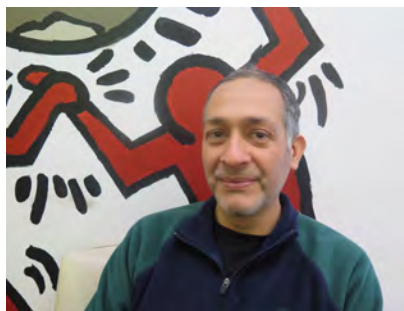
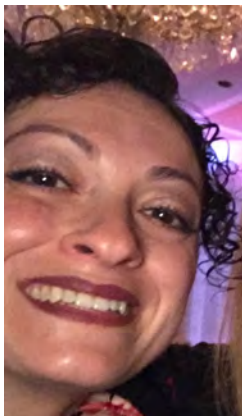
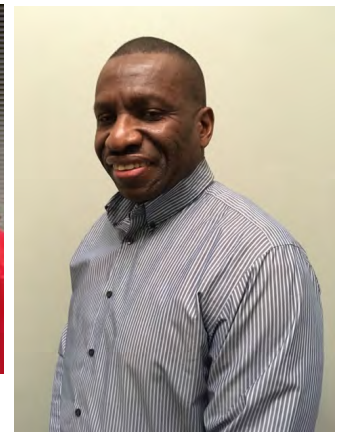
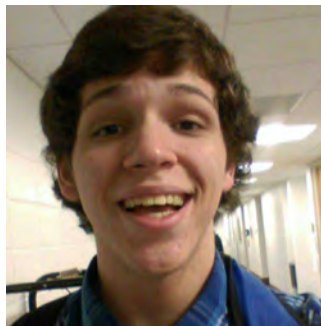
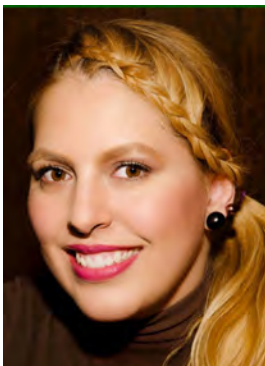


INSIGHT 2017



*The New Jersey Association for Lifelong Learning
Learner Writing Contest*

INSIGHT

Volume Three, 2017

New Jersey Association for Lifelong Learning

This is the third year NJALL has held a learner writing contest. Each year we have received about 75 submissions from all around the state. We continue to be humbled by students' willingness to share their ideas, memories and feelings. As is often the case in adult education, some of the things the writers shared dealt with personal experiences that were life-changing or traumatic. We hope that the writing process was a positive one and that participating in the contest was a learning experience.

For the third year in a row we invited some of the contest winners to present their work at the annual NJALL conference. The learners read from their winning submissions and then took questions from those in attendance. Conference participants were moved and impressed by the learners' work, and we hope that they in turn encourage their own students to take part in next year's contest.

Thanks again to all the writers, teachers and reviewers that made this magazine possible. We look forward to reading the submissions for next year's contest and we hope to receive even more submissions.

Erik Jacobson

Chair, NJALL Learner Writing Contest

2017 Reviewers: Debbie Graham, Faleeha Hassan Al Alabboodi, Merrill Silver

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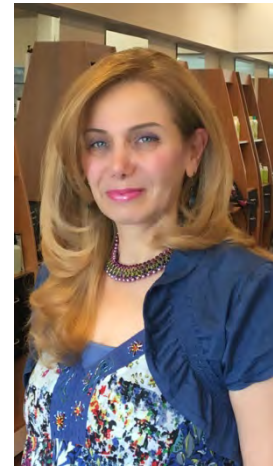
Abir Alkus



A Syrian native, Abir Alkousa left her war-torn country for a better life for her and her husband and their family of two young children. As bombs exploded closer to her home, she felt it necessary to get further away. Abir arrived in the United States two years ago and within a few months of relocating, enrolled in Literacy Volunteers of America. She quickly excelled in the program and with the help of her tutor/mentor, made her family's new life in America a smooth transition.

I am from Syria. I was a dentist. I came with my husband to the U.S to survive and to protect our lovely daughter. She is 14 years old and inspired me to write my essay. I work as a volunteer in the Bergen County Technical School, adult education program. I am passionate about my job there because everyone is very kind. I am creating a website for them. I like to take photos and make videos for my friends as a hobby. My dream is to be a U.S. citizen in because I value the freedom and democracy of the United States. I hope and pray for peace in Syria and for the entire world.

Faten Atfa



Maritza Chang



Maritza Chang spoke very little English when she came to the United States from her native Peru almost two years ago. Ordering at a fast food restaurant was a challenge. Now, Maritza is gainfully employed as a librarian and was hired for her bilingual expertise. She made tremendous strides in learning English by attending ESL classes for 8 hours each week, enrolling in Montclair State University's ESL program and meeting with two separate LVA tutors for a total of four hours a week. It is not unusual for Maritza to study English until 2 am or later, after her two daughters have fallen asleep and long after her classes end.

Jouseth Coba



Jouseth Coba, an emergency room physician in Ecuador, left her country due to a recession. Jobs were scarce. “Josie,” as she is known to her friends, came to the United States to continue to pursue her medical career. She is an advanced ESOL student and one of many professionals who study vigorously with Literacy Volunteers of America in preparation to resume the careers they enjoyed at home. While she studies for her medical exams, Josie works as a writer for a newspaper and a companion for an older woman

Fernanda Contreras

Fernanda Contreras, a former LVA student, has taken a leave of absence from the program to raise her newborn son. After leaving Colombia almost 10 years ago, Fernanda has nicely acclimated to life in the United States. But, it was not easy for her at the beginning. She struggled to learn English, and with the help of her tutor and now friend, Fernanda has enjoyed life as a student, a writer, and most of all a new mom.



Raymond Crowthers



My name is Raymond A. Crowthers IV. Currently a triple major in Biology, Chemistry, and Biomedical Science at Atlantic Cape Community College. Though I have a very heavy science background, I've always had a natural love for writing. I wrote this piece for my own acquisition of knowledge on the subject, to help shed some light on the serious consequences of not recycling, and to come up with better, alternative methods to the current plastic set-up we have.

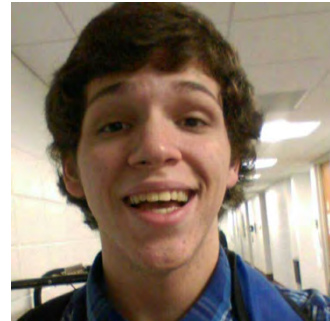
Cory D'Amore



I am a former radio personality on Cruisin' 92.1. Now presently working for a hospital trying to get a degree in the medical field. Writing stories has become a fun hobby I have surrounded myself with to set my mind free from a stressful world at times.

Agapito Garcia

My writing is nothing more than the musings of an angry member of the disenfranchised, hopeless and confused. I only hope people find the same levity, wisdom, and thoughtfulness I've gained from reading and essentially breathing words written by countless people in every era. I do not come from a family with many poker chips to play with in this weird gamble we've all silently accepted as the correct way to host human beings properly and, at least, somewhat proportionately. While I'm alive and well there are other people are not. People close and far and, in a kind of Doctor Suess way, no matter who you are. I've always admired his insight. Though I digress, I intend on doing things with my words that speak to people in ways that move them. I would love to change people's lives for the better. In truth, my whimsy as a poet is countered by a daunting cynicism and, considering the climate politically or otherwise, am not optimistic. But I feel as if something can be done, as human always have. I just hope I can be of use. I don't take myself very seriously at all I think that healthy. I hope I've made people smile and think.



Maria Greco



I am a student at Brookdale Community college in Freehold, New Jersey. I'm studying really hard for my GED and pre-requisitions, I'm 39 years old and looking forward to attending the New Jersey All contest next year! Thank you so much for this opportunity.

Clifford Henry



Clifford Henry, 57 years old, has been in the military for 37 years. He served in Iraq and Cuba and is currently in the Reserves. He has worked at Houlihans for 22 years.

Estaban Morales

LVA student Esteban Morales made his mark in the computer industry in his native country of Peru and plans to continue his legacy by writing a book in English. Esteban left Peru with his wife and two young daughters in tow and settled in Essex County a little over a year ago. In this short time, he has joined LVA and with lots of hard work and extreme dedication has become their most advanced speaking ESL student.



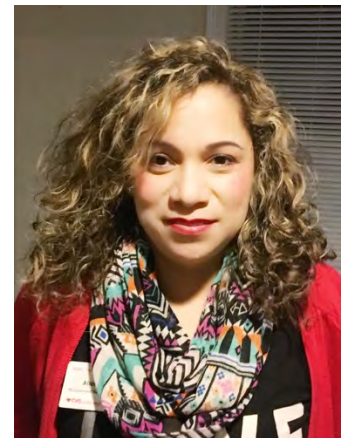
Kaven Townsend



My name is Kaven Townsend. I'm 44 years old, and I love to write. When I write I am letting my voice come out. I am a student at Mercer County Community College's HSE program in Trenton, NJ.

Alicia Veleriano

My Name is Alicia Valeriano, I am a GED student. I'm from Mexico D.F. and I am 40 years old. And I love nature and every day to me is a blessing.



Award Winners - Memoir

First Place

I Would Become My Dreams

Abir Alkus

Two weeks after I came to America, I woke up from a long night filled with tears and prayers. I found myself alone in this big world, no husband, family or friends. I had left them all behind living the horrors of an ugly war. I lost the presence of a loving husband and the caring eyes of a mother who gave me all she had, and a father who always treated me like a princess.

Life was never easy, but nothing prepared me for this moment. I felt an overwhelming sorrow, my heart was about to stop, I wished everything bad could just end, I found myself at a crossroads with nothing ahead but the unknown.

I turned my head and looked at my children who were asleep next to me. There lies my older son, 9 years old, with his sun-kissed skin and dark hair, he has gotten so much taller in one year. He has his father's looks, and dreams of being a famous soccer player like Christiano. Next to him sleeps my younger son at 5 years of age. He takes after me: his lighter skin, chestnut hair, and a shadow of an innocent smile on his plump lips, which I have often joked that they look just like Angelina Jolie's. They slept like babies, with a sense of peace and safety, because they believe that they have a Mom who protects and takes care of them. I had promised to make-up for all the bad days they had went through during the war in Syria.

I decided to gather my shredded pieces and regain my strength and resilience to become the mother they would be proud of, their source of strength and joy. I wiped away my tears and told myself "I am strong, I am a strong woman ..." over and over again I repeated those words to myself until I came to believe them. I reminded myself that I am not alone because God is always with me and so are my children. Since that day, I pray to God to keep me strong when I feel weak or sad and I always remind myself "I am strong ... I am a strong woman".

I have been in my new country for two years, they brought along both bitter and sweet days. There were days when I was hopeful and motivated to take on any challenge, and others where I felt broken and with nothing but worries and fears of the future. Those were the days that made me what I am today; a stronger woman who has the ability to achieve all she sets her mind to. I learned two lessons which I have taught my children: first, you should believe in God, he is your greatest support in the good and bad days, he will never leave you out at his door, thus never feel that you are alone, ever! Second, you should believe in yourself. Your own potential is always greater than what you expect. You can achieve anything you wish for... and more.

Before we go to sleep, every night, we thank God who has given us the strength to hold out in front of all the difficulties that we experienced and always gives us the energy to face the future. Every night each one of us says “I am strong... I am smart... I would become my dreams”.

Second Place

The Experience of Deciding to Leave my Country and Come to the U.S.

Faten Atfa

When I was in my country, I saw things which changed my life. None of this stuff had a bigger impact on me than the death, devastation, and destruction around me. Every day I heard different stories about my relatives, friends, and neighbors who had lost members, houses or money. I was scared for my daughter and my husband. Our life was terrible because of the war. The war destroyed my dreams and made me mad. I did not know what I could do to survive and protect my family. I decided with my husband, to leave our country and come to the US.

I was born and grew up in Damascus. Damascus is the capital of Syria; I had a wonderful life in my country. I was a dentist. I was married and had a lovely daughter. My husband was an engineer, who owned his company. In the mornings, I worked for the Ministry of Health as president for the Department of Human Resources Development. In the afternoon, I worked in my own dental practice. Our life was fantastic because we had a beautiful house with a nice view, good jobs, money, love, and peace.

Unfortunately, our life started to change when the revolution began in 2011. No one could have expected what would happen next. There was a peaceful demonstration in our neighborhood, to protest the tyrannical Al-Assad regime. The regime used the weapons against the people who wanted to reclaim their freedom, and many checkpoints were set up because the regime wanted to protect themselves. Our life became tough.

One day, two big explosions happened at the same moment my daughter left for the school by bus. I can't get that day out of my mind. I was scared for my daughter. More than 300 hundred people were killed in this explosion, and it was a terrible situation. After that, we heard about many bombs all over Syria; Bad people had a chance to do worse things like threatening people and destroying their homes, kidnapping an individual and demanding ransom from their family. Things like that happened to our daughter's neighbor, and our son's friend and many relatives. Every day we heard more painful stories.

In 2013, our life became worse. Frightening incidents happened all around us. One day a big explosion near our house shattered all the windows, while another day my husband went to buy food while I stayed in our car with my daughter. Suddenly we heard the sound of an explosion. I was very worried about him, and he was scared for our daughter and me. After that unknown people stole everything from my clinic and my husband's factory. It seemed that everyday bumps fell, and one killed a member of my family. Isis kidnaped my three cousins, and more than three siblings died under torture in the regime's prisons.

As a result of this horrid situation which destroyed everything around us and made us mad, we were confused. We tried to find a solution to have a better life. We asked ourselves what we could do? My husband told me that we must leave Syria to survive, and suggested to emigrating to the United State. I said that it was difficult because the life in the U.S. is very expensive. Second, I couldn't be a dentist in the U.S. He said that if we stayed in Syria, we might die.

His opinion was right. Before we came to the United States, I went to the hospital, and I saw the people who had died from bombings. It was painful and harmful. Seeing blood, people who died, people crying about losing members of their families. It was in front of me; I didn't hear it from the news or another person. Finally, I agreed with my husband and we came to the United States.

Third Place***It Is Time!*****Jouseth Coba**

August 2001 was the last time that I heard from the nurse "Dr. Luque a patient in room number three. I remember that night because it was the day my country started the recession and all workers were protesting outside the children's hospital. They refused to work because of their low salaries, but at that time I had just gotten hired and I could not leave the hospital.

How I can forget that night? The nurse said "Dr. Luque we have ten doctors, seven medical students, twelve nurses, two ambulance drivers and you. You are the director of the hospital for this night." I was in shock, because we had about two hundred fifty sick children to care for.

My department was the ER for that night. I prepared all the schedules and sent one nurse and one student to help each floor and two stayed with me in the ER, as well as two nurses to the Intensive Care, and two to the neonatology, the most needy departments. I started praying "God please help us!" I called all the doctors from the different areas and said "We can make it; we can work together and tomorrow will be a memorable day for us."

That night we were very busy, patient after patient arrived at the ER. At 11:00 pm, I started to sign about two hundred fifty prescriptions for the entire children hospital, and I remember feeling numbness in my fingers. Nobody could sleep or rest that night; it looked like the end of the world. At 2:00 am, I received a 12-year-old child with brain trauma. He needed surgery immediately, but we did not have any surgeons at the hospital. I had to transfer him to another hospital, which was frustrating situation because the only two drivers that we had were busy with other patients.

All state hospitals that were free of charge had the same situation. Finally, at 3:00 am we found a low-cost hospital and an ambulance was able to transfer him. But, help came too late because during the trip, he did not make it. This was the saddest part of the night.

When the dawn arrived, I thought that surprising or not, we survived, the doctors, the nurses, the students, the drivers and the most important our young patients. I felt very proud of myself that night and I said " I did it; we did it!"

This story is repeated many times a year in most countries of Latin America, where poverty is a sign of death and destruction.

The next day was my day off. I received a call from my mom from the United States, she said "It is time to come to America, our country is in a bad situation and you and your husband will have more opportunities here." In December 2001, we arrived in United States and we started a new life. Everything had to change: new language, new food, new lifestyle, new ideas, new purpose. It was not easy, especially since United States had been attacked by terrorists three months ago, everything changed that day, it was never the same again.

Six months later my husband and I tried to pass the first medical test, but without a study guide, we failed. After that trial, some doors opened but others closed for us. My dream and my goal of working as a doctor in a children's hospital is still here for this reason this year I will start a new medical career again.

During all this years I have learned to be patient, but at the same time, to be decisive, to have faith in the dark moments, to be grateful even when is hard to be thankful, and to fight to achieve your dreams. I have learned to live in the present, day by day, because that gives me peace, living in the past only causes depression and living in the future just causes anxiety.

As the years pass you realize that now is your time, time to ask for forgiveness from your family, your friends, and time to change your life. It is time now to get a new job, or a new career; restore your marriage, or get married; come closer to God; travel; eat healthy; do exercises; enjoy the little things; spend more time with your family.

The days are shorter now. Do not let the time pass you by.

Award Winners - Non-Fiction

First Place

I'll Take the Carcinogen-Ridden Bottle, Please.

Raymond Crowthers

The future of Earth does not look promising if it keeps going the way it does. There will be so much plastic that kids will be able to make ball pits with water bottles. The Statue of Liberty will have a plastic bag on its torch, waving hello in the wind as tourists pass it by. The wild, wild west will have replaced tumble weeds with plastic bags, and people will send messages in a plastic bottle. Litter as thick as moss and abundant as lily pads will be rowed out of the way as people pass, showing their trail with a distinct remnant of where they traveled. Children will ask what turtles looked like before they went extinct. Elders will tell their grandchildren stories of a time when you could taste the snow without fear, and a time when oceans ran crystal clear. Teachers will teach the four layers of Earth: core, mantle, crust, and plastic, because the government will build over what it could not fix. There will become even more problems when the plankton and bottom feeders start to die off because there will become mass extinction, humans included. All in all, as we progress down the lineage that the generation before granted us, we must be the ones who stop this catastrophe before it happens.

However, this generation must act fast because the ball is already in motion. One of the ways this is evident is through the Great Garbage Patch. It is a collection of trash that is a third of the width of the United States, 1,100 miles long, floating on the surface of the ocean. This patch is killing precious wildlife and polluting the surrounding ocean at the same time. As farfetched as it sounds, this is the reality that the modern world has created just by letting it happen. However, it is not only lack of action that is killing the planet, but it is also horrible attitude and ignorance. It is evident through interviews that the sheer amount of information the general public is unaware of is astonishing. It is enough to make one feel horrible, and particularly angry at corporations for hiding what they do so well. Luckily,

there is still a chance that individual voices, together, can create a single voice so strong that no one, not even corporations, can ignore it. One of the ways that this generation can achieve redemption is by using less plastic. Earth is in its worst shape ever, but a future with less plastic does not mean a worse future. Switching from plastic bottles to glass can drastically reduce pollution, raise consumer awareness, and radically change the current environmental status the modern world has created.

Convenience is king in this generation. So much so that plastic bags are used for only 12 minutes (“Top Ten Facts”). Sherry, the General Manager at Wawa has “[seen] people come [into Wawa and] get a plastic bag for things they really don’t need a bag for. Like getting a bag for one pack of cigarettes” (Girard). Sadly, a single plastic bag has a life expectancy of up to 1,000 years. Some of these twelve-minute wastes end up in landfills, wasting away with all of the other twelve-minute rejects, but a majority of them actually do not make it into a trash can (“Top Ten Facts”). Where do these bags end up going after they are disposed of improperly? They end up becoming the bag-tumbleweed in the road that everyone swerves around as it dances in the air. Sometimes that same dance lands it wrapped around a branch of a tree where it can stay for years, and will continue to stay for about a thousand more if no one takes the time to take it down. In interviews I conducted, one hundred percent of people said they preferred bottled water “because of what is happening in Michigan”, because they think “it is better for you, for sure”, because “it is all they have”, and finally, because they think “bottled water is way safer” (Rickabaugh; Hemmingway; Girard; Gossage).

These statements could not be further from the truth, but can people be blamed for not knowing these facts when consumers hide them so well? It is understandable that people in Flint, Michigan would want to drink bottled water because they have contaminated tap water, but anyone else thinking that they have to worry because of what is happening elsewhere in the country is making a very broad generalization about the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Speaking of regulations, “In the U.S., public water is regulated by EPA, which requires multiple daily tests for bacteria and makes results available to the public. The Food and Drug Administration, which regulates bottled water, only requires weekly testing and does not share its findings with the EPA or the public” (“Bottled Water Facts”). Therefore, anyone saying bottled water is safer is wrong. Not only that, but it only costs \$.19

a day for a water purifier when the equivalent would be \$4.98 for bottled water. Therefore, the average person could be saving \$1,817.70 a year (“Bottled Water Facts”).

I knew absolutely nothing about the world of plastic or its loopholes and sleights of hand before I started researching how plastics affected the environment I was like the average consumer: completely clueless about how the product was devastating to the environment. Despite my ignorance to the subject at the time, I opted to immerse myself in a world without any plastic. I committed myself to going on a two-week journey to find out if a plastic-free lifestyle was possible. Before I started my project, I created a motto for myself: No plastic bottles, whatsoever. No exceptions to the rule, no cheating, and, certainly, no giving in.

The week leading up to my project, I decided I better get a head start on things to make a smooth transition into a life with no plastic. Due to the fact that I only drink milk and water and the realization that both came in plastic bottles, I had to change how I was going to get these products. I ascertained that though I love milk dearly, I would have to give it up for two weeks while this project ensued, because there was not any practical way of obtaining milk without having to pour it from a plastic bottle into something else, which is cheating. I also used to buy packs of water from the store. However, once again, these were in plastic bottles. Following some deliberation, I stumbled onto the idea of using tap water and a glass mason jar. With the deep feeling of beneficence, I went to Wal-Mart and started looking for a jar. After about twenty minutes of searching on my own, I asked an employee to help me find what I was looking for. She also had trouble finding it, but after another thirty minutes of going up and down every aisle, we eventually found the glass jars... in the gardening department with soil pots and hoes hastily thrown into the corner.

I did not know it at the time, staring at the jars that were heavily neglected with a thick coating of dust, but glass turns out to be a fantastic substitution of plastic. It can be endlessly recycled, made of abundant natural material, and takes much less energy to make than plastic. Glass only contains three ingredients: limestone, silica sand, and cullet. Cullet is recycled glass, and each new batch of glass made on the assembly line can be comprised of as much as ninety percent of cullet. Furthermore, cullet melts at a lower temperature, so for every ten percent of cullet used, two-and-a-half percent less energy is used to produce the glass. If glass was manufactured on a grand scale like plastic is, this two-and-a-half percent

of energy saved could compound continuously, causing an abundance of money to be saved every year. Most satisfying about the glass manufacturing process, all the ingredients are easy to say and well known (How It's Made).

Unlike Glass, plastic has much more intimidating sounding ingredients such as Polyethylene Terephthalate, or PET. Though this chemical, along with as much as 24,500 other chemicals found in plastic bottles, is not something you would want to give to a pet, let alone drink yourself. When I first got my glass jar I thought that it hurt my manhood because it had a butterfly on the side on the glass. However, that butterfly glass is the very thing that helped me keep my manhood. German researchers found evidence proving that androgen was affected by as small as a tenth of an ounce of the chemicals found in bottled water, and were affected by as much as ninety percent. Yet, plastic bottles do not just affect hormones. It can also cause "stunted growth, early puberty, premature birth, infertility, and early menopause" (Landa). On the other hand, tap water and a glass bottles provided no effect on receptors, and cause no health risks (TRR56 ;Landa).

After my purchase of the glass jar, on the way home, I caught on quickly that the jar was going to be awkward to carry around. It did not have a handle, it had a screw on lid, it did not fit in my car cup-holder, which, oddly, seems specific to a plastic bottle, and it could easily be broken. What I am saying is that making everything glass is not the only option the world has. There are a plethora of other possible solutions. Another solution could be stricter enforcement of littering laws. Today, there are many laws about littering. However, these laws are not implemented too strongly by law enforcement as a whole. Littering is going down the same path that prohibition went down; miserable failure because laws are only as good as they are executed.

A way to combat this lack of enforcement can be found in a book about water scarcity, called *The Big Thirst* by Charles Fishman. He talks about water police in Las Vegas. These policemen have the sole job of enforcing the strict laws they have about water. Borrowing from this idea, if there were recycling police patrolling the streets and fining would-be criminals, there would be a lot less littering. Furthermore, in the same book by Fishman, he talks about people being paid for desertification of their yard. What this means is that people are paid to rip up their grass and put dirt back in because it would not use as much water. If counties held contests and incentives for people to recycle more and litter

less, all while cleaning up the cities, this would further the dwindling amount of trash accumulated if there were recycling police. Schools and younger individuals could also get involved in this sort of activity. This would help the young minds of the world acquire a great concern for their Earth at a young age. Finally, in *The Big Thirst*, he talks about how companies find a snowballing effect of saving money if they switch to something safer and more environmentally-friendly. For example, a wool company found that when they used treated run-off water instead of the cities tap water to clean their wool they used saved 1.6 million dollars a year. Yet, this was not the only benefit they received from switching. They also were able to use forty percent less water per pound of wool than they had previously, as well as not having to heat the water as much due to the treatment process the water went through, saving them even more money (Fishman).

While these ideas seem to be great alternatives, they require a lot of moving parts to complete. It would take action extra action from the police, as well as every company to get on board with this line of thinking on their own terms. Sadly, most companies are out for personal profit instead of the betterment of all people. This is the reason why most companies switched to plastic from glass. While the product is the manufacturer's fault, it is also the fault of the consumer for buying it. Gerber, the baby food company, started selling former glass packaged products in plastic. Senior Vice President, David Yates, was cited saying that “[they] listen to parents everyday, and [they] recognize that [the parents] need new, convenient feeding options” (Prichard). The new design, sort of like a baby juice-box, appealed to busy moms on the go. They can give the box to their child, not have to worry about them breaking it or holding glass, and when their child is done they can easily throw the juice box out. The product gave Gerber a rise in sales by twenty percent, so there was obviously no incentive to change it back to glass. The reason that they made the change is not only because of the profit, but because “it’s something [they’ve] seen across all the food segments” says Matt Croson the Spokesperson of the Packaging Machinery Manufacturing Institute (Prichard). This is known as the bandwagon effect. It simply states it is okay to do something because everyone else is doing it. However, this was not the best course of action, it was the start of the world’s problem. Though recycling police and incentives to recycle would be good additives to the change, glass is the primary, most sensible option. All it takes is one law to be passed and the betterment of people would already be underway.

When the end of my two-week project came, I felt a deep sense of accomplishment because the point of my project was to keep my promise of not using any plastic, yet I found out something much more meaningful: the amazing fact that my routine has changed and instinct went from grabbing a bottled water to only grabbing my glass jar. This is important because it indicates that change is possible for the individual, and if enough individuals change, the whole world can change. Though I returned to drinking milk, it does not mean that I have failed myself and this project, because I have personally saved over five hundred bottles from going into landfills within the few months since the project concluded. What it does translate to is shame on Corporate America for forcing bottles down my throat, even when glass is clearly the better choice.

I see a blissful future if we take initiative and start using the better option, glass. Hiring a milkman would create jobs and get America's recycling rate up as well. With the incentive to recycle and clear the streets, people will do so more willingly. People will start to take pride in their city, their salvation. The people who do not follow the rules will have to answer to law enforcement, and will be heavily fined to make them learn that this Earth will never become as ramshackled as it was before. Forced suffocation by Corporate America can not be tolerated anymore. It is time for the world to breathe again, taking in fresh, clean, immaculate air. It is time for the world to walk again, without trudging through knee-high mounds of bottles. Most importantly, it is time for the world to come together again, while clinking glasses to a job well done, because we were the generation that saved the world.

Second Place***Anger: A Call for Healing*****Esteban Morales**

Why do certain circumstances get you angry? The typical answer to this question is, “because I am like this”. Have you ever wondered why are you like that? Is it just a matter of chance that some people get angry at foolishness, others at injustice or disobedience, and so on and so forth?

The answer is NO; anger is never just a matter of chance. Anger is always a result of an event in our childhood where we suffer emotional pain and then is stored in our minds. We are not aware of this event but we are always projecting it on others. We are always watching this projection in everybody else and the particularity of this is that we are always wanting to change it, just like if we tried to fix our hair in the reflection of a mirror.

This mechanism works like this, our mind is always collecting information from the exterior and comparing it with the information we had already acquired. When the mind finds any information that matches an episode of emotional pain, it recalls the emotion but not the occurrence so we need a justification for that emotion and we grab it from whatever is going around on the outside, so that we always blame the person next to us.

Let's say you are walking by the street and a dog is approaching you. In order to find the appropriate reaction to keep you safe, your mind looks in its files for all the information regarding dogs. If your previous experiences with dogs were positive then your reaction will be positive, otherwise you would experience fear or panic. So, your reaction doesn't rely on the dog itself but on your previous experiences with dogs.

Now let's take a look to some real examples:

- A young lady came to me claiming that she always got angry at her son when he didn't understand how to do his homework. She was always yelling at him calling him names. When she noticed the fear in her son's eyes, she realized she was doing wrong but even though she didn't want to keep mistreating him, she couldn't help it. I asked her how had she been treated as a child in the same situation. She closed her eyes and started looking for that memory. Her lips tightened and while her eyes brimmed with tears, she replied for me with a tone full of sadness that her father always yelled at her too. I asked her how she felt back then and she told

me that she felt sadness and fear. Then I asked her how she thought her son feels when she yells at him. She looked down and with a sad expression she replied me that he would feel the same way as she did when she was a child. At that point, she realized that she was repeating with her son the same history of her childhood but now she was acting as her father and her son was acting as herself. I guided her into that particular memory in her childhood and showed her how to heal that negative experience. A week after that, she got in contact with me to say that she was very happy because after healing that episode in her life and forgiving her father, she was more patient with her son and didn't yell him at all. The most important thing was that their relationship changed for good because he wasn't afraid of her anymore.

- Another day a man came to me because he used to get angry at foolish people. He couldn't stand foolishness and was having many problems with this, especially at work because he got mad at his subordinates and actually yelled at them. When he was talking to me about his problem he suddenly realized that during elementary school he had been treated as a fool by his classmates. I asked him to recall one of those memories, to feel what he felt back then, and compare that particular emotion to the emotion in the present when he noticed people doing foolish things. "It is exactly the same emotion", he said. "Now that you are sure where this pattern is coming from, do you want to get rid of this?" I asked him. He replied that he was ready, so I guided him into forgiving his classmates and he told me he felt that he was getting free of the heavy burden he had been carrying for more than 30 years. In the next days he called me to tell that it worked like magic, he had changed from night to day; he went through the same exact situations like before but now he didn't get angry at all.

- My daughters wanted to have a pet, but they were too little to take care of a cat or a dog, so my wife and I decided to buy hamsters for them. So we did and they named them Charlie and Cauliflower. One day my daughters were playing with the hamsters and they weren't careful enough and I saw the hamsters falling from their hands to the ground a couple of times. I got really mad and yelled at them because they were mistreating their pets. As most people do, I thought I was right for getting angry because it's not good to mistreat any creature, but as I have been dealing with many anger problems in my practice I told myself, "Hold on, don't fool yourself, this has something to do with you, there is something inside you asking to be healed". I asked myself, what happened to me that watching my daughters mistreat their pets made me feel so angry? The question was so precise that I got the answer immediately, I

remembered an episode from my own childhood where I mistreated a parrot I had as a pet. I couldn't understand then why I did it, and I had never forgiven myself for doing that. Now I could look at everything with different eyes and suddenly everything was so clear. When I was a boy, my father used to yell at me and I felt sadness and anger. I could never defend myself from his mistreatment and I felt that everybody else was stronger than me except the parrot, so I used it to repeat the pattern, trying to relieve myself from the pain without knowing it. When I saw my daughters --according to my judgment-- mistreating their pets, what I was really looking at was myself mistreating my parrot. I forgave myself for mistreating my parrot, I sent love to my parrot for being there so I could learn this important lesson and forgave my father because he was repeating a pattern, giving back what he had received from his parents just as I had done with the parrot. After that, I talked to my daughters explaining everything to them and asking them to forgive me for yelling at them, which they did, understanding the situation completely.

As you can see with these stories, anger is not something to be taken for granted. It is like an alarm telling us that there is something to heal in ourselves. Just remember, whenever you feel anger again, try to stop for a minute and ask yourself this question: "What happened to me that this situation makes me feel angry?" and when a memory comes to your mind, watch it carefully, understand the situation and forgive whom you have to forgive imagining that your forgiveness dissolves all your emotional pain and turns it into light.

Third Place***The Tree*****Kaven Townsend**

I knew this brother and he had a son. The brother told his son to go out and cut down the tree that is in the yard, but don't cut down the one that is leaning on the house. Now you will think it is better to cut down the one that is leaning on the house. It looks like the best thing to do. So the son went out to do as his father told him to do.

So the next day he told the son to just water the tree that is on the house. I know it may seem crazy to just water the tree. For you see the tree was a dead tree and it wasn't able to move on its own so when the son began to water the tree. The tree began to get strong. As time has gone on the tree was able to stand on its own. That's how we are today as church folks. When we first came to God we are weak. So weak that you may have to lean on the house just to get strong.

See the more you come to church and get feed the word of God. The stronger I will be. If I had a topic it will be can you feed your tree? My tree needs love and understanding. I can't get this love and understanding from my homie or my friends nor can I get it from the internet. I just got to get it all from God.

I don't know about you, but I'm going to feed my tree. Every chance I get. Every time the doors of the church open. I'm going to be there. See we as church folks don't want to feed our tree until we need something. When was the last time you read your bible or pray to God to just thank him for all his goodness?

How can you expect to grow in God if you won't read your bible and pray? Will you feed your tree? Now when you feed your tree. You can't allow the negative talks effect you. You must keep on going. My tree was wake, but now it's a strong tree.

Award Winners - Fiction

First Place

Airam the Fairy

Maritza Chang Chavez

Between reality and fantasy, between desires and facts there are many possibilities of learning. This is the story about Airam the fairy. She, like everybody else, had a gift. Airam was an expert in healing spirits. The people of the town said that she was born to teach people how to know themselves and to discover their inner treasures. During her life, she had worked really hard to cultivate and improve her gift. She spent many evenings reading and reflecting about different strategies to become a specialist in other people's emotions, because it's paradoxical but it's sometimes easier to dominate the demons of others than one's own.

Airam lived in a small tower that had been given to her and her husband as a wedding gift by an elderly couple of the kingdom. At the beginning, she didn't like the place very much because it was "cold" and she felt they were always being watched by the elders. Little by little the tower was impregnated with laughter, with stories, experiences, love and learning. Finally her tower became a bubble of oxygen, ceasing to be her prison. Maybe you are wondering why it was a prison? The reason is simple. Some emotions have a tremendous power and they can cover your mind. When these emotions are negative, they can take your energy and can make you close your eyes to opportunities to be happy.

One day, Airam found a letter under her door. It was an invitation from The North kingdom. The invitation for this place could be received once in a lifetime. Not everyone could travel and live in the North kingdom; only those who had received the invitation were allowed to do so. In this way when somebody gets it, it is like a winning the lottery; the invitation is like a key for a door. The northern kingdom was a place full of learning opportunities especially for the fairies that were just beginning their journey.

Airam had two little, brave, and smart daughters who were half fairies and half humans, and she had to make a decision about this opportunity. She decided to give her daughters the opportunity to live in a "better" place. It was a really difficult decision because in the North

kingdom the language is different and she had heard that some people there don't believe in fairies, and they don't like fairies.

She had lived in a world where her power could be seen, where her voice could be heard, where her words could be understood, where her emotions had a place to be kept. She was generally happy but always felt she was missing something in her life. Occasionally when she looked at everything she didn't have in these moments she become sad and her sadness became anger. It was a real tangle of emotions. She loved what she did, loved her job, loved her family, and the people she had helped.

After fifteen years living in the same tower, there were a lot of things for sale or share, and with each thing a memory that made them take more time to pack, so they left many things behind. It seemed that part of Airam stayed in the tower.

When Airam arrived at the North kingdom, she lost part of her power. She lost her magic and her spells didn't work as before. Airam could speak or write a little in the language of the North but it wasn't enough to be part of the country, wasn't enough to continue helping people and it wasn't enough because she always demanded the best of herself.

In a new place, in a new little home Airam missed her old life. One day, she woke up and she couldn't understand what the people around her were saying. She couldn't shop in a store by herself. She couldn't talk with her neighbors. She felt really bad. She thought it was a nightmare. Suddenly her life had changed. Her strength was gone. What had happened to her? Nobody knew because silence was her best companion.

She was really unhappy, and it was because she was looking only at her fears. After a lot of days praying, asking to be able to discover the mission that she would have in this land she had a dream. In her dream there was a key in her hands and the key had a heart shape. Many hands held the key but when she took the key it was little and light.

The next day she woke up and turned on the television to listen the news of the North kingdom. She tried some spells in the North language and she realized that she made this decision not only for her daughters, but for herself and her family and now she had new challenges and an opportunity to learn. Challenges are what make life interesting and overcoming them is what makes life meaningful.

This is the way Airam learned that fear is our greatest enemy. Fear limits us and locks us into a cave. Usually we believe we are safe in this cave, but this is where we run into more danger because we are losing the chance to enjoy what the universe is giving us.

Since that day Airam continued living, and discovered many hands around her helping. Since that day she learned to receive help. In that it is also something she learned, usually living in the past is a big mistake because you don't pay attention to the present and the new adventure and learning.

Second Place***Son and Dad***
Clifford Henry

Brian is my son who I love very much.

Brian is seven years old and going into the third grade. I am a single father to my boy. My wife died at a young age. She gave me an amazing son. I don't have to tell him to do anything. He does his homework on his own. I had a happy life with my wife before she died. Brian was too young to remember his mother.

I open the recipe book to make a cake. My son and I play with the flour. He doesn't have any idea what we're doing. He asks me, "What's going on, Dad?"

My response is that we are going to make a pound cake. My son and I have so much fun mixing butter and vegetable oil with the flour. We get flour over our face and hands. I'm so proud of my little boy. I wish my wife was here to see the fun we are having together.

I say, "Mom would be so proud of her little son. Do you like to make a wish?"

Brian says, "Yes, Dad."

He blows the flour dust into the air and makes a wish. His wish is to have a baby brother or a baby sister.

"Dad, do wishes come true?"

I say, "Wishes come true."

"Dad, how long does it take for a wish to come true?"

I say, "Sometimes it takes a month or year or even more."

At work I meet a new friend named Karen. Karen and I have an amazing conversation.

Karen says, "I have a little daughter named Jasmine. My husband died at a young age."

I say, "My wife died at a young age too. My son was very young when his mother died."

She says, "My husband died in Iraq. My little girl was young."

I say, "Thank you, Lord."

Karen says, "Thank you, Lord."

I ask, "Can we all go out for dinner one day?"

Karen says, "I'll give you a call."

Karen calls me at home. I pick up the phone and say, "Hello, I would like to be with you again."

Karen says, "Can we all meet tomorrow for dinner at Fridays?"

The boy and girl greet each other for the first time. They say, "Hello."

"My name is Brian and what's your name?"

"My name is Jasmine."

The boy and girl play together with the crayons and coloring book. Karen and I are happy to watch them. We look at each other.

We both say, "What are you thinking about?"

Karen says, "My daughter doesn't have a father."

We look at each other again.

Karen says, "Let's not rush things."

I say, "I agree. Let's see what happens in the future."

We both smile.

Third Place

Wake Me Up When September Ends
(Introduction - Selection from a Longer Piece)
Cory D'Amore

“Summer has come and pass, the innocent can never last,” as the Green Day song proclaims. This song was known to be a tribute to the Victims of Hurricane Katrina; an anti-war song for the Iraq War, and for most Americans, September was also associated with the dreaded day the Twin Towers in New York City fell back in 2001. The writer to this song, Billie Joe, wrote it from his feelings of his father who died in September. This song can bring a meaning to many different individuals, especially, this one person, who this story revolves around. A young fellow from Holly Grove, Tennessee could relate to the song in his own opinion. His mind races every day, stressing about how his life has been and is going. He tends to be frightened by the future. Trying to enjoy the summer, he notices that it has come and past. He feels that the innocent can never last. In time, this young man from Tennessee will realize how this song affects him. Drenched in his pain, he will see that he is becoming who he is. His memory may rest, but he’ll never forget what he lost. All he is praying for is for someone to wake him up when September ends.

It was just beginning of summer of 2015; Samuel Dixon was living in New Jersey for the past five years since his sister Kelly passed away. He was born in Holly Grove, Tennessee and lived there until that horrible day of her death that came upon Kelly. The past five years Samuel struggled with depression of the loss of his sister and best friend. He left Tennessee after that event. Samuel moved to a small town where his mother and father resided. The town was known as Dorothy located in South Jersey. Samuel faced many other struggles from going to jail due to the cause of disloyal relatives. Since that incident, the Dixon family went their own ways.

Samuel moved a few months later to his parent’s home in Dorothy after being locked up. He moved down South to Georgia. After moving, he struggle with one mission that needed to be done. It was the hassle of finding a job, therefore leading him to be homeless

under the boardwalk. Samuel had many problems. He always tried to stay in a positive attitude. He left college since school was just too expensive. When living under the boards, Samuel was determined to get out of his predicament of having no home. He worked hard to earn a job, in the field he always wanted, in a recording studio. The town that his job was located is in a small town known as Lakeside, Georgia. Once he saved enough money, Samuel rented an apartment in the same town.

After three years, he struggled with his bills. He needed another job. Across the street from the studio was a restaurant that Samuel applied for. The restaurant is known as Papa Ronaldo's. He needed the extra cash to pay rent and to save. Samuel knew some of the staff from going in for lunch and dinner. Samuel was lucky enough to have two jobs. He didn't get to see or spend time with his friends or family. There was only his work friends he got to see every day, but that's all they were. He didn't go out or hang with them after hours. Deep down Samuel was hurting inside. He was a little depressed. He believed if he could persevere and work hard the future will be bright. The only problem that he does is bottle up his problems. The summer of 2015, Samuel will experience an ending to summer wake up call.

Samuel was average high with light brown hair. The smile he showed would brighten up a room even if he was depressed. He knew how to hide his sadness with positive thoughts. Samuel hardly got enough sleep. He would just ignore the baggage that highlighted around his light green eyes. His schedule was the same every day. He wakes up for breakfast. Samuel would get a shower and get dress for work. When he was ready to leave he'd hop in his truck. He owned a Ford pickup. The truck was a green 1935 Ford ½ Ton Pickup. It was given to him by his grandfather before he passed on. Samuel hardly uses the truck unless he was going long distances, to car shows or occasionally to work. The studio was a short distance from his home. Sometimes walking to work was good exercise for his health.

The studio is known as Well Tone Studio. Singers, bands, voiceover specialist, and radio personalities came from all over the county to make recordings for business or hobby use. Samuel's job was to produce music or run the board for anyone who needed to record. Samuel work there for four years. He had at least thirteen years of experience with the field he chose to pursue in. Many students who go to college to get a job in a studio had trouble obtaining this position at Well Tone. They may have the degree but they still lack the experience. He did eventually want to receive a scholarship and finish school to achieve a

degree to go with his experience. Samuel was blessed to not just have the job at the studio but to also have a second job. The economy is tough for most individuals to remotely find a place that's hiring. As lucky as Samuel was, deep down something was eating him up inside.

Papa Ronaldo's is a small Italian restaurant across from Well Tone Studio. Samuel worked over there at night. He pretty much didn't have much of a social life. Working twenty-four seven puts a toll on a person. After three years of pushing hard, Samuel became friends with his first bad habit. Alcohol! He never drank during the day. Nightly drinking became a past time sport after work was through. Sitting at the bar got lonely at times. Samuel kind of liked drinking alone because no one will ever see him as he is when he drinks. He did hate being alone at times though. The closest people to him were the people he worked with. Work was work for Samuel. He was too focused in his work to even focus on a social life.

Award Winners - Poetry

First Place

A Plea for The Consideration of the Contrary

Agapito Garcia

I know many kind and positive people who carry a certain faith
And I know many intolerant zealots of the same
While these types of people aren't all religious
It seems a confusing and lazy consensus remains amongst some who carry a faith
That the world is designed around us perfectly and will always remain just so
That science is but a delusion of the faithless

What these individuals fail to understand is that they themselves are deluded
They've been tricked by words. Words written by men
People had a hand in creating the image of a god or creator
Surely we are all aware of the dastardly and deceptive nature of people
I cannot deny the existence of the almighty
I've no proof of it either

But I would contest loudly and with that same zeal
That to repudiate and disassociate oneself to the study of our reality and the great minds
behind it
Is only proof that there is an unwillingness to concede an untested and flawed view of the
world
If our creator is everywhere and is in everything
Wouldn't it be elementary to concede that the intelligence we all know our species to be
endowed with
Can study our creator and its creation?

Would it not be wondrous to consider
That a grand artist created a masterpiece for us to marvel at and explore?
Instead of butting our stubborn heads over our beliefs
Why not combine them?
Albert Einstein believed everyone is a genius in the most eloquent fashion
Judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree
And it will live its whole life believing it is stupid

Let us be humans
That reach towards infinity
To map its marvelous depths and complexity
Let us find our gods together
Our hands firmly locked in place
On our long, confusing journey around our small sun and through the colossal cosmos

Second Place***At least I'm not Mariah.*****Agapito Garcia**

And once the new year rang
I found myself, for the first time in my twenty years, feeling old
Alone in a computer chair wondering how the escapades of my friends turned out
Convincing myself that the new year is hardly worth celebration
Rationalizing the passing of time as an event that occurs with the earth traveling around the
sun
And yet I feel empty

A few billion people who all consent to this day being anything but benign got to me it seems
All the debaucherous tales and adventures to be shared over the next year could transpire
tonight
I struggled to capture the isolation that gripped my heart
It's as if I stood in the middle of a frozen lake
Staring out at the winter's blanket laying across the landscape
Then, without warning, the ice under my feet gives way

I plunge into the water
It feels like razor blades on my skin
The heat of my body leaves me violently and abruptly
The ache of the cold would almost be soothing
If I weren't alone I could share a laugh
The unfortunate things in life, when shared, can be laughed off and immortalized in anecdote
Instead I'd drag myself out of the frozen hell
And begin to make the grueling trip home
Desperately hoping some kind soul would ask if I need a ride home

Third Place***I'm Waiting for You*****Fernanda Contreras**

It all started one June day. As the hours and days passed from the sky, a light came to my life. While the phases of the moon passed, your love grew inside me. You are a star in the dawn, a light that has lived.

And while I mark days on the calendar, I feel you kick my mature belly with your fragile feet, filling me with your magic. On my inside, you change my body, you change my mind, you change my being because you are my little boy. You are the love that my life lacks. And without knowing how your hands are, your mouth, your face or the color of your eyes, I go blindly waiting to hear the sound of your voice.

I wish I could show you the earth in a thousand colors. I know that I cannot change the world as it is, but I promise to tie your thumb to my heart to guide you with my heartbeat.

I'm scared but I ask God to go further than I can. I am not sure I will be the perfect teacher for you. Maybe I will make mistakes on the way while I teach you about life and I try to make you a good man.

But you will realize with time that for a mother it does not matter if a child arrives first or last; if it becomes a doctor or a simple bohemian; if you succeed or fail in the attempt to be better.

My arms will always be open to comfort you and my kisses to fill you with tenderness. And if you feel alone, there will be a place waiting for you at the table. For a mom, it does not matter if you are a child or an adult, the love you feel doesn't change. It lasts.

I you want to know my beloved little Thiago, that God and life fulfilled the desire to have you. Your love will dwell in me forever.

Memoir – Honorable Mentions

It Was a Long Wait

Asad Ahmed

Twelve years ago, I met my beautiful wife at a friend's wedding ceremony in Pakistan. I still remember that she was wearing a very fancy traditional dress; it was light green with lots of shiny hand work on the front. She looked gorgeous. It was love at first sight!

I gathered all my courage and approached her. To my surprise, it did not take very long for us to find common interests in our conversation. She found me funny and I loved every bit of her. Later she told me that she was a United States (USA) resident visiting relatives in Pakistan. She would be staying for a month.

Soon we became close friends. We started meeting for lunch and shopping almost every day. Days passed quickly until one month was over. Then she had to leave. However, she visited Pakistan for three consecutive years. By now we had developed deep feelings and love for each other. I proposed and she said, "YES!"

With our parents' blessings, we were married. I was so happy to finally be with the girl I loved from the bottom of my heart. I was looking forward to a vibrant and colorful life with her. We wanted to extend our family as soon as possible. Little did we know that my newly found happiness would not last long. We would have a very agonizing wait. Since my new wife lived and worked a world apart in the USA, she was not able to stay very long in Pakistan. After three beautiful, but rapidly passing months, she had to leave again. After her departure, I was very alone and sad. However, we made sure that we Skyped almost every day. This became the norm of our newly married life.

Because of the time zone's difference between the two continents, I had to stay awake at night so I could chat with her. This caused another problem – I was sleeping less. This began to have a negative impact on my work life: I reported late, concentrated less, and lost interest in the very business I had established.

One day my wife informed me that she was pregnant. She wanted me to be with her when the baby was due. I was so happy to soon be a dad.

However, after months of discussion, we decided that my wife would not resettle in Pakistan. Instead, I would emigrate to the USA. Because she was pursuing her MBA and had plans to earn her CPA, I did not want to shatter her dreams. Hence, I agreed to close my business and move to the USA. We looked forward to having a great beginning as a new family in the Land of Opportunity.

Unforgettable Memories

Guadalupe Avila

In my humble opinion, farming is one of the most rewarding jobs. As Colin Powell said, “A dream doesn’t become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination, and hard work.”

My father used to be a farmer. Our cornfield was about an hour and a half walk from home. He used to work so hard: six days a week, from sunrise until sunset. There was not any modern machine. My father used two bulls to plow and plant. Some years were better than others; it depended on the rain. When the years were dry, there was not enough grain. When I was little, I rode a donkey to bring my father lunch at the cornfield. I remember that the donkey would bray, “Hee-haw, hee-haw, hee-haw.” as soon as he approached the corn field and saw my father. I stayed with my father the whole day. I loved to help him plant corn and different kinds of seeds. In my bare feet, I enjoyed the feeling of the warm, moist, and fresh soil. Sometimes the sharp small rocks and thorns hurt my feet. My father would say, “One step apart and two or three seeds in every spot.”

When he finished his day, my father’s day did not finish. After he returned home, he still had a lot of work to do before dinner. He removed the donkey's saddle, fed him, gave him water, and took him to the barn.

After the plants grew corn ears and were ready to eat, my father would tell my mother to invite her friends and family members to spend the day in the cornfield. It was a picnic day! The men carried water in big buckets from the well, which was far away from the

cornfield. The women cooked many dishes using all the fresh products from the field. Children played, climbed trees, ran, built sand castles, and made dolls out of branches. When the food was ready, everybody sat down to enjoy the meal. It was a pleasant day.

The rewarding part of my father's hard work was to see mountains of corn ears, beans, pumpkins, and peanuts piled in the house. He did not have another job or salary because farming absorbed all of his time and energy. He did sell some grains to support our family.

Unfortunately, my father retired and sold his land. Now my brothers and I have beautiful memories.

Memorial Day

Partricia Cajuste

Dear Marc,

I hope you are feeling good today. For me, everything is good. Yesterday was Monday, May 30. It was Memorial Day in America. A day off, no school, no work, everything in the government was off. Memorial Day is always the last Monday in May.

On this day, I remember the soldiers and all the military. The President visits the cemetery. Family and friends bring wreaths, flags and flowers to the tomb in memory of their soldiers. There are parades. I made a barbecue and I start to think about summer. It is amazing.

I am happy to return to school today because I love my friends and my teacher. She is nice. That's all. See you soon!

Memorial Day

Johanne Colas

Dear James,

Good morning! How are you? It is a pleasure to write to you.

I want to let you know about the holiday “Memorial Day.” This year it was on Monday, May 30. It is a great day for America. Memorial Day is always celebrated on the last Monday in May. It is a federal holiday. This means a day off – no bank, no school, no work, etc. I had three days off; it was a long weekend. The temperature was so hot. The president and many people visited cemeteries. We put flags and flowers on soldiers’ graves and have parades. I took time to go to the park.

Today I am happy to come back to school.

Education in My Life

Gisela Cardenas

Zig Ziglar once said, “What you get by achieving your goals is not as important as what you become by achieving your goals.”

Education is essential to me. As a teenager, I struggled in school and was disinterested in completing high school. As I grew older and had many life changes, marrying and giving birth to my son, I realized the importance of staying in school and obtaining an education.

I was not fortunate as I began my search for employment. I was turned down by some employers or was out schooled by other job seekers. I was unable to match the skill set in order to provide for my family. I knew change was necessary in my life and I need to set some goals. With hard work and dedication, I will not only work on my goals, but will achieve them proudly.

Recently, I have set some immediate, challenging objectives. Currently, I have enrolled in an adult education course in which I am preparing and studying to take the NJ

High School Equivalency Exam. Once I receive the honor of holding a diploma, I plan to further my education by being one of the first in my family to enroll in college.

I have many motivational factors that are driving me towards achieving these goals. I want to be a positive role model for my family. I also believe that putting forth an effort in school will provide me with more chances for a positive outcome and happier life.

I know that education will supply several positive benefits that will not only affect my life, but also those around me. Education is a life long journey, but once achieved, a person will realize all the positive effects it provides and how it improves one's position in society. It has long been said by many, and I agree and believe that every child, teenager and adult should have an equal opportunity to learn, study, and be successful. I am a success in progress.

A Mother's Strength

Maria Greco

My son, Peter, was born with 2 kidneys on the left side and has a double ureter, which is the duct by which urine passes from the kidney to the bladder. He was monitored by a specialist from birth, and when he was 7 his doctor said that Peter needed surgery to repair his ureter. He explained that this surgery would keep my son from losing both his kidneys. We scheduled the surgery for July 14, 2014. The morning of the surgery, my son and I were very scared, but also very anxious to get it done. I met with the doctor's husband, who was assisting in the surgery, and we were on our way to fix my son's issue

The surgery should have taken about 2 hours. However, 6 hours later, Peter's doctor came out of the Operating Room and told me that when they were doing the surgery, they found a third ureter and it needed to be attached to the other ureter. My son was in a lot of pain after the surgery. Three days following the surgery my poor baby was in agony! The doctors told us that it was normal and that my son was being dramatic! Even though there was still blood in his urine, the doctors removed the catheter and insisted he be released. Screaming in agony, we took him home. That night, my son started screaming so loud the neighbors could hear him across the way. I woke up in a panic, not knowing what was wrong! I ran to go check on my son and upon lifting his sheets realized they were wet with

blood and urine leaking from the incision. We rushed him back to the hospital where he lay for five days without further medical intervention.

Finally, on the sixth day the doctors decided to go back in for surgery. Anxiously, waiting after seven hours of surgery, and thinking my son could die, we were told the surgery might have ruptured my son's bladder! Adding to my total confusion and horror was the husband of my son's long-time doctor advising us not to consult with his wife because she didn't know what she was talking about. I became numb, disoriented, and couldn't comprehend what was going on. The doctor then informed me that when he pushed on my son's bladder, it caused everything to fall apart. The result: he had to re-implant my son's ureters. I was horrified! I remembered hearing my son complaining that he felt the doctor pushing on his stomach during surgery and saying it felt like a house fell on him! I was so angry and confused, I immediately called The Children's Hospital in Philadelphia for a second opinion. They referred me to the Chief Urologist of Columbia University Hospital in New York City. I was advised to ask the present doctors to do a cystogram, a special test done by a radiologist that takes images of the bladder and surrounding areas, to show where the leak was.

A week and half later, after much fighting and struggling to have the cystogram performed, the doctors informed me that the hospital did not offer that type of imaging, something I later found not to be true. The doctors lied so that I would have to do it at their office, so they had total control of the situation. They didn't want to have any other doctors looking over their shoulder and could cover any wrong doing. I refused to do this procedure in their office! I wanted to have a radiologist present at the time of the procedure, and proof of all of it so it wasn't my word against theirs. When I told the doctor at Columbia University Hospital about **my fears**, he thought I was insane. To convince him, I sent him copies of all the blood test and procedures that were administered as proof of what was going on. I felt like an undercover FBI agent, trying to crack down on a case.

When the doctors that performed the surgery found out that I was getting a second opinion they reacted quite badly. The assistant doctor talked down to me like I did something wrong when the only thing I was doing was trying to protect my poor son. He chastised me saying, "How dare you, second guess my work!", none of this stopped me for I was determined to fight for my son's life. I couldn't believe that they had tried to lie and cover up

their mess. My child's life was on the line and they could only think about covering their mistakes! I hugged my son and told him that mommy is here and I will not let anyone hurt you anymore.

Later that day I received a call from the Doctor from Columbia University Hospital that I had sent all of my sons records to. He informed me that it was crucial for my son to get medical attention immediately and told me that he had requested transport for my son to be released to him in New York City. The hospital refused to transport my son, stating it was not medically necessary. At this point I went to the head floor manager and patient advocate's office and explained my situation. I was so lost as to what to do that I threatened to call the media and broadcast my ordeal. Finally, the Chief of Urology came to the rescue and my son was transported to Colombia University Hospital. I was relieved, yet scared, not knowing what to expect & not knowing what kind of recovery my son had.

At Colombia, there my son recovered from a 105 fever and a pseudomonas infection, which is a deadly infection in your body, caused by an untreated staph infection. He had three corrective surgeries to fix what the previous doctors had done. Finally, he was released from the hospital on September 2014, two months after this horror began, he was finally going home! This situation was by far my worst and challenge in life. I couldn't do anything to prevent this nightmare from happening to my baby at the time and it's taught me many a lesson which I will impart to all of you. Before trusting a doctor or finalizing any type of surgery, be sure to get a second and third opinion, because it can save yours or a loved one's life. Doctors are specialists that study their profession, but they are normal human beings, like you and I. They cannot perform miracles and they can make mistakes along the way.

It's been two years since this incident and my son Peter is now 10years old and is a talented young boy. He draws phenomenally, creates YouTube videos and loves to sculpt different characters out of clay. He hopes to be a Claymation cartoonist one day and to become successful in Hollywood! I am married to an amazing husband that stuck by me through the hardest time of our Lives. Despite all the fighting and heartache we as a family went through, we have never been stronger. I am a mother of three beautiful & amazing children who make every day a gift. We have had a few bumps in the road but doing great! I finally got the courage to write and share my experience. In closing, no matter what kind of

curve ball life throws at you, just pick your head up high, be positive and fight for what you believe in. Thinking positive, can make you move mountains; In other words: NEVER GIVE UP!

Memoir

Leodegaria Lopez

Hello. My name is Leodegaria Lopez. I am 41 years old, and I have 3 boys and 1 girl. I came to the U.S. in 1990. I had to leave in 2008, because my mom got sick with cancer, and I had to go take care of her. My mom died after 6 months, and then I returned to the U.S., because I had left my children here with their dad.

After I got back, I decided to learn English because it is very necessary in this country. Although in my work I do not need it because everyone speaks Spanish. But I want to learn English to be able to join the community.

Thanks to God, I found these beautiful people who teach me with so much experience to write and to learn something. For me, it's very difficult to learn English, but my teacher Kathy is an excellent person. I hope not to disappoint her and to learn even a little well. I leave one of so many stories of my life.

The Power of Forgiveness

Esteban Morales

I had stayed awake late that night writing some e-mails and answering some messages on Facebook and suddenly I felt driven to go into a Facebook group where people write about their problems and other members of the group give them advice and comfort.

My eyes were caught by a publication from Alice (fictitious name). She was asking for advice from the members of the group about whether she should get a divorce or not. She explained the situation she was going through with her husband: he was always criticizing her

and she could not stand it anymore. A lot of people replied to her post, some people in favor and others against her getting divorced; each gave her their own reasons.

In my practice I had been helping people dealing with many kinds of problems using an approach where rather than thinking of problems as a threat from the outside, thinking of them as emotional conflicts from our past claiming to be healed. I thought that this different point of view would be helpful for her so I replied in her post. I told her that the real problem was not making that decision but rather knowing why she was experiencing this situation in her life. I said that as long as she didn't find that answer she would be going through the same situation over and over with different people.

It seems that what I wrote rang some bells for her because she became aware that the same experience had been repeating itself in her life in different forms but with the same content. Then we started talking by message on her post. I helped her realize that all these events were an echo of a single source event that was an emotional conflict to be found in her memories. She started thinking about it, and right away she recalled a memory from her childhood where her mother had criticized her. She then realized that as a young girl she felt exactly the same way as now with her husband. Through many messages I guided her to eliminate that emotional conflict and heal the wound. After our correspondence Alice felt very relieved, and she realized that the problem with her husband wasn't so important anymore. It turned into something she could totally deal with.

Some weeks later she contacted me again, this time through Facebook chat. She told me that she had other issues in her life that she wanted to heal. The first issue was with her husband's lying. Again I told her that the problem wasn't her husband but some event in her life needing to be healed. It had to be something related to lies. It took her about 4 days to get to the specific memory. She told me then that she remembered losing her student credentials and not being able to take the written exam required to enter university. She lied to her family telling them that they hadn't let her take the exam because she came from a private school. Alice never got to study at the university. The hardest thing for her was to admit that she had lied to herself and wasted the opportunity to study and have a better life.

Alice was on the right path but it wasn't yet the memory we were looking for, so I told her that she had to look for something from her childhood. Next time we talked she started telling me that she was having issues with her family. Her mother had passed away a couple

of months ago and her siblings were the ones criticizing her for her relationship and for not having a good job or money. I told her that everything was related. Now the picture was getting sharper, and in order to fix all of it she had to find a memory related to lies and money in her childhood. She got it right away. She told me that when she was a child, her grandmother accused her of stealing some money from a bag where her grandmother kept her money. Alice denied it, but her grandmother called her a liar and told Alice's mother about it; she didn't believe her either and punished her for stealing. Soon after that, her grandmother found the money, and yet they never apologized to her, neither her grandmother nor her mother.

To complete the puzzle Alice told me that as a child there had been another issue that she had had to deal with: the fact that her mother preferred one of her sisters over her other siblings. She felt her mother didn't love her.

Now that Alice had all the pieces of the puzzle she had to make something of it. The real work was about to start. I told her that in order to fix her life she had to forgive her mother and that now she was in a very special position, because what she was going to heal was not just mending her present life but healing her whole family. It would be the ones that came before her like her mother and grandmother as well as her own children and grandchildren, because as she could relate, the same loveless history was repeating time and again in her family.

At this point she started to look at all these problems in a different way because she knew that her mother had not felt loved by her own mother and she realized that she was just repeating the same pattern by yelling and punishing her children just as her mother did with her as a child.

She realized the importance of what she was about to do. Forgiveness is not the easiest thing to accomplish, so she needed to learn about forgiving. I explained to her that forgiving someone had nothing to do with the person she was forgiving. They wouldn't be better or worse with her forgiveness; nothing was really going to change in them. The change was meant to be in the person who forgave, because when you forgive you can get rid of all the emotional pain you are keeping in your mind and heart. I made her realize that in the same way she couldn't stop yelling and punishing her kids, her mother faced the same thing, as well as her own mother. It's a chain that she had to break for good.

To accomplish this task I taught her some exercises based on the methodology that I used in my practice. She would have to face every one of those painful memories, look at them, understand the situation and forgive whoever she needed to forgive. While she did this she had to notice where in her body she felt that emotional pain and imagine cutting it out and placing it in a big black garbage bag until she felt all the pain was out. After that she had to fill that empty space with a happy memory. She had to repeat this exercise until she felt she had healed all her wounds and filled all of the spaces up.

In our following conversation she told me that she had done everything I told her and that it had been very painful to face and forgive those many past situations but she would continue doing it to heal completely.

