



OUR STORIES, OUR VOICES:

**A COLLECTION OF WRITING
BY ADULT LITERACY LEARNERS**

TORONTO PUBLIC LIBRARY

ABOUT OUR STORIES, OUR VOICES

Literacy is a fundamental human right that is not available to everyone worldwide. Fifty-one years ago, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) officially declared September 8th to be International Literacy Day. On this day the international community celebrates and actively promotes literacy for all. *Our Stories, Our Voices* is published in celebration of International Literacy Day 2018.

Many hands went into creating this booklet. The written work of the learners in the program reflects their individual achievements. All submissions were printed with minimal edits and changes in order to preserve the authenticity of their voices.

Thank you to all of the dedicated learners in Toronto Public Library's Adult Literacy Program. May your efforts keep you achieving, growing and dreaming. Whether you are a newcomer, refugee, or have called Canada home all of your life, may your hard work, focus, and dedication carry you forward.

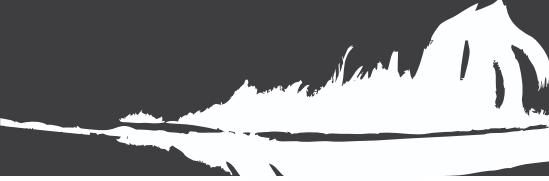
Thank you to all of our dedicated tutors and Adult Literacy Office Coordinators. Without your support, this program would not be possible. For more information about the Library's Adult Literacy Program, please visit our website, tpl.ca/adultliteracy.

Literacy empowers individuals, expands access, increases opportunity, improves the quality of life and builds connections. This book is dedicated to adult literacy learners everywhere who strive each day to grab hold of their right to read, learn and grow.

Adult Literacy Services

Toronto Public Library





DON'T MAKE FUN OF ME

BY J.P.

Teach me, I am ready to learn.

I am ready to learn for you and for me.

I have wisdom for life and you have wisdom for education and to share with each other education and wisdom.

When you make fun of me you are hurting me.

But you are telling me you love me.

But you treat me like this. That is not fair.

You don't love me like I do.

You didn't feel my pain. I am hurt and depressed as I can't communicate like you. Only way to communicate like you is to scream and cry but you don't see it.

You are telling me to stop screaming at you. Okay please stop telling me you love me.

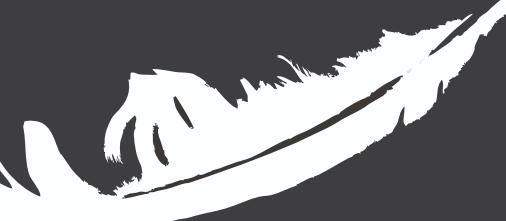
I expect you to come and give me a hug, say I am sorry but you didn't.

I thought you are smart but you are not.

That makes me stronger.

So I will let you go,

For me life goes on.



COMING TO CANADA

BY ANNA DRAKES

I was born in Italy. I have 2 brothers and 2 sisters. I am the baby in the family. We came to Canada by boat. I was 6 years old. It was cold. It was scary because I didn't know anyone. I was lonely. We went to school to speak English. I finished school when I was 20. Now I am married and I have friends. I go to work. I go to the library. Everything is good.

DEAR FRIENDS

BY N.F.

People always say there's someone out there for you, it's all about timing.

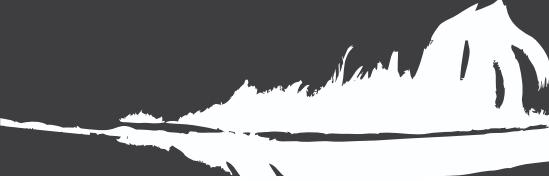
We all have someone close to our heart, many of us have lost the love of our life, we all deal with it in a different way.

Nowadays, people play with our emotions. And we lose ourselves when they do that to us.

We look to be loved from someone when it shouldn't be like that. We need to love our self first before anyone else can love us.

So the lost love of my life is me. I have learned a lot in this world and I never felt so good in putting myself first so much. Taking care of me first makes me feel so beautiful.

Don't get me wrong. It's nice to have that person to love you but loving yourself first is everything you feel and I will never want to lose myself again.



GOD IS LOVE TO YOU AND ME

BY M.A.

I always wanted to be a singer. Since I can't sing as a job, then I can sing for God, the Lord. I am a singer for God.

I had a dream I was singing for the Lord. Two weeks after, a lady at my church said she dreamt me on a big pulpit; gray pants and a white top with something over. I was singing for thousands of people. That's confirmation! It was like the dream I'd had. We had the same dream.

I always wanted to sing. Lots of people give me compliments on my answering machine after hearing my recording – even people I don't know! I know He'll send me places, different countries. I love the Lord and I still keep trusting that I'll do it. I still believe I can. I can sing. The whole family can sing. I've been doing it since I was a little girl.

Since I'm saved, I want to sing for God. I want to sing just my church songs. Sometimes, at home, I feel depressed. I got this tape, so I put it in and I know all the hymns. I sing them and I feel good. I feel joyful inside, like I'm travelling. Sometimes, I cry. It's just tears of joy.

I want to share a song I wrote:

In God's presence,

In God's presence,

there is peace.

In God's presence,

In God's presence,

I will linger.

I will sing.

In God's presence,

day by day,

until his likeness is received in me.

There is love,

there is wisdom,

knowledge, peace, understanding.

God be love unconditional,

unconditional.



A GATEWAY TO THE WORLD

BY CLIVE M.

Before I got my glasses, I would look at words and all the letters were blurry. Everything seemed jumbled and mixed up. It was as if I was looking at everything through a fog.

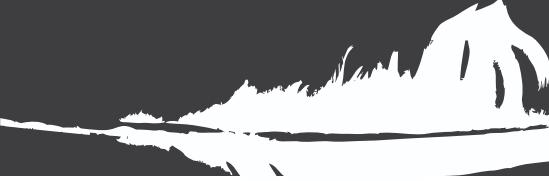
I tried some reading glasses that were in the literacy office and they helped for a while. Soon afterwards, I went to the eye doctor and got a prescription for reading glasses. I walked to the eyeglass store with my teacher and I chose a pair of cool frames. I wondered what it would be like when the glasses were ready because I had never worn prescription glasses before in my life.

When the glasses were ready and I tried them on, it was as if the world suddenly became clear. Now I use my glasses to read and sometimes I use them even at work. My glasses are a gateway to the world.

A LIFE OF PEACE

BY DELOVAN

I have lived in Canada since 1995. I moved here from Iraq. I have had a lot of good experiences here – experiences with work, peace and love. So many people from different countries, different religions and different races live in this country in peace. I wish that the other countries could have this kind of life and live in peace. A life without hurting each other for any reason.



DYSLEXIA

BY CHRISTOPHER WHITBECK

Dyslexia is a challenge to learn how to read in my own way and own speed. I've had this my whole life, and having to go from school to school, teacher to teacher, and they can't figure out what is wrong with me. Reading the T.V. headlines and information is difficult, because they change it fast. Researching on the internet is frustrating and confusing to me. Things that you want are hard to describe in your train of thought. I don't see it like everybody else sees it.

Being in this program, I have improved my reading and writing, and learned how to be more confident and presentable. Coming to class is also a challenge but fitting it into my everyday schedule has made me a better person. I am committed to reading more books to understand what I'm reading. I have 2 hours to learn how to read and write a little bit at a time to improve my self-confidence and literacy skills. Also, I put more effort into my personal hygiene to make myself more presentable when coming to class. I rarely use phrases like "can't", "won't", and "unable" as much as I used to in class. When I enter class, I am more positive now; even though dyslexia has kept me down most of my life I still keep pushing ahead.

When you have dyslexia you find out you have hidden talents that you were not aware of. My hidden talent is fixing things which makes me feel better about myself. Every day we face challenges but we should focus on our abilities to overcome those challenges.

EARL'S STORY

BY EARL

This is my Thursday morning routine. I wake up at 6am in the morning. I brush my teeth. I get ready for work. I eat my breakfast. I go to work. I work inside the warehouse moving toys, furniture, boxes and clothes. After work, I take the bus to the library. I attend a program to learn math, reading, writing and maps. I go home at 7:00pm. That is my Thursday.



A LITTLE BOY IN THE CARIBBEAN

BY VINCENT

When I was a little boy, I lived with my father's aunt. We lived in Evesham Village, Mesopotamia Valley, in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. In 1979, I was six years old. On the windward side of the island, I saw a bright light flashing on the mountain. It was La Soufrière volcano. NBC Radio 750 broadcast warnings.

Many people had to leave their homes. They sheltered in the schools and the churches. Electricity was out, water was out. I stayed home with my great grandmother. A lot of people stayed home. We lived about two hours away from the volcano. I could see the smoke and fire and hear the boom. The volcano erupted and ashes were falling down. The ash fell like snow falls in Canada. The whole island was covered in ash. The ash is like fertilizer. You can plant anything. We planted dasheen, banana, plantain, yam, sweet potato, cucumber, cabbage, lettuce, carrots, peppers, tomato and herbs. Some people had good crops of marijuana.

The volcano has not erupted since. About fifteen years ago, I went down on a rope to see inside. When I went down into the volcano, I saw water in front of the dome. There is a little hole in the rock with fire inside and water dripping from it. There is smoke coming out of the dome. It could erupt any moment.

You have to live your life every day, as if it was the last day. Be loving with everyone and with God.

(I John 2:17, Matthew 6: 19-21, Romans 13:11)



DON'T GIVE UP

BY N.

When I was seven years old, I left Somalia. My mother and I left in a small rubber boat with a lot of people. We were going to Yemen. Many people died because we were stuck for seven days in the water and there was no food and no water left. It was very scary! We were rescued by a big ship, but we had to swim to shore. My mother and I could not swim, but some guy helped us.

When we reached the shore, we walked for three days and then we came to Sana'a. My mother knew some people from my tribe and we stayed there for several years.

Yemen was hard. We used to clean people's houses. One day, at work, I fell down and broke my arm. The man who owned the house pushed me on the ground and tried to rape me; but, I screamed and screamed and people came. He ran away. I never went back. The country was so hot and the work was hard. When I was thirteen, my mother sent me to live with my aunt in Canada.

I have lived in Canada for the past twenty years. It wasn't always easy, but I have a good life now. I have two beautiful children and I am learning how to read and write because I want to help my kids when they go to school. I have a good life now because I didn't give up.



A PART OF MY LIFE

BY ROHAN G.

I have learned a lot from this literacy program. When I first started, I wasn't able to complete or to sign a form. Now I have acquired this skill. The literacy co-ordinator, Tina, has been helpful in other ways, as well. She has advised me and provided me with a job resume. I am so thankful for these lessons and for my tutor, Frances. These are my few words for now.

ADVENTURES IN TOW TRUCK DRIVING

BY K.M.

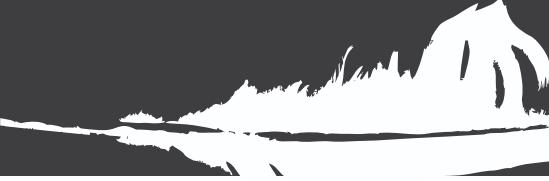
I became a tow truck driver four years ago to help people when they are stranded on the road. Sometimes, people try to get their vehicle towed without proper documents.

One day, I got a call to tow a car. The member did not have the car ownership papers. He only had a temporary licence plate on the car, which means the car was not fit to be driven. It had to be taken to a mechanic to be certified, so I did not tow it. He started to yell at me to tow it.

I called my dispatcher who told me just to drive away – so I did.

This was a scam. The guy was trying to use his membership to buy a used car and get it towed for free to the mechanic.

I was happy because I had just caught another guy trying to do a fast one.



EMRON'S STORY

BY B.W.

My son is 17 years old. He is a very tall 17-year-old – really tall. His name is Emron. From the moment he received his permanent residency, he was very happy. He heard that he was able to travel to Canada. He was very excited and he was ready to leave St. Vincent. When he arrived at the airport, he was very happy and everyone was saying, "Welcome to Canada!" He arrived here on January 18th and his birthday is on January 26th.

I was very excited because I had not seen him for seven years. His sister in St. Vincent was happy for him, but was sad at the same time. She and her other sister would be back home and he would be here.

On his birthday, Emron went in for a school assessment. He applied to the local high school and got into grade 11. It took a little time to fit in and now he is doing much better. He has friends from Grenada, St. Lucia, the Philippines and even St. Vincent. He is happy and he feels at home. He is preparing to go into grade 12.

So far, he is doing good. He loves Canada. He adapted very easily to the cold. He is excited about autumn because he has heard me talk about the trees and the red, brown and yellow leaves. Autumn is really nice.

He loves the mall very much. His favourite mall is Yorkdale. He also loves to go to Walmart to buy what he needs. Emron gets excited about eating pizza. He goes out a lot with his friends and he loves to ride his bike. He enjoys Canada as much as he can. He talks about his future and becoming an engineer. His big hope is to go to college to become an engineer.



BEATRICE'S STORY

BY BEATRICE F.

I came to Canada for a visit on October 8, 1986. I flew from Ghana through Amsterdam to Toronto by myself. Since it was my first time on a plane, I was so scared; but, I was excited, too. I was on an adventure.

After my arrival, I visited a few places. I went to Honest Ed's. I saw so many of my fellow country people in Toronto that I made up my mind to stay in Canada. I spoke a little English and wanted to go to school, but I could not. I knew that I had to work and save so that I could send my money back home to my mother.

While I was looking for a job and a place to stay, I met a woman named Comfort. She took me in and gave me a place to live. Comfort helped me any way that she could. She treated me like her own daughter.

I saw my future husband in 1989 at Honest Ed's. We had planned our wedding; but, then tragedy struck. There was a horrible explosion at his work and he was badly burned. The recovery process for this injury was hard and long. We finally got married in 1992. He passed away on a visit to Ghana in 2007.

Canada had become my home and I decided to stay here.

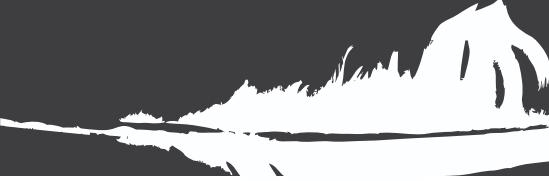
CARTER WALTON

BY E. BULLOCK

My grandson's name is Carter Walton. He is two years and three months old. He is a very handsome boy. He likes me to read to him. He likes to play with his toys. Sometimes, we go for a walk in the park. After breakfast in the morning, he likes to watch cartoons. His favourite cartoon channel is Treehouse.

Sometimes, his grandma sings to him. She also takes him on daily walks. Carter likes music and he likes to dance.

My grandson likes to eat macaroni pie, pepperoni pizza and yogurt. He also loves coconut water.



EDUCATION IS IMPORTANT

BY VAN H.

Back home, I didn't really pay attention at school a lot and I dropped out. Everyone in my family could read; but, I just got street knowledge and common sense. I thought that was enough. It was reading to me. I still respected the older people on the street because you never know when you may need help.

I ended up working with my family in the family business shop. I worked there for a while, not very long, building chairs and beds. Everyone asked me why I wasn't in school. I was being rude and said that I just dropped out. When people told me I couldn't read, I would just smile at them and not let them get my temper up. Working for my family, I saw my friends who could read and write. I thought I could do better with my life, so I prayed for the knowledge to read.

I realized I was the one holding me back. I should be picking up a book and teaching myself to learn how to read. When I fought with my sister, she would yell at me that I couldn't read, but I would just walk away. Although I couldn't read, I knew I had common sense. Back home, I was with my mom to help out in the shop. My brother was never home. My two sisters were in Canada already. My mom sent me to Canada. When I came to Canada, I knew having common sense wasn't all of it. You needed to know how to read. Even though I could catch the bus and train, I needed to learn how to read. Words would stick in my head and I would know things like my building number. I went to church and asked God to help. I went to the mirror and asked myself what I'm going to do. Be a coward or not? I said, "No, it takes a man to stand up for his own responsibilities – to be what he's going to be in life. I'm going to try my best to learn how to read."

Being able to read books would be fun and reading comic books or comics in the newspaper. They make people smile. They look like they're having fun. I'd like to do that and do my best. In the future, the most fun thing will be able to read to my kids. I will tell them how much fun reading will be for them and how it will help in their future. I will tell them how important reading is and common sense isn't all you need. It's like you're lost sometimes when you can't read. I feel like a nobody sometimes because I can't read; but, I'm learning right now, step-by-step. I will read a book to my daughters and be able to smile to them and the book will be funny and I will be happy that day.



EVELYN'S LOVE FOR HER SISTER

BY EVELYN

I have a sister who I love very much. She was two years and four months older than me. She was so loving and nice to me. In the year 2008, I had my first son. She was with me, praying for me throughout my delivery. After we got home, she stayed and helped take care of me and the baby. For one month, she never allowed me to do anything.

I was waiting for her to have a baby, so that I could help her in the same way she helped me. Unfortunately, in 2012, my sister died. It was and still is so painful for me. I miss her so much.

COMING TO CANADA

BY LUCKY

I came to Canada from Nigeria in March, 2015. I came here with my boss to meet someone in the field of solar energy. I wanted to improve my job skills and gain Canadian work experience. I was told about the opportunity here to learn to read and to write proper English because Nigeria only has pidgin English. I now take English as a Second Language classes and I also do one-on-one tutoring at the Toronto Public Library.



FRANCINE'S STORY

BY F. ZUFFEREY

When I reached back home in Haiti, it was sad to see that where we come from is so breakdown. My mother's house is down – finished. I sent money to fix the house and they do nothing. That makes me so sad and I cry.

I put my face together and stand up. I have to go do that job. I have to do it.

I see my son. He left Canada. He go over there. I have double sadness. I have to go to the Canadian Embassy. They don't want him to come back here. His card is finished, even though he lived in Canada for 23 years. Everything is finished. Canada Immigration have to call the Embassy to tell them it is okay. I am still waiting for that.

I lose so much weight, I don't know why. Sadness made me lose weight. God blessed me to come back to Canada to do my thing.

HOT MOVE

BY F.B.

I moved from Falseff Avenue to Wilson Avenue on Canada Day.

It was very hot!

I had lots of stuff to move.

I rented a van.

And my friends helped me.

To thank them, I ordered pizzas and cold pops.

We sat on the floor of my new place and we ate and talked.

We had fun!

I still need to finish unpacking.



GETTING MY LICENCE

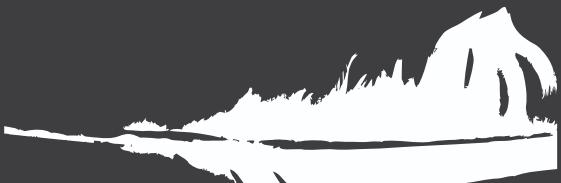
BY R.B.

I wanted my driver's licence, so that I could get my own car. When my wife is not around, I could go to work and to the store. I could reach home on time from work. When it's cold, it's very hard and painful for me to wait at the bus stop. My feet, my eyes, my ears get frozen. It's very annoying because it's cold and it takes a lot of my time to wait for the bus to get home.

I studied with my tutor for about eight months, so I could pass the G1 test. After the eight months, I felt confident that I could do a good job. I could pass it. It was my first time. I was anxious. So many people did not pass it the first time. The lady at the centre told me I had the whole day to do it. She wished me good luck.

When I go to do it, I passed the signs in the first set and I failed the written part in the second part by two questions. I knew I could do it; so, I went back in 15 minutes to do it again. In the second part, I made four mistakes out of the first eight questions. I remember what my tutor said to me. She said, "You are very smart. Don't panic if you get a couple wrong. Just relax and take a deep breath and calm down. Believe in yourself. Do it and you will be successful." I did the next 12 questions and did not get any wrong. I was so happy and delighted.

My tutor was fully confident in me. It was good to know that she had that energy for me. I decided to call my tutor and run a joke just to hear her reaction. I called her and told her that I never passed. She said, "Okay. You can do it next time." I smiled and told her I passed the second time. She said that I had scared her. I was really proud that I was successful in getting my G1 licence.



EXPERIENCING SNOW

BY B. POWELL

I came from Jamaica, a country that has never seen snow.

When I came to Canada and saw snow for the first time, it was so strange to see and know that it was something I would have to get accustomed to.

Looking at the snow from the inside is a beautiful sight. It is fun to see the children enjoy the snow, making snowmen, sliding down the slopes and having snowball fights.

I am always afraid of walking and driving when it is slippery.

I do not look forward to shoveling the snow but enjoy watching it done.

MY DREAM

BY C.A.

My name is C.

I was born in Ghana and I came to Canada in 1992. I followed my now ex-husband here. He came here long before me and he sponsored my immigration.

My family has scattered. I am a Canadian citizen. My sister, Lucy, went to the U.S. and now lives in New Jersey. My other sister, Mary, went to France and now lives in Paris. My mom and my remaining sisters, Vesta, Margaret and Ruth, stayed back in Ghana.

I am very proud of my son, Roni, and I adore my two granddaughters, Elsie and Love. They are the reason I am working so hard to learn to read and write English. I want to inspire them with the love of learning and I want to show them that you are never too old to learn. My goal is to read books to them.



GOD'S WISH

BY SAO

I came to Canada in August 2016. I came from Nigeria to visit my daughter and son. They were here for four years before I came. Their father was in Toronto and he brought them here to study. My daughter has graduated from the Community Justice Program at Humber College and is going on to university in London, Ontario. My son is in high school, going into Grade 12.

The government helped me a lot when I arrived as a refugee. They helped with paying my bills and buying food. I appreciate Canada very much. I have a three-month old baby boy who I have named Trudeau because of the help that I was given.

In 2017, I came to Tina. Before this, I could not even write my name. Tina told me that she would give me a tutor, Doreen, who would teach me to read and write. I am learning to do this and am so very happy.

HAJ

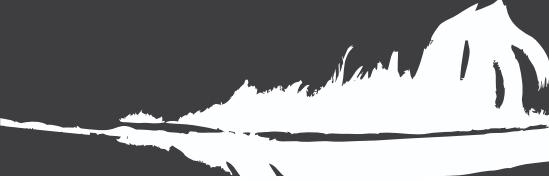
BY K.S.

I was praying at the mosque. Two ladies were talking. I said that I would like to go to Haj but I do not have enough money to go this year.

Another lady said we could ask at the office of the mosque for help to go to Haj this year. I said I could not go to the office today but next week I will go to the office to ask for help.

I am very happy that I might be able to go to Haj this year.

If I can't go to Haj this year, then I will try to get a job and go next year. Every night I think and dream about going to Haj.



LEAILAH'S DANCE CLASS

BY G. ASH

I woke up on Saturday morning and went in the kitchen to make myself breakfast. Then I had a shower and got ready to leave. I left home at 10 am to pick up Leailah for her class at noon. We got to the dance on time. Leailah started practicing before they went on stage. The concert had 20 different cultural dances. Children from the age of 5 to 18 performed very well. They put on a good show!

LEARNING IN CANADA

BY FATUMA S.

When I lived in Kenya, my parents didn't send me to school because I was a girl. I felt sad because my brothers got to go to school and I didn't. I am so happy to be in Canada now. I am going to school everyday to learn English. I am also coming to the library's Adult Literacy Program. Tina, the co-ordinator, matched me with a tutor named Teresa. She challenges and encourages me to study hard. I am improving every week.

I have even taken a CPR course and I'm now also doing a program to get a Home Daycare Certificate. I hope that I can soon volunteer at the daycare located in the middle school near my home. One day, I also hope to get a job working in a daycare.

I am proud of myself because now I can read and write and I can speak and understand English.



I AM CANADIAN

BY A.S.O.

Great things have happened to me since I first came to Canada, as a refugee. In 2017, I got my driver's licence. Also, in 2017, after two tries, I was so happy to get my Canadian citizenship. I am thankful for the programs I have attended. Now, I can read and write to some extent and I am still working hard to improve. I am thankful to be here. Today is voting day and I am going to vote!

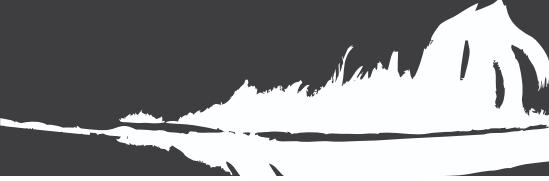
I LOVE GOING TO THE OPERA

BY ETA

About 20 years ago, I went to my first opera at the O'Keefe Centre in Toronto. The title was *The Merry Widow*. I have always loved musical theatre and so, when my friend invited me to go, I happily went along with her.

After this opera, I decided to try to see all of them. In addition to *The Merry Widow*, I have seen *Carmen*, *The Magic Flute*, *Anna Bolena*, *Aida*, *Norma* and *La Boheme*. My absolute favourite one is *The Phantom of the Opera*. I love all of the stories that are told, especially the love stories. Some of the endings are tragic; but, I still like to watch them. I also love the music. It calms me down.

I will keep going to the opera as much as I can. I'll even see the ones I've already seen because I enjoy them so much.



LOVE CONQUERS EVIL

BY L.F.

I am writing about love conquering evil. People all over the world face evil at some point in their lives. People say mean things and hurt others' feelings. They take away our happiness. They make it hard for us to cope. People lie and steal and are not honest. They sometimes kill others. Evil is not a good thing to experience; but, if you face it with enough love, you can overcome it. Love is the greatest thing. We can forgive evil-doers and show them compassion. Instead of hurting them by doing bad things back to them, we can tell them that we care about them. Love can help forgive a multitude of sins. We should treat each other the way we'd like to be treated.

If we put love in everything that we do, the world will be a better place! Amen.

MY GRANDSON'S FIRST OUTING

BY ROSETA

On a Saturday night, last October, my husband and I decided to take my two-year-old grandson, Atheneous, with us to the Caribbean Children's Foundation Fundraising Event. When we arrived at the Elite Banquet Hall, Atheneous was already in a playful mood. We sat at our table and ate a delicious buffet dinner. People sang songs and my grandson clapped when they finished singing.

Finally, the lights went out, the music started and the dance floor opened up. My husband, Atheneous and I went onto the dance floor and that is when my grandson ran into the crowd and disappeared. We looked inside and outside the hall. Security guards even helped us look for him. A few minutes later, we saw Atheneous on the stage, with a microphone in his hand, singing and dancing. He almost gave me and my husband a heart attack! We had to force him off the stage. Later, we took him home to sleep. It was both a fun and scary night for us. We all enjoyed ourselves and we will do it again next year.



I'M AN ARTIST

BY T.F.

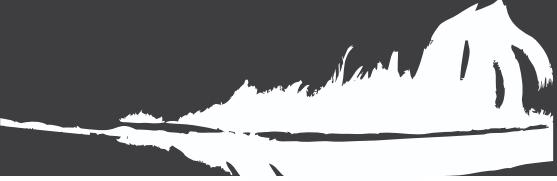
When I was about 12 years old, I started painting and drawing for my church. I entered a contest there. I didn't win; but, doing the art made me feel really good. It's my passion. It's all about emotions. I draw images that come from my life experiences. My art tells my story. Sometimes, I don't feel comfortable showing my art and sometimes I do. It depends on the person.

I've taken a couple of classes and I learned that there are a lot of rules to follow. My art is different, so the classes didn't really didn't teach me all that much. I did find a teacher who was very supportive of me and my style of art. She wants to teach me more about the subject of art. She even sold some of my drawings and paintings for me. I think that soon I will start to try new things with my art.

K'S LIFE STORY

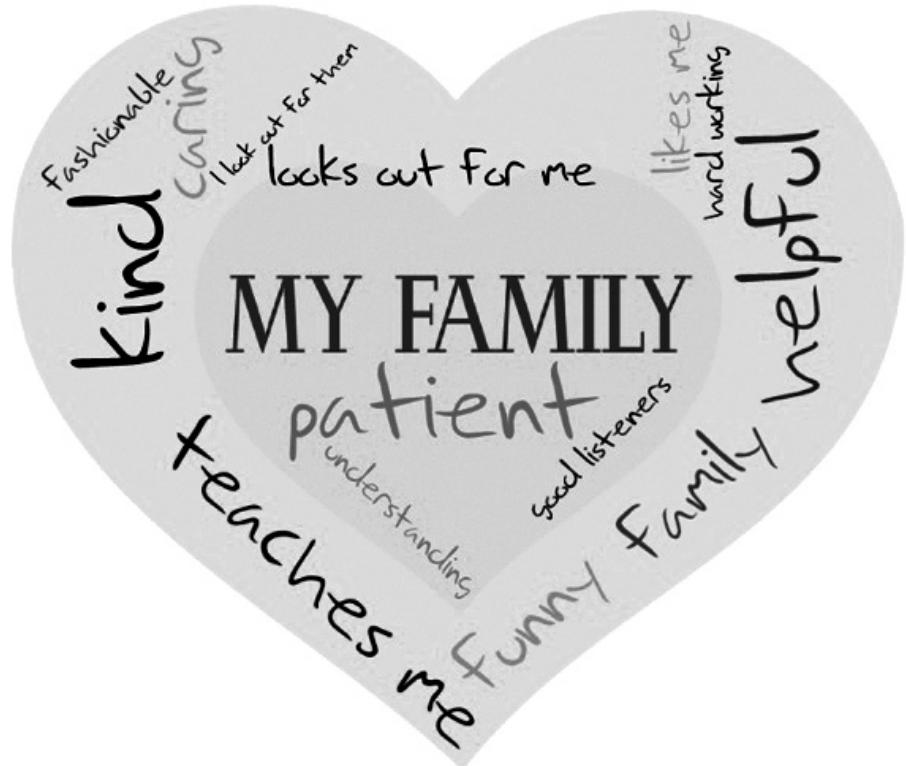
BY K.H.

I never had no mom and no dad. I grew up with my grandmother and my aunt. I never got enough schooling. I started work from age 11. My uncle used to beat me a lot. Growing up, it was hard to find a job that I needed because I never had education. So, I decided to learn a trade. I decided to do construction. Work was slow and it was hard to see my way out. I had a vision that I got a program ticket and in that vision I came to Canada to get married and to do construction work. My vision became a reality.



MY FAMILY

BY S.P.





MY BIGGEST DREAM

BY R.D.

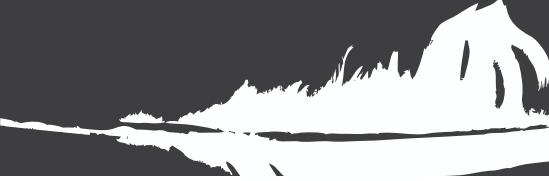
I want to read and write and get a better job so that I can be independent. My goal is to become a Personal Support Worker. I am interested in this work because I like to help people. It's very good to help change people's lives. This gives me satisfaction.

To know how to read and write is my biggest dream.

NEW FUTURE

BY R.O.

I emigrated from Jamaica in 2007 and started with the Toronto Public Library's Adult Literacy Program in 2008. An evening class instructor for the school board recommended the library program for me as a starting point for improving my literacy skills. Because of this program, I have successfully obtained my Canadian citizenship and my Ontario driver's licence. I really appreciate the literacy program and would strongly recommend it to others. It is never too late and it will give you new confidence. Thank you to Tina and to my tutors for their encouragement and their patience.



I AM A BLESSED MAN

BY W.W.

My first time in Canada was in 2011. It was a little hard in the first couple of months here because it was so cold. I had to wake up at 4:00 am to go to work in the snow. I had to walk far to catch the bus.

I used to unload food trucks. I never experienced hard work like that before. My body felt tired, cold and hurt. Sometimes, I did not work because there was no work for me and I had to go to an agency. Some days, I had to drive 12 hours to deliver food. It was hard to drive those trucks in the cold because it was slippery. We drove long hours and the pay was excellent. I sent my first pay to Jamaica to my mother to do work on my house. I also used to work for a demolition company in the night.

After two years, I found something I love to do. I started to cut hair in the barbershop. It was the best thing for me. I love my barbering because I love to be around people and to see a person look clean. I love it because I never feel tired. I am happy with what I do and always want to go to work. The clients laugh because me and my co-workers like to run a lot of jokes in the shop. We make up stories about each other, tease each other and laugh. We are like family.

It is never cold and snowing inside the barber shop. We work all day without worrying about the snow until I have to leave work.

I love my work because it is my passion! I am good at my job. I am always busy. Sometimes, you have a bad client and they try to spoil your day by changing the haircut halfway through it. They then try to blame you. I ignore this and be professional with them. At the end of the day, you don't allow them to spoil your day because they will leave soon anyway.

I love my kids. They always make me very happy. They mean everything to me. I love to spend time with them. My daughter makes me feel good. She is always hugging and kissing me. She is always waiting for me to get home. She cries when I leave to go out. I love my son and I like to be with him. I just bought a Superman bike for my son. He loves it. Me and my son read together, we play ball together, we talk, we laugh and he helps me to fix things in the house. My son is mama's boy and my daughter is daddy's girl.

I take my kids to school. I love to pick them up from school. We go the park and I love to spend time with them. They adore me.

I am a blessed man.



LEARNING TO READ AND WRITE

BY D. GITTENS

I just want to say how good the program is.

Since I joined the program I have learned a lot.

The teachers are very good and I have learned a lot.

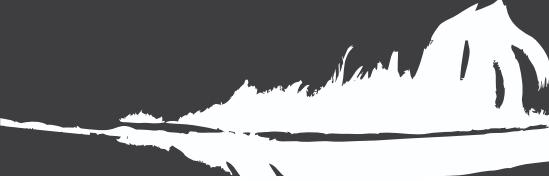
Thankful for the opportunity to learn how to read and write.

MY GARDEN

BY M.D.

I am a plant person. I love to plant. In the spring, I would plant just about anything. I plant a lot of vegetables and flowers. I nurture my garden because it is just like a part of me. My flower garden is where I spend most of my time when I'm not going to work. The best part of my garden is watching my flowers bloom and watching people admiring my flowers. Some people ask if they can take pictures, while some just walk up, pose, and take their photos.

I remember when two of my grandsons were going to kindergarten. Their first spring in school, each one of them brought home one bean stalk in a cup. One died and one I planted. Until this year, 2018, I am still planting from that one bean stalk. We also eat beans from that one stalk, sometimes once per year or twice. It all depends how much fruit-bearing we get. This year, the boys are 14 and 15 years old. I hope one of them will take an interest in planting when they're older.



I AM AFRAID TILL THIS DAY

BY ENORENSE

My family (mom, dad and sister) lived on a farm in Nigeria when my mom was pregnant with me.

My sister was four years old then. On the day of delivery, my dad took my mom to a mid-wife. My aunt was to come and care for my sister. My sister wanted to accompany my parents, but my parents had asked her to stay back and wait for my aunt. My parents didn't realize that she was following them on the walkway, between the fields.

My aunt didn't find my sister at home when she arrived and she went looking for her. She found her by the side of the fields, weeping in pain. "Ant bit me. Ant bit me," my sister complained to my aunt. When my aunt saw the place where my sister was bitten, she realized that it was not an ant bite, but a snake bite. She tied a piece cloth tight just above the snake bite, on the leg, and rushed her to my grandfather, who was an herbalist. He treated her with traditional herbs and medicines and asked them to leave eggs for the snake at the location, in the field.

He told them that it could be considered life threatening if my sister threw up that day. He invoked the spirits to request the snake to accept the offering of eggs and to withdraw the venom.

My sister didn't throw up. She gradually recovered from the effects of the venom.

A few days later, a snake was found dead, beaten, at the same spot, in the field. My grandfather wondered who could have done such a thing. He inquired within the family and found that none of us had anything to do with the snake's death. When he checked with the neighbors, one of them confessed that he had beaten the snake to death. In a coincidence, the man died within a few days.

We know that all snakes are not venomous. Even venomous snakes do not bite unless they feel threatened. Till this day, however, my sister and I are scared of snakes. My daughter knows this and she tries to pull my leg, leaving toy snakes on my bed, in our living room at our house in Toronto, Canada.



MEMORIES OF MY GRANDMOTHER

BY KEN TAHIR

One of my happiest and earliest memories is of my Grandmother. I called her Nanny. Her name was Ann Davidson. She came to Canada from Belfast, Ireland all by herself when she was a teenager. She married a man from China. I just know his last name which was Two. He had a Chinese restaurant in Oshawa but he was killed while driving his Harley Davidson motorcycle so I have no memory of him.

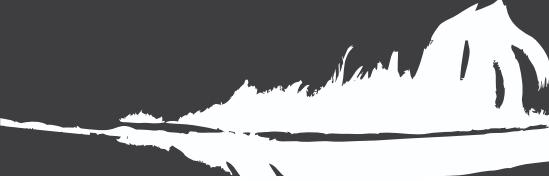
When I was very young, my mother would often send me to Nanny's house for the weekend. It was on Eastern Ave. at Trinity in Toronto. Then, when I was six or seven, I spent the whole summer there because my parents were having marriage problems.

Nanny grew her own vegetables and she taught me how to plant them. She cooked everything from scratch on a woodstove that was also used for heating the house. I remember that we would always have porridge for breakfast. Nanny also taught me how to make stews and omelettes and soups. Sometimes we would go to the St. Lawrence Market where they sold live chickens and pigs. She would buy a chicken and the butcher would kill and clean it for her.

Nanny had no T.V., just a radio that was about three or four feet tall and stood on the floor. We listened to radio plays and I also remember listening to Larry Solway. At night I would fill a bucket with coal and wood and put it next to the stove so Nanny could make a fire for the night. Then I would have a bath and she would tuck me into bed. Sometimes she would wake me up later to look out the window. She would say, "Hurry up and look in the garden – there's a Leprechaun stealing tomatoes!" But I was always too late to see him.

Sometimes we would go to a clothing factory on the corner of Parliament St. and Eastern Ave. where Nanny would get scraps of fabric to make quilts on her treadle sewing machine. I would thread the bobbin for her.

Nanny left me that sewing machine and I still have it along with a box of her letters. They are very precious to me because they bring back happy memories of a time when I felt comfortable and safe.



MY CHILDREN

BY A.S.

I have two handsome boys and a beautiful girl. For seven years, my family was not complete because my girl was not here with us. On February 13, 2018, my daughter finally united with us and this has made me very happy. I am expecting another child into my family soon. This brings even more joy into my heart because I have reached my goal of having four children.

I enjoy having fun with my family. My boys like soccer a lot. Most times, during the winter, when we cannot go outside to the park, we play soccer in the hallway.

For this summer, I have the usual activities planned. My girl is here now. We have to take her everywhere we have already been to before in order for her to enjoy the fun here in Canada – especially during the summer months. I remember how I used to send her pictures and videos of us having fun and she would always say how she could not wait to join us. She is longing for the swimming pool where she can swim with the boys. Now, summer is already pretty close and so we have been doing some shopping for new clothes to wear.

I am very happy and grateful that my family is complete now and I thank God for all of these blessings.



THE RIP - FICTION

BY JENNIFER PEREZ

One day Samantha and her little brother and sister went to the mall to buy their mom a new dress for her birthday.

When they got home, Jacob and the dog were playing with the dress when, all of a sudden, they heard a RIP! Susie came in and stared at Jacob. She told him it was going to be ok because she had a plan. She told Jacob to get the glue. Jacob and Susie put the ripped dress back together. Samantha came in to wrap the present not knowing it was ripped.

When the parents came back they took the kids out for dinner. When they came home the kids gave the present to mom. She was very happy with her new dress. Mom tried on the dress and Dad got the camera. She pulled on a loose thread and everything fell apart! "Click" went the camera!

MY HOLIDAY PLANS

BY LINDA A.

I would like to take my holidays in Europe because my brothers and sisters are there. I have not visited with them in a long time. I have siblings in England, Holland and Paris. They are all over Europe.

There is another place that I would like to visit. I also want to take my holidays in Egypt and in Israel because I want to know more about what the Bible is telling me. I have seen pictures of the pyramids. I think that it will be hot there, but I would still love to go there.

I hope that, one day, I will go to all of these places.



MY EXPERIENCE IN CANADA

BY I.K.

I have been in Canada for three years. I came from Nigeria as a refugee and I sought asylum in Canada.

Since I have been in Canada, I have learned and experienced a lot. First, my daughter was born in Toronto. Second, I learned how to use media. Third, I am learning to read and write. The fourth significant thing is that I got my driver's licence.

My daughter is everything to me because she is a blessing, is beautiful and makes me feel happy. Even though she cries for everything, I don't mind.

I have learned a great deal through the Internet, which I discovered in Canada. It has helped me to send messages, to find directions and information, to spell and to write a bit.

I attend literacy classes at Downsview Library and ESL at another school. Tina and Christine have helped me to read, spell and write. I have also found out about libraries. Erica, my ESL teacher has helped me to improve my English. I want to learn to read and write to be a better person and to get a good job.

I didn't believe that I could get a driver's licence. In March, 2018, I got it! I want to get a car to take my daughter to daycare and to be able to get to a job.

I live in the Jane and Finch area and it has been good for a newcomer like me because everything can be found nearby. My experiences in this country have been interesting and important to me.



MY GRANDCHILDREN AND THE ANIMALS

BY NICOLINA Z

My name is Nicolina. I have a son in Lethbridge, Alberta. His name is William and Jennifer is his wife. They have five children, named Idowny, Niko, Slon, Maddex and the baby Aleyna.

I am going to see them all this summer in Lethbridge. They are growing very quickly. Their ages are 11, 9, 7, 4 and the baby is 8 months. They have chickens, rabbits, ducks, two cats and two pigs. The animals live outside in the backyard and they have their own rooms. The children help take care of the animals. They collect eggs from the chickens and give food and water to all the animals.

ST. VINCENT

BY C.J.

St. Vincent, you are my homeland. I love you a million and I miss you.

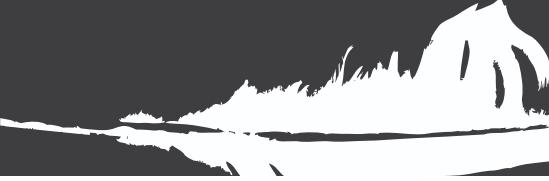
The water in St. Vincent is blue and the sand is white and black. There are a lot of coconuts, bananas, mangoes, bread-fruits and sugar apples.

There is also a volcano there called La Soufriere.

The people in St. Vincent are always welcoming, especially during Carnival time.

The summers are always hot and humid. We are a country of colours and a place where people want to visit for their holidays.

Most of my family is still there. My family is the most important thing in my life. I wish to go back to visit them some day.



MY LIFE

BY ALTHEA

My name is Althea. I came to Canada in 2006. I went back to school to get more education. I started off at a high school in 2007. I did one year at that school and then I found a job. I started to work in a factory. I worked there for over a year and then I stopped working. I stayed home with my children. I was married and had four kids. Now, I'm a single mother. My oldest daughter is in grade 11 in high school. My other three children are in elementary school. Now, I am in two programs in order to improve my English reading and writing and my math skills.

TO MY DAUGHTER

BY M.P.

Dear Orly,

I'm sorry you are not here in my life because I miss you very much. I want to tell you that I know you would be proud of me. I am now going to school once a week to learn to read and write. That makes me happy since you are not here to read and write for me, or to help with the cheques and the bills.

Especially when you don't know how to read, people can take advantage of you, put you down or think you are stupid or that you don't understand anything. When you can't read, you need to take hard jobs. You finished two years of university and always wanted me to study and to go back to school, but I had no time as I was working.

If I had learned to read and write years ago, I would have become a chef or a baker. But now that I can read and write, I can cook and bake.

You must be happy watching me learn. I will always love you.

Your mother,

Mary



MY FAVOURITE SPORT

BY E.C.

Right now, my favourite sport is basketball. I've been watching it since 2004. My favourite team is the Golden State Warriors. They are a quiet team. They are not loud or aggressive; but, they win a lot of games. They are the most dominating team. They are heading to the championship games against the Cleveland Cavaliers. I hope that the Golden State Warriors win. They deserve it!

SPRING

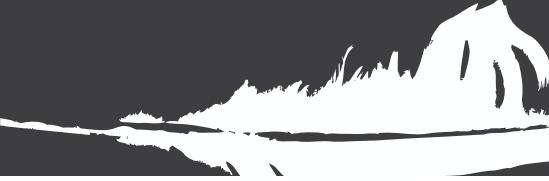
BY D.T.

Spring is one of my favourite seasons. There are lots of good things that come with it. For one thing, the weather is perfect – not too hot and not too cold. I like to see how the trees bloom with new leaves and the flowers blossom. They are so colourful.

I love to plant. This year, I planted my flower garden with lavender, pink and white Impatiens. I also planted tomatoes, zucchini, okra, hot peppers and herbs in my vegetable garden. I can't wait to pick my organic vegetables this summer.

Spring also brings a lot of birds to our yard and I listen to when they are whistling to each other. It is amazing to watch the insects and bugs trying to build houses and nests.

Spring is my favourite season because it brings new life all around us after the long winter.



MY DAD

BY L.G.

In March 2010, I lost my father who lived in Jamaica. He had a heart attack and died suddenly. He was 78 years old. That Sunday night, my sister called and told me to give the phone to my husband. I told her that anything she had to say to him she could tell me. "OK", she said, "Your father is gone". I threw away the phone and I screamed. At that moment, my life changed.

My father was a man of principles. He was the first of ten children. He always told me his life story. He wanted to be an engineer but he never reached his goal. He was an excellent builder and he could read blueprints. He mastered his job. He built Montego Bay Airport, St. Andrew's High School for Girls, and the East Wing of the University Hospital in Kingston.

My father was a man with values. He was the proud father of 7 girls. He loved his girls and he always told us to have a mind of our own. My father was a Church-going man. He loved his Church and he sang at funerals.

When I go to Jamaica to visit, I miss my father. He always gave me sugarcane, mangoes, yams, and breadfruit to take back to Canada.

I am very proud of my father. Dad, I will see you at the Pearly Gates.



MY STORY

BY J.Y.

When I arrived in Canada, it was cold. I found it difficult to stay outside. I was living in the basement of a house in Mississauga. For about six months, I was working in the basement, braiding hair for people. The lady who brought me to Canada said that she was going to open a salon in her basement and that I could manage it for her. When I went there, there was nothing like a salon in the basement; but, she called people to tell them that she had someone who could do their hair. She collected the money that I earned, but she never paid me.

That was my first experience in Canada.

WORRY LESS

BY T.A.

Evan, my son who is autistic, keeps amazing me each and every day. Sometimes, he's moving faster than I actually notice, and that worries me a little – only because I feel like I'm holding him back and not letting him reach his full potential.

His school started to toilet train him and in the first week, Evan would have six accidents a day; then the second week, he would have three. By the third week, he finally started to have none, and I was so proud of him!

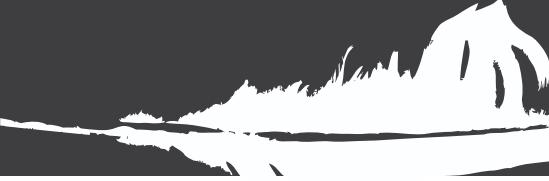
I've been noticing whenever I set small goals for my son to accomplish, it might take a bit more time, but he reaches every single one. Sometimes, I'm scared to tell people about Evan's achievements, because their neurotypical children already went through that stage, and they're not used to children completing those goals at his age.

As I get older, I'm starting to realize that I can't worry about what people think anymore. I can only focus on the new skills I can acquire to better help Evan every day.

THIS IS ABOUT ME

BY LAMBERT

Since I have been coming to this program, I learned a lot. Now, when I go places, I can read basic words. Learning to read makes my life much easier. I would like to thank my teachers for all their support. Five years ago, I met someone and went to his office and we talked for a while. I told him that I couldn't read and write. He told me about the library and took me there. I am so glad he took me here.



NEVER GIVE UP

BY AMR

My name is Amr. I was born on October 15, 1976 in Alexandria, Egypt. At age eight I started boxing and at age ten I started Kung Fu. That was a new sport in my country. Now they call it Wushu Kung Fu and Sanshou.

My first competition was at age 14. I continued to compete in Sanshou around the world. Eventually I became a coach for the Canadian National team for Wushu in the 2008 Beijing Olympics. I am proud of that.

At that time, I worked hard to lead the Wushu team to be successful. Then I figured out I could have my own school for Wushu. But it is not that easy to build a school in Canada. You need a lot of money to do that.

So I started taking steps to make enough money to build the school. I decided to become a truck driver because truck drivers make good money. In 2010, I started to learn about the requirements for truck drivers. I learned that I would have to have level 5-6 reading and writing, so I went back to school to learn English and reach level 5-6. I worked very, very hard to reach that.

In 2013 I felt ready to attend school for learning to drive trucks. I passed the test for signs, rules, and airbrakes for the AZ 18-wheel truck license. Then I continued to learn how to drive.

On August 3, 2015 my life changed forever.



MY STORY

BY O.G.

Now, I am a PSW and I have been a nanny for others. This is my real dream.

A long time ago, when I was growing up in Nigeria, I wanted to become a teacher because I love teaching kids.

The reason is that my mom worked as a cleaner in a hospital and it was a shift job. When my mom was going to work at night, I cried because I was going to miss her. I knew that she would make our favourite meal when she came back. I love the morning shift because she made a really good breakfast for my brothers and sisters and then we all left home together. She went to work and we went to school.

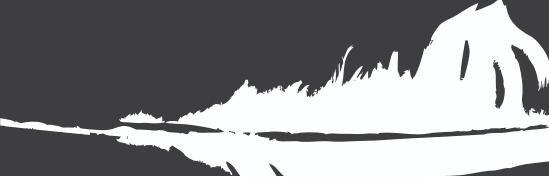
I have children now – two wonderful little boys and a gorgeous baby daughter. As they grow up, I want to see them go to school. It is very important for me to help kids learn in the morning and be home later in the day for my family.

That is one of my reasons to want to become a teacher in Canada.

WHAT I'VE DONE THAT I NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD DO

BY BIMLA SINGH

What this program has done for me, it gave me a lot of confidence and no fears with my colleagues. The things I couldn't do before, now I just do it either I'm wrong or not. This program and Susan taught me so well and beyond I have learned from anyone else. Her teaching is so well taught even stupid can learn from that. This knowledge that I'm gaining is remarkable. I'm no longer in fear about what will come in my life. I have prepared to face it without any fear. So this program not only has been educational, it also preventing me from calling Dr. Phil. That's the kind of strongest strength I have received, bravo and thank you to God for this program!! And Susan! And Deborah, too. This program also prepared you emotionally and psychologically.



WHEN I WAS A DJ

BY PEPSI

When I was a DJ, my friend and I used to play music in basement parties. We used to DJ together for one hour each. My friend's DJ name was "Black Rabbit" and mine was "Lover's Rock".

We used to play slow reggae that we call in Jamaica "Lover's Rock" but we also played other types of music like calypso, R&B, and sometimes even some old time rock and roll.

The largest number we ever played for was over one hundred and the least was about 50 people.

The reason I stopped playing music was because of the shootings in some parties and some of the crowds.

I still have all of my equipment but I don't think I'll ever DJ again. I still love music, though. Music is my life!

MY LIFE STORY

BY A.A.

My name is Azeem and I came to Toronto 9 months ago. I have to say that I am very happy to join close family living here. I benefit from them a lot. Also I wanted to read simple words and to learn how to add numbers. So I enrolled in the library reading program and then worked hard to improve myself.

My life in Guyana was good because I worked with my father to make furniture and also learned how to build houses. He also taught me how to make nice things using wood and I enjoyed all these things with him.

In the future I want to continue working as a carpenter and to build a nice house. I plan to learn many things in this country so that my life in Toronto can be happy and fulfilling.

When I came here the first thing I got used to was wearing a coat. The food here is not as tasty as the food in my country. I find Toronto so big and don't want to imagine travelling in the buses and trains by myself. Another thing here is the children are so smart and I want to be able to live like them. Slowly by surely I will get where I want to be in life.



MY OWN STORY

BY ANNA LUONG

My name is Anna Luong. I was born in Ontario, Canada. My background is Cantonese. My parents were born in Saigon.

Fortunately, I am studying at the Adult Literacy Program at the Fairview Library. I enjoy going to this Literacy Program because my tutor Janet is a very nice lady. She taught me math, reading, how to tell time (analog clock) and homonyms.

I like Deborah because she found me this nice Literacy Program and she is a very nice lady.

Also I go to the Conversation Circle at the Don Mills Library on Thursday. I learn lots of new words and definitions. We make our own sentences. Then we complete Build-a-Words, word searches, and learn homonyms. Mary-Lou is a lovely teacher. I am happy to learn from her too.

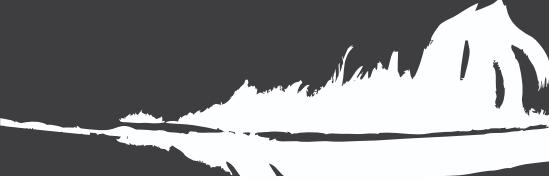
MY STORY OF CANADA

BY CECIL LAMBERT

I left my country where I was born and grew up and I immigrated to Canada. The plane landed in Toronto from Jamaica on February 14, 1993. I was nervous but I was also excited. I was glad to see my son and meet his wife.

The next morning, I woke up and I looked outside and saw snow for the first time. It looked pretty. Later I went out and it was COLD! I wished I had a warm coat. My friend who had been living here for five years picked me up and drove me around town. I saw tall buildings and no leaves on the trees.

In the Spring, it all changed. The trees blossomed and flowers grew. The air was warmer. I started to enjoy the city and the people. So now I was glad to be living in Canada. Before the next winter, I went and bought a WARM jacket!



RESOLVE TO SUCCEED

BY M.G.

While growing up in Africa, like many other people around at the time, I did not have the opportunity to go to school. This did not appear to be a problem. Life was normal as I grew up into the woman that I am. I had kids, educated them in schools and we lived like any other family would. We played together, told stories from time to time, had dinner in evenings like every other family. I, for one, had almost nothing to do with reading and writing, as I had not been exposed to the necessity and benefits of literacy.

When I just came to Canada, of course, I still could not read, neither could I write. Life here is totally different from my home country. From the beginning, I noticed that there was something that was wrong, though I could not lay hands on it. Whenever I came across a poster or direction in writing, it meant almost nothing to me. I passed through without even a second look. Life became very difficult. Every job I applied to needed a resume. Although my children could assist me in writing my resume, I still needed to know how to read and write by myself. I needed to sign my name in any form given to me either by the government or at work. I noticed that it is very important to be literate.

In order to resolve this issue, I was advised to attend the Toronto Public Library and enroll in its Adult Literacy Program. The co-ordinator, Miss Tina, is a very nice person. She spoke to me in a very polite manner and encouraged me very much. So, too, were the teachers she assigned to me. First, it was Mr. Mike. His guidance was my foundation in the literacy program. He advised me to concentrate on the spelling of words as I study. The next teacher was different. Her name was Ms. K. She was a very serious teacher who always ensured that my homework was completed. I would run into trouble with her whenever I neglected my homework. This has helped me so much that I have progressed in my learning. Now, I can read my Bible. I can fill out my name, address and other important information whenever there is need. I identify basic things in writing at the doctor's office or the hospital or wherever I am called upon to work.



MY KIDS

BY J.U.

My name is J. I have four kids. Their names are Seth, Merit, Ann and Helen. Their ages range from 4 years old to 15 years old. They are all doing well in school. Seth likes to watch TV and to play video games. Merit enjoys her role as a big sister and likes to read stories to the youngest child. Ann is my oldest child. She is mature and responsible. The youngest child is Helen and she loves to dance and likes to have stories read to her.

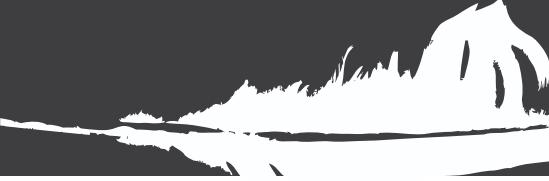
I am proud of all of my children and I love them very much!

THE ROAD TO TRUCK DRIVING

BY N.B.

Choosing a career in truck driving started with a dream. I want to learn more about Canada. I can do this while driving a truck and I will also be making a better living while exploring Canada. I have heard so much about this country that I live in. I am curious to see all of the places that I have heard about, like Nova Scotia, Alberta and P.E.I. I also want to learn about the different highways and the different people that live in other provinces.

I also like the idea of being alone while working. There will be no stress that comes from working with others. No-one will be watching me. I will be working independently.



THE GOLDEN OAK AWARDS

BY BRETT BALABAN

Every year, we do the Golden Oak Awards. They start with lots of books and they narrow down to eight books. Then the books go to all libraries in Canada. Learners try to read as many Golden Oak nominees as they can or want to. Then the learners will vote for their favourite book to win. The book that gets the most votes will win the Awards.

I look forward to reading the Golden Oak books. I ask in October because that's when the books come out. I start reading the books. I read about four to five books each year. Some books are sad, and others are happy. Some were true stories, and others were fiction. I enjoy reading the books but I like some books better than others.

At the Learners Conferences each year, eight learners introduce either authors or read about the books. For about three different years, I was a presenter which I enjoyed a lot. I am a backup presenter if they need me. For one year I was a Master of Ceremonies. It was great. They announce the winner, and they present the awards. It is a plaque. Then we take pictures with the authors and the presenters. It is a fun gathering, and you should check it out.



THE SURPRISE WEDDING

BY P.O.

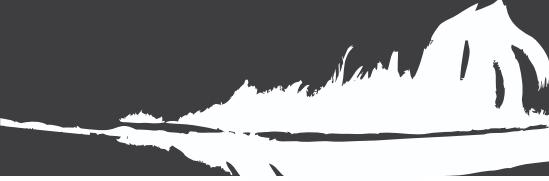
In 2010, I came to Canada from Nigeria. In the eight years since I've been here, I married a good man. He is also from Nigeria. We met at my church. We have three children – two girls and one boy. Since I came to Canada, my life has been good. I have a good job as a nurse.

In December, 2017, my family and I travelled back home to Nigeria. This was the first time that my children met my family. Everybody was so happy!

One day, my husband said that we should travel to a nearby city. On our way there, my mother called and said, "Come back here now!" We turned the car around and went back. When we got out of the car, all of my family and friends yelled, "Surprise!" