfather and Mami for teaching me how to work hard!
How can you support Literacy Volunteers?

Tutor
Our volunteer tutors are the heart of our program. Becoming a tutor will enable you to make a profound difference in a person’s life. We train you to tutor an adult student in reading, writing, and English acquisition skills. Most of our tutor/student pairs meet for two hours a week at a mutually convenient time and place. We ask for a year-long commitment. As a tutor, you will receive a rewarding experience knowing that you’ve helped someone achieve their goals and be more integrated within our community.

Volunteer
It takes a lot of effort to serve our community. There are lots of ways to volunteer and provide invaluable service, even if your time is limited. Volunteers are needed to assist in the office, serve on the Board of Directors, participate in the planning of events, work on community awareness projects, and more! Call our office to find out where you can be of assistance.

Donate
As a non-profit organization, LVCA relies on state and city/county grants for the majority of its funding; these grants leave little room for the growth our organization requires to meet the community’s need for our services. The cost for each learner—taking into account staff support, tutor training, learner materials and facility costs—is $25 per hour per student. Eighty percent of every dollar we receive is put into our program, and while we stretch this as far as possible, we can only maintain the status quo. We are able to serve more of the 9,000 adults who need our assistance only through the contributions of our friends, family, and neighbors—in other words, you.