Soon, all the work she had been doing started to show results. Emotionally, she began to feel much better and her whole life started to change in a positive way. It was at this point when she received a wonderful and unexpected surprise.

Alice had already been working really hard on solving all her issues with her mother, who had died a few months before. In that same week one of her sisters came to visit her. She brought her a beautiful figure of the Virgin Mary. Her sister told Alice that she had dreamed of their mother the previous night and in her dream she told her to bring that Virgin to Alice. She then realized that this was a real message from her mother and a real act of love and forgiveness. She felt that after many years, she was finally at peace with her mother. Alice told me that after that day she started dreaming frequently about her mother, and although she was no longer in this plain of existence, they finally achieved a beautiful relationship. In her dreams they hugged each other, her mother blessed her and she felt joyful. She told me that she felt the connection with her mother, freed of the heavy burden she have been carrying for a very long time.

A couple of months later she wrote me again to tell me about the miracle that the Virgin, that her mother had given her, had made in her life. She told me she had gotten a job, the one she had dreamed about her whole life. She also told me that she realized that after a severe financial, mental and spiritual crisis had passed everything now was even better than before and that she feels happy and finally free.

Most of us are like Alicia. We focus all our energy on fighting everything we see wrong outside of us without understanding that everything outside us are effects and the causes are

always within us. With this story we learned that fighting the effects is a waste of time and energy. Forgiving is what really heals the causes and this is the power of forgiveness.

The Night That Could Have Gone Wrong

Tamesha Price

On a nice summer day, K. called me on his way home from work, inviting me for dinner and drinks. I asked where and when. He told me to meet him at a bar in Penn Station. I don't get out much, so while I was getting dressed, I was hoping for a lovely night. As I walked into the bar, music was playing, the lights were dimmed, and there were cute tables. When I sat on the high stools, my feet couldn't touch the floor. We ordered the drinks and food. In that moment, everything was fine. We were talking and laughing, enjoying the music. The food was great.

While we were having our second or maybe third drink, K. saw that the man next to us left his wallet open on the counter. K. went over to the wallet as if he was going to steal his money. The man spotted K. getting too close to his wallet and started to go off. I had to save K. It could have gotten ugly really fast. He is the father of my son, and I wasn't going to go home without him.

I rushed over and tried to change the man's mind because at this point he was ready to swing and take K's head off. K. is not much of a fighter. He just likes to hear himself talk. I told the man that K. had a lot to drink and that he thought the wallet was his. The man calmed down and even bought us a drink. By the end of the night, we had made a new friend.

My Best Working Time in New York, USA

Janethe Sucuzhanay

When I came to America I got a great job. I started working in the area that I love and I have knowledge. "Accounting".

To get this job was a miracle! I think God had this ready for me because if He would have not planned it, I'm sure it would be impossible to get it.

One day I was waiting to see my aunt near central park when somebody asked me if I needed a job. I told him immediately YESSSSS. So he told me that he knows an old man who needs somebody who can be with him a couple of hours helping with his medicine, bringing his food and going with him to his doctor appointments.

We went to meet him. There he was MR. ALBERT ELIOT MARRE. He was born on Sept. 25, 1924, in New York City. He began his theatre career as an actor. In the late 1940s, Mr. Albert Marre was married to actress Jan Farrand, but the marriage ended in divorce. In 1956 he got married to the actress Joan Diener. The same year he was nominated for the Tony Award for Best Director for *The Chalk Garden*. They had two children, Jennifer and Adam, and remained married until her death in 2006. In 2009, Mr. Marre got married again to the actress-lyricist Mimi Turque, to whom he remained married until his death three years later, on September 4, 2012 at age of 87.

Mr. Marre accumulated a host of directing credits over his long career, including the original productions of the musical *Kismet*, *Milk and Honey*. He directed many other shows like *The Chalk Garden*, *Time Remembered*, *At the Grand*, *Too True to Be Good*. But it was *Man of La Mancha*, a tuneful telling of "Don Quixote," that came to define his career.

My first impression when I met him was that I was looking at an old man, a very serious, important and intelligent man. Later on, I found out that he was a very generous and famous man. From the first moment, he showed me his marvelous manners. I didn't speak too much English at that time, and just understood a little bit, but he was so nice that I felt like he was talking in my own language "Spanish". We started talking about ourselves; he saw that I couldn't tell him everything that I would like, so the first time that we went outside together was to buy an English-Spanish dictionary. Every time when I didn't remember the verb that I wanted to tell him, I used the dictionary and so did he.

I started working with him for three hours, three days a week. I was helping him with his medication and getting his food and sometimes I went with him to his doctor appointments. I had a lot of free time so I found another job cleaning offices around the same area but I just did that for a few months because soon, I started working with Mr. Marre more hours and six days a week.

My time with him was incredible! He loved to talk about his life, his career and especially about his wife Mrs. Joan Dinner because they worked together and he admired her so much. She had an incredible voice, and we used to listen her songs. He had a lot of pictures of her and the job they did together, and he explained to me everything that they had to do before they made a show. He showed me her beautiful and expensive clothes that she used for her presentations. I remember that he gave me a jacket that belonged to her and I was scared of wearing it because he told me that it was very expensive and I didn't want to lose it. I still have that jacket and I wear it just for special occasions.

As he was a famous man, he had his own business so after a few weeks of talking about ourselves I told him about my knowledge in Accounting. Then I started managing his incomes and expenses. I had his son; Adam's, help for it because he used to do it, but he wasn't there every day like Mr. Marre would like. Mr. Marre tried to do it by himself but he told me that he got a headache when he had to make the checks and the deposits, etc. For me that wasn't a headache; that was great! I feel passionate when I start working with numbers.

I started making his monthly income and expenses just in excel program, because I didn't have any Accounting program in my computer. He had a house which he rented for two tenants. He lived alone in an apartment near to his house and he wanted to know how much he had at the end of each month. I tried to explain to him how I did those reports and he liked them and showed them to his son, Adam, and his Accountant. They liked them too, so Adam put in my computer "QuickBooks" which is an Accounting program and he taught me how to use it. I was feeling very excited about everything that was happening in my life. The days passed by and we were getting more and more comfortable talking with each other. I was learning a lot about his interesting life; and from all the information that he gave me, I tried to help him contact his old friends using the social media. I was glad because he found out that he had a friend living in my country Ecuador. That was amazing! He was so happy, that immediately I got his number and he talked with his friend and planned to fly to Ecuador. Later

on, we found another friend that was part of his Man of La Mancha's show. She was living in New York, so they meet each other easily, I think it was the same week that we got her phone number.

Meanwhile I was in the US with my tourist visa so I had to go back to my country but I kept in contact with him. He gave me a surprise: he decided to travel to Ecuador to spend a couple of weeks at his friend's place and he called me, telling me that he was in Loja-Ecuador and he invited my family and me to go over there. I went with my daddy and my uncle and we spent a few unforgettable days there with him and his friends.

Mr. Marre friend's place was a business ranch where he had a restaurant and spa for tourists, so they had all kinds of people to meet every day and that was great for Mr. Marre because he was used to being along almost all the time. He came back to New York and I stayed in my country for a few months and we still kept in touch and he told me if I wanted to come back to this county he would give me my job back. So I decided to come back, and for that time he was talking and having a good relation with his friend that he had in New York and few months later they went together to my country Ecuador to the same place and I stayed in US taking care of his staff.

In one of our conversations I promised him if I had a baby boy I will name him Eliot like him and I thanked God because my first baby was a boy and his name is ELIOT. I worked with him almost four years and all those years were the best ones in my whole working life. I had to leave him because I got married and I was going to have my first baby and he got married too so his wife decided to take care of his staff her own way.

I felt and I still feel blessed because I was being paid for being protected, for being with my angel because that was for me... **Mr. Marre**; for doing what I love, and for getting the opportunity to help my family, for having everything that I needed to survive in this county and for learning many things.

Unfortunately after I stopped working with him I couldn't keep in touch with him. I would just call him and leave him a happy birthday wish every September 20th of each year, and I also found out a little bit of what was going on with him by his stepson.

On September 20 of 2012 when I couldn't leave him a message I called his stepson. I explained to him that I couldn't wish Mr. Marre a Happy birthday and he told me that Mr. Marre died on September 4th of that year. I couldn't believe it; that notice was the worst one that I got since I

got to this country; and I have to confess that I was resentful that the people that could contact me and let me know about his death and funeral, did not tell me anything. They knew how important he was for me. I couldn't understand why they did this to me until I talked with my husband and he made me understand that everyone is different and everyone is going to act and make their own decisions.

Every day after I stopped working with him I missed him a lot, but now I feel happy because he is having a better life and I think he is closest to me and he is taking care of me and my family more than he did before.

Mr. Albert Eliot Marre will be alive in my mind and my heard forever!

Fighting for My Life

Dylan Teator

All of my life I have had to fight. Since the age of four, I have had high anxiety. Today it is just more manageable.

By the age of seven, I was diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), Tourette's, depression and tactile disorder. I remember my mother wondering what was wrong when I would wash my hands 20 times in a row. Every time I saw a crack in the floor I would have to step on it 15 times before I could go on. Because of Tourette's, I felt trapped in my body with all its uncontrollable tics. I couldn't concentrate in school and I was bullied a lot due to my odd behavior. And so my struggles continued.

By the time I was 20-21 things got tricky. Those were dark days. I would be up for days at a time but continue to have all this pent-up energy. I was severely depressed and manifested impulsive behavior. At one point, I attempted suicide. I spent 4 months in an intensive inpatient care facility and was ultimately diagnosed as bipolar. My saving grace was that I always had my mother in my corner and she never left my side. She helped me to realize that it is ok to get the help that you need.

I also had two best friends, Chris and John. Chris helped me to realize that you can accomplish anything you set out to do in your life, disability or not! John was always there for me and in my corner – he stood up for me when I was continually bullied and couldn't

defend myself. In addition, I have an amazing manager at Shop Rite named Bill Sterling, who has encouraged me to go back to school. He has helped my confidence so much because he has faith in me and what I can do. I have a long-time counselor; who I now consider my friend, Erin. She has coached me on how to deal with my anxiety. She has made me realize it is okay to get help and use medications if necessary to deal with the symptoms that were wreaking havoc with my life.

I believe in myself and my support system, and I have hope for the future. My wish is that people may read this story and see themselves in it. Maybe you have a disability, or maybe you are supporting someone who does. You, too, can have an impact on someone's life. Having a support system is invaluable. My support team has seen me through my darkest hours. I consider myself a "winner" because I was lucky enough to have the "A Team" in my corner. "A" is for Angels on earth!

The Day I Chose Me

Latifah Tucker

It was a hot August day. One of the hottest days of the year. I was trying to stay cool. I lay across my bed, doing my best not to move. All of a sudden, my cell phone started to ring. I looked at the phone and saw it was Kimberly. "Hey, Kim," I said. "Hey, Tifah," she said. It's a nickname some of my friends call me. She then asked me, "Hey, have you been on Facebook today?" I told her no. It's been too hot to do anything but lay here." She laughed and said, "Girl, you're crazy!"

Then she told me that one of my friends had posted something rude about me on Facebook. Kimberly said I should go on Facebook and see what it was. I laughed it off, and we talked a little longer. When we got off the phone, I decided to see what she was talking about. To my surprise, just as she had said, right in front of my face in bold letters: There it was! I couldn't believe my eyes! I felt very disrespected and enraged all at once. Who did she think she was? What possessed her to do something like this? She called me all types of nasty words and said I better watch my back because next time she saw me, it was on!

I could take all the name calling, but not the threats. I was not having that at all. In no fashion, shape, or form. That was uncalled for. I was very angry and immediately wanted to fight right off the bat. The girl is a skinny brown skinned girl with big teeth. She's pretty in her own way, but has a big chip on her shoulder. Plus, her attitude is terrible, to say the least. I knew fighting could go left really fast because I was mad as hell! Didn't she know who I am? Me! She must have not done her homework. If she had, she would know that all I used to do was fight. I was very good at it, too!

I thought she must be crazy. She would rather run through hell with gasoline drawers than mess with me! I imagined punching her in the face and stomping her out. I just wanted her to feel at least half as bad as I did. Now that I think about it, I was more hurt than anything else.

Instead of being violent, I decided to call her. When she picked up the phone and said, "Hello?" I asked her in a very nasty way, "What is your problem?" She replied even nastier. "I don't have a problem." I said, "Something is wrong with you to put that craziness on Facebook!" She then asked me, "What are you going to do about it?" I replied, "Nothing. I'm just going to take it down and block you." I also told her, "You're lucky I'm nothing like I used to be!" I then stated that I was going to pray for her, and hung up the phone.

The old me would have went to her house and beat the mess out of her. I love the new me because she loves Latifah. I realize I'm better than that, and that I have too much to lose. My kids, my husband, my house, my career. Yes, basically my whole life, over words? No. I know that all I have to be is me, and not who I think people want me to be. I know that fighting is not the answer to the problem. So, I ended the friendship without any incident because of the new me.

How I Became a Locksmith

Leonard Viola

It started in the late 80's where a friend needed help in his locksmith store. At the time, I was looking for a job. He asked me if I was interested. Of course I said yes. That's when I started working for Samson Locksmiths in Brooklyn. John was my boss.

A work for John about a year and a half. After working for John, I moved to Queens and found a new job. Around the Clock Locksmiths. Jay and Alan were the owns. It was pretty cool. There were a few guys working for them. We all became friends. I work for them for ten years. Down the line the guys started to leave one by one. In the end it wind up being me alone. It became boring so I moved on. I found a job in the big apple Manhattan, New York, Umbrella Locksmiths. It was exciting for me to work in Manhattan. I learned new locks and safes. That was great learning.

Sometimes the work became hard but I picked up on it quickly. A had a good teacher to teach me. What I love about the job I drove around Manhattan. Met new people and actors and actresses. I even got some autographs that was the cool part of the job. I work for Umbrella Locksmiths for 13 years. At least I can say I love my jobs and my work. Those were the best years of my life.

An Eventful Night

Giny Wells

One cool evening, I arrived at my new job not knowing anyone. I was excited, 18 years old and working at a well-known club.

About a month or so later, I noticed that one of the guys that also worked at the club was always in my space. I guess he was trying to get to know me better. He was tall, dark, and handsome, with a bit of swag to his personality. That's what caught my attention.

We started talking. We didn't take it any further. I realized that another female was giving me the stink face every time we passed each other.

One night, I was with my sister and we were walking down a long hallway. Here she comes. She banged right into my shoulder and kept walking. I responded by saying in a loud voice, making sure she heard me, "Take my arm off next time."

She turned around and started to come for me. My sister and I always have each other's back. The other woman was bigger, taller, and older. She came towards me. Before she knew it, my sister and I were on her like white on rice.

When the guards of the club heard the commotion, they came running over to pull us apart. Little did I realize it was all over a guy, the guy I had been talking to.

"That's my man! Who do you think you are?" the woman yelled as she was escorted out of the building.

"Wow! He must be really good if she's going through all that," my sister said.

And a few years later, we moved in together, and 25 years after that, we got married. As I think back, I wonder what would have happened if I just walked away.

My Angel
Damian Wilson

Melona

Before my niece Melona was born, I prayed and asked God for her. The first time that I saw Melona after she was born, I knew that she was my angel.

In the Hospital

I remember when I was sick and in the hospital. My blood pressure would go up and down. But when my sister Marva would bring Melona to visit me, my blood pressure would be normal. The nurses would say, “Your niece must be someone special” because every time she comes for a visit, your pressure goes down. I would say that’s because she is my angel from God.

Sleeping in My Bed

Melona was a funny little girl. She would come out of her bed and crawl downstairs to my room to sleep with me. Her parents would try to get her to sleep in her own bed but Melona did not. So for five years Melona slept with me and for five years I would kiss Melona and say, “Good night, my angel.”

I See It in Her Singing

Now that Melona is older, the same baby that I asked God for, the same little toddler that would come to the hospital to visit me, she’s still my angel. I was so surprised and proud of her when I first heard her sing. I love to listen to her when she is singing around the house or at church. It makes me happy to hear her, and I would say, “That’s my angel.”

Non-Fiction – Honorable Mentions

Is the United States a Dream Land for All Immigrants?

Faten Atfa

Is the United States a Dream Land for All Immigrants? Many people from all over the world hope to have a chance to come to the United States because they believe it is the best country for them to achieve all their dreams. In general, the U.S. offers great opportunities, especially for immigrants who are young, poor or poorly educated to have a better life. On the other hand, the U.S. does not give immigrants who are old, rich or have a higher education equal opportunities. Most immigrants will face many obstacles to reach their goals, but the poorer, less educated immigrants will find more success and will improve their lives more than well-educated immigrants.

Some young people are determined to change their lives for many reasons. Depending on their ambition, they may want to get a higher education. Doctors, dentists, engineers, and others who want to get a master's degree or Ph.D. can get a visa and stay in the U.S. legally. Studying hard is the big challenge for these people. They need to find a university to accept them, after that, they will need to find a part-time job to earn money and to help them pay for college. Most of this group will achieve their goals after they finish their studies, and perhaps it would take more than ten years to change their lives forever.

Poor people who don't have a good education or work experience come to the U.S. legally or illegally. Some come with the objective of staying in this country so they will have a chance to register their children in public schools and find a job where they can speak their language. These people will achieve their dream very quickly. They will have a more comfortable life than before.

People who have good lives and are forced to come to the U.S. because of wars, disasters, or epidemics are shocked when they discover that life in the U.S. is very difficult. They face many obstacles, especially people who are older than fifty years old. They must improve their English, get their educational credentials evaluated, and find a job, health care, and more. In many cases, the laws in the U.S. don't allow them to work in the same field that

they had before coming to the U.S until they have their educational credentials evaluated. After this, they often have to go back to school. They can't do this step without passing the TOEFL test with a high score and take a special test depending on what they had studied. After that, they can register in a university to get the classes they need. All these steps will cost them money, time, and hard work. The question is, at what age will they finish their goals and which company will give them a chance to work? Is it worth it?

On the other hand, if those people decide to work another type of job, what kind of jobs they will find? Whatever they have degrees in from their countries, doesn't matter. No one cares about their education experience and skills. They will find a job for which they don't need any education or skill, most of which depend on physical work like a driver, waiter, guard, or babysitter. Physical jobs are difficult for these people, especially those who have health problems. In these kinds of jobs, they will forget what they had learned and they will lose their experience, skill, and maybe their health will be worse. In reality, how can these people survive if they can't find a job, or study, or have good health?

It is important to realize though that it is not fair to have the same laws for people who have higher qualifications and degrees in their countries and those who do not. In my opinion, if the government changes the laws a little bit to give everyone a chance to work in their fields and contribute to the country, instead of taking any help from the government, then everyone may achieve the American dream. The United States is still a land of dreams for many people because they are allowed to have many chances; good education and great opportunities to have a job, safety, and peace. It is not a land of opportunity for everyone, though.

Identity Theft

Annette Santiago

Beware of identity thefts especially around the holiday season. Identity theft happens when someone steals your personal information and uses it without your permission. It's a serious crime that can wreak havoc on your finances; credit history, reputation and can take time, money and patience to resolve.

Always keep your financial papers secure and locked in a safe place at home. Also lock your wallet or purse in a safe place while at work. Only take identification, credit /or debit cards that are needed and leave your social security card at home.

Don't give out personal information on the phone, through the mail or over the Internet unless you've initiated the contact or know whom you're dealing with. If a company that claims to have an account with you sends emails asking for personal information – do not click on links in the email.

Finally, take steps to protect your online information as well. A "lock" icon on the status bar of your Internet browser means your information will be safe when it's transmitted. Also, you need to report to the police as soon as possible and cancel all of your credit cards if you notice any fraudulent activities. Calling the bank keep you safe and well informed and safe.

Fiction – Honorable Mentions

The Spring

Nasreen Akhtar

The spring is a very beautiful season, and I love spring season. It brings new life. Every year spring starts after March 20th.

When spring comes new leaves grows on the tree and flower blooms. I feel very good and happy, when trees grow new flower and leaves.

They spread fragrance everywhere. When I go for morning walk, I feel so good. The breeze is blowing in my eyes and my breath feel good and fresh. The birds are chirping here and there, the Nightingale singing a song. I like its voice.

When I see greenery all around me I feel so happy. I love the spring season and everybody loves it because spring is a very beautiful and it's good for health.

Little Nandi

H. Queensbury

It was a beautiful Saturday morning, the sun was out and little Nandi had just finished eating her breakfast. Mommy!! Mommy!! yelled little Nandi. Nandi was small in size, that's why her mom called "Little Nandi" Nandi had a pretty smile, dark brown hair and beautiful round eyes. Nandi enjoyed playing outside with her best friend Shanice, who lived next door. Only on this day Shanice was being picked up to spend an entire weekend with her Aunt Helen. Little Nandi and Shanice hugged and said goodbye. Shanice said Goodbye Nandi I'll see you on Monday. Nandi and Shanice waved at each other until the car was way down the road.

Little Nandi was sad, who's going to play with me. Little Nandi, walked to the backyard, she laid on the green grass. Nandi's mom came into the backyard, she could tell that Little Nandi was sad. Her mommy said Look Little Nandi, there are four rabbits playing in the flower bed, that Nandi and her mother had planted. Nandi screamed, Mommy they are

so cute!! She walked over and Guess What, they began to hop towards her. When Nandi reached out towards them they began to hop the other direction. Nandi's mother said "let's sit down and be very quiet, Look Nandi the rabbits are coming towards us." Nandi spoke very quietly to her mother, "Mommy look at the color's, two are brown and white and two are black and white. Look how cute their noses are they look so soft. Nandi's mother could see that big smile on Nandi's face. It turned out to be a great day for Little Nandi.

Discussion Questions

1. What is Nandi's best friend's name?
2. Why was Nandi so sad?
3. What was playing in the flower bed?
4. How many were there?
5. What color were they?

Meaning of Life

Kevan Santiago

I was talking to a friend of mine and he said what is the mean of life. I was looking like what do you mean. Until I had to pray and ask God what was he talking about. It's more like what is the meaning of your life. The meaning of life is being able to guide our fellow friends out of a muddy life. Where some of us church folks have a habit of getting stuck and won't ask for help. Some of us have felt a shame. Some of us have so much pride until we don't know how to ask. I have had a muddy and mess up life. As I recall the old days where we as a whole would go and pick up our friends. No matter what it looks like. No matter how the day was looking ahead. We always had a good word to help each other out. I wonder what happened to life. I mean I ever happened to the ones that will help pick you up. The meaning of life is to help somebody else's. See I know it looks crazy. I know you are saying why would i help you. I don't know who you are. I came by to tell you I'm here to help push you. God sent me here to grab your hand. Will you grab my hand? Grabbing my hand is saying I'm here to help you. I'm here to pull you out of the mud. The meaning of life itself is

to be able to help somebody else. If I can't help you I'm wasting my time trying to pretend I can do it and I know I can't. Now is the time to grab somebodies hand. I just mess up because nobody has time to grab my hand nobody has to time to tell me about life. Nobody has time to tell me about God and how he can lead me out of the mud. I don't know about you but I need somebody to grab my hand. It doesn't matter if your hands are cold I still want to grab it. Will you tell me about life? And how to move like I need to move. Having life is a great thing, because I can learn from the next person what I didn't know. We as a body of church folks are here to learn from God. The meaning of life is great to know because it is a tool of how to move like you need to move. How to learn what we need to learn. I don't know about you but I'm willing to learn. I'm reminded of a song that say I'm learning to lean on God. What is the meaning of life? The meaning of life is not hanging on the street corners trying to hang out. But to hang in. I wonder what will happen if they had a program about life and how to live. I bet every bar or club will be close. I bet people will drop their guns and raise their hands and say yes to God and turn from there evil ways. What a time that will be. Every church will be fun. What a time that will be. It will be an amazing time. I can't Waite to go. The meaning of life is to be able to live a great life. I bet every jail will be dry out. I speak it in the air. God is about move. The meaning of life is when we will all come together and have a great time. I can't Waite to be able to walk around with a smile on my face even though I'm not feeling good. The meaning of life is not to reflect on my past but to learn about my future. God said don't let your past dictate your future. The meaning of life is even though I'm in the storm and the rain I'm still going to make it. The meaning of life is not to stand in the middle of the road looking like you have time. And you know you don't. What is the meaning of your life? The meaning of my life is to lean on God. To be able to live like I need to live. Life itself is a great way to live. It is always wise to listen to the older people. See God will send somebody your way. To keep you on the right track. What is the meaning of life

Poetry – Honorable Mentions

Can You See Me????

Derra Bennett

Can you see my beauty starts underneath my smooth skin,
through my dark brown eyes, on the inner side of my lips, in between my back
my heart beats a pretty rhythm that sparks my soul.
Can you see the same beat shoots to
My feet that powers my every step, “The Goddess you never met. “
Can you see my fingertips as they leave a print of gold on your mind, body, and soul,
A face that will ignite the sun, with a smile that could never turn cold.
Can you see skin as light as a honeycomb hanging from a tree,
hair dark as a desert night. A spirit of joyful and humble being.
Can you see I’m painting a picture of pure art. Most will only see outside me,
Yet I still dig deep in to my personality to reveal the unapologetic question
CAN YOU SEE ME????

De-Stress
Hanif Dwyer

Our paths can be challenging
Littered with mounds of stress
Circumstances become overwhelming
Sometimes hard to express
It takes strength of spirit and all the faith you possess
To weather the storm and minimize the distress

Of trials and tribulations we get no recess
They can distort your outlook and yourself, you second guess
Every day brings new hope and a chance for success
Your fight might seem futile, be courageous, nevertheless

Be careful of the thoughts, that on your mind you impress
Lest in the doldrums of confusion, you'll surely digress
From the emotional baggage of life you must undress
Take time to relax and try to de-stress
Behind every dark cloud lies a hidden path to progress.

Fences
Hanif Dwyer

Fences here
Fences there
Fences everywhere
Should there really be fences anywhere?

Some are invisible
Some are insurmountable
Some upon ourselves we impose
While some, upon us are thrust

We are trained to think that fences deter and secure
Of that, I'm not really sure
....that they're for protection and fortification....

But
Are they protectors?
Or
Are they inhibitors?
We build and rely on fences to keep things out
But
Consequently, they lock things in, no doubt

Fences can be mental in nature
Fences can be physical with an array of features
They can provide a sense of order and normality
Or
A heightened feeling of insanity

Fences are RESTRICTIONS - They marginalize and limit
Fences are BARRIERS – They block and impede

For some,
Fences are an ARMAMENT – They guard and shield
For others,
They serve as a fortress, a garrison and a stronghold

Their styles, sizes, shapes and composition
Combine in various ways to create fascination or illusion

Fences in our lives are ever-present
They become more oppressive based on the social group you represent
Their posts of exclusion are deep-rooted
Their effects resonate through generations, undiluted

*If I Should Have a Son (Inspired by Sarah Kay)***Agapito Garcia**

If I should have a son I will warn him of men who insist on what a man is
I will assure him that even I have no good answer to what being a good man consists of
But I won't tell him some overly insecure ideal of how to be a man or to even to be a man
Instead I will only guide him to whatever he is happiest being
The earth will rotate thousands of times and the sun will rise and fall while events in his life
transpire

Within these cosmic certainties he will experience the uncertainty that is reality
It will feel as if the world is spinning out of his control
I will be there to assure him the world is definitely spinning but
It has nothing to do with the pretty girl a few desks over

If he is a chip off the old block he will think women are carved straight from marble
Every curve etched into her by a divine sculptor with not a detail left unscrutinized
She is far from your Galatea
Her symmetry is no more centered than yours
Let Shakespeare impart to you the truth that her cheeks compare poorly to the rose
Her perfume at times will be more pleasant than her breath and disposition
But my son, her beauty lies in her humanity
Her imperfections and idiosyncrasies are yours to adore
But only if you present yourself genuinely
No need for tall tales of drunken escapades or flexing muscles she wasn't even paying
attention to
I promise if she is going to make you happy you'll cross her mind from time to time

Now I won't tell you the worst thing she could say is no.
It's "we can still be friends"
Which to be perfectly fair is always said with the best of intentions
And yet it always feels like you are only worth so much

But that is the biggest mistake you could ever make
You will be worth all the money I could ever muster
All the jewels in the crust of the earth
And every last breath and bone in my body
Know that there will be people who will make you feel as if you are but a chunk of slate in a sea of
glistening diamonds
But those who you will keep around will be able to see the core of quartz you hide
Our human masquerade is akin to peacocks
Touting bejeweled images of ourselves like vibrant plumage
Keep your feet firmly planted on the ground and your head toward the sky little one
For the pressure of the world will be enough to break you
And one day, when you're strong enough, you'll be able to piece yourself together again

Words of Note

Agapito Garcia

Love and hate
Two four letter single syllable words with opposite meanings
Depending on who you ask and your preference in outlook
Each word can have different potency and effects
Some will say love conquers all
Others will say the world is filled with hate
Whichever you subscribe to depends on a word I find far more valuable

Perspective

To go beyond your usual patterns of thinking and conversation
The exploration of all possibilities and opinions outside of your community
As a concept perspective scares people
That delicate bubble people exist in allows them to peacefully float in blissful ignorance
To pop that bubble is to expose yourself to the world around you

And the world around you seems to literally be going insane
So that sphere of triviality is one created out of the most powerful word I know

Fear

The mind's response to being overwhelmed with unassuredness
The lasso that corrals the wild nature of human curiosity
If you're afraid of something it is likely you will not challenge it
Or ask for improvement
Stagnancy and complacency are what makes fear so powerful
If you stop moving and become content with the status quo it destroys fear's only enemy

Hope

What has landed men on the moon and overthrown tyrants
It is the very glue to the fabric called humanity
All these words are simply symbols we've all agreed have meaning
They paint our thoughts on the canvas of reality rather beautifully
But they can also erase it entirely
Choose your hieroglyphics very carefully
For centuries, even millennia from now
Second graders will marvel at them
And wonder innocently
What was it like to live in our time

A Daughter's Perspective

C.A.S.

A father teaches his daughter how to be loved correctly by a man.

To be respected not just said to be protected and loved unconditionally by a man. Instead I was rejected, my life affected by a man. I was neglected, misdirected, and probably wouldn't understand how you could look in a mirror and call yourself a man. I know it may seem as though I'm living in the past, but all the times I reached out to you it seemed to never last. I

was always jealous of the kids who grew up and had their dads because that was the love I dreamed of but never seemed to have.

You say you love me, but I wonder what it would feel like if you hated me because you don't even know me, and you're the one who created me. I know now that I'm older and stronger from the pain, but how could I not wonder whose blood is running through my vein. Not knowing what to say to you if we would see each other again. It's a vicious cycle and sadly it's going to repeat over and over again. Well I grew up, which means I'm grown now. Just my brighter side got a little darker because I want a daughter of my own now.

I feel as though I was set up for failure to be another baby dad's living disgrace. Those who feel they know me think I'm just another welfare case. Just another number in the system, a fatherless face. All because I searched for love in the wrong place, but can you blame me??? Can you judge me for not knowing where to look? Because I can't find it in the streets, and I sure can't read it in a book. This is my problem, and it's about time I addressed it because to me you still don't realize even after the 5 children my mom blessed you with.

I tried to let it go, but I can't help but to express it. It's a hard pill to swallow, but it's about time that you digest it. You were supposed to set a standard on how I should have been treated, but you left me as nothing. I felt like I was cheated. My mother's mistakes were continually repeated. I just want you to know how much the decision you chose to make in life affected me. Sometimes I wish my mom would have aborted me. Just wish you were there protecting me.

I look just like you but there's much more to me. Growing up without my real father was the furthest thing from easy, believing that when you got out of prison that you would actually come see me. You must have forgotten that you were a dad, you know the other half to complete me, but you had other important things to worry about because you missed my life completely. Being in the streets was something I was getting used to. Completely shut out any guy I was introduced to. From a girl I became a woman with game. I don't think you

could ever understand the struggles I eventually overcame. I started realizing why my mom never spoke about your name. Sadly because she knew I would only feel the same.

I've been starving, I've been broke, and I've been heartbroken and homeless. I guess you see now why I'm kind of numbed and emotionless, but this is my life so I try making the best of it. I guess everyone you lose isn't really a loss, but every girl needs her father, well at least that's what I thought. I'm one of many girls that grew up with daddy issues. I don't even know who you are but self-consciously I miss you. Question? Would you be happy if I ended up with a guy like you? Or if your sons grew up to completely dislike you?

Your absence speaks volumes and says so much about you, but your kids are going to be somebody with or without you. I mean how could you care about some kids that you don't even know? Because a true father is supposed to be a personal hero. I guess you'll never know when a boy first made me cry or as I went to school to wave me goodbye or when I rode my first bike or when I was learning how to drive or learning the things I need in order to survive.

My brothers were sad, but the worst was on Christmas because I was putting your name on the top of my wish list. You should have been there to tell me I'm beautiful and perfect, but obviously your daughters weren't worth it. You can't get the moments back when I was an innocent child, you can't ride me on your shoulders or even walk me down the aisle. You can't make up for lost time so all the wishing is useless. Don't you think your kids are tired of hearing the same old excuses? It seems like everything else comes first and your kids just come last. I guess that's what happens when you write checks you can't cash.

I didn't do this to try and make you feel bad, just trying to make you realize that you're somebody's dad. I can no longer pretend that I remain unaffected. You made some mistakes that remain uncorrected. This may come out totally unexpected, but you need to see things from your daughter's perspective.

P.S. My life couldn't be any better. Well, at least that's what I thought. I found a wonderful man that loves me unconditionally. He showed me the true definition of a real man.

Just remember that I'm going to always love you.

In My Father's Eyes

Damian Wilson

That's where I want to be
In my walking and talking to people
In my Father's eyes
When I am learning to read or write
In my Father's eyes
When I am loving and caring for children
In my Father's eyes
Where do I want to be?
The best place that I can be
In my Father's eyes

My Love

Damian Wilson

My love is so high it can touch the sky.
My love is so deep it can touch the ocean bed.
My love is so wide it circles the world three times.
My love is so shiny it twinkles in the night.
My love is for you and me to share all the time.

The Island
Damian Wilson

I like to take a walk
on the beach with
the sand between my toes

while the waves go
back and forth

and the sun beams
down on me

with the beautiful flowers
all around

and smells of delicious foods
fill the air

And as the evening sun
sets on the ocean
a cool breeze passes over

What Do I Want to Be?

Damian Wilson

Maybe I'll be a peach or an orange.
But do I want to be round?
Or maybe I'll be long,
Maybe I'll be a banana or a cucumber.

Maybe I can be me
Where I can run and jump,
Playing with my friends.
I think I like being me.

NJALL Adult Learner Writing Contest Previous Winners

2015

Memoir

<u>Winner</u>	Meekko Jones	<i>Upon Reflection</i>
<u>Second Place</u>	Vjollca Rexhapi	<i>My Story: Dedicated to My Dad</i>
<u>Third Place</u>	Pharah Charlestin	<i>As I Lay Me Down to Sleep</i>

Poetry

<u>Co-Winner</u>	Ronald Fils-Aime	<i>Before 1804</i>
<u>Co-Winner</u>	Matthew Lowsky	<i>Divine Beauty</i>
<u>Third Place</u>	Luz Atehortua	<i>Quest</i>

Non-Fiction

<u>Winner</u>	Lara Pointner	<i>The Irony of "Social" Media and "One World"</i>
<u>Second Place</u>	Jazmin Benavides	<i>Someplace Else I Long To Be</i>
<u>Third Place</u>	Adriana Toledo	<i>Immigration: A Current Political Issue</i>

Fiction

<u>Winner</u>	Dianne George	<i>An Empty Home</i>
<u>Second Place</u>	Nevonne Tyndall	<i>Touched By An Angel</i>
<u>Third Place</u>	Mirly Paul	<i>Monologue With Two</i>

2016

Memoir

<u>Winner</u>	<i>Rising Above</i>	Barry Batts
<u>Second Place</u>	<i>A Day in the Life Of...</i>	Anonymous
<u>Third Place</u>	<i>Childhood Memories</i>	Beralia Briceno

Poetry

<u>Winner</u>	<i>Goodbye Letter</i>	Alyssa Davis
<u>Second Place</u>	<i>A Christmas Letter</i>	Fernanda Contreras
<u>Third Place</u>	<i>Drifting Into Eternal Slumber</i>	George Aguero

Non-Fiction

<u>Winner</u>	<i>Too Much Stuff</i>	Christine Coffineau
<u>Second Place</u>	<i>I Believe in Sleep</i>	Chelsea Acquino
<u>Third Place</u>	<i>Untitled</i>	Charles Brown

Fiction

<u>Winner</u>	<i>Confused Young Man</i>	Clifford Henry
<u>Second Place</u>	<i>Untitled</i>	Charles Brown
<u>Third Place</u>	<i>Winter's Surprise</i>	Andre Allen

Photography

<u>Co-Winners</u>	Maricela Sandoval	Anzhela Lukianova
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Award Winners - Photography

First Place

The Turtle (Alicia Valeriano)



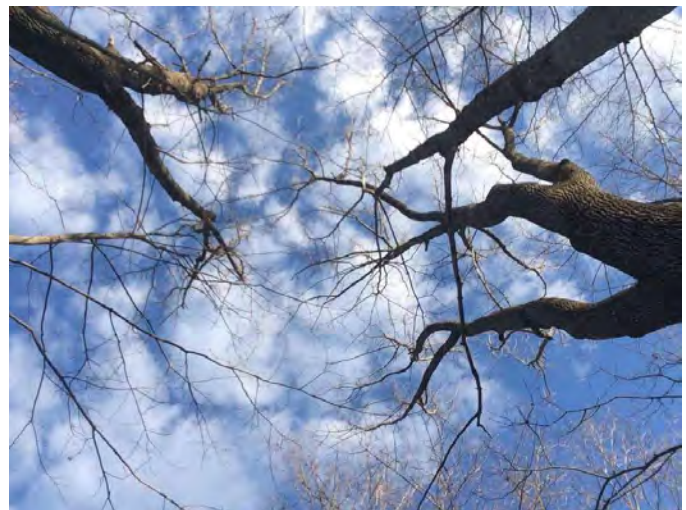
Second Place

Untitled (Maria Greco)



Third Place

Looking for Hope (Faten Atfa)



Photography – Honorable Mention



*In Conversation With
George Mason*
(Muhanad Almusali)

Eat More Fruit
(Derra Bennett)



Mystery Above Us
(Damian Wilson)

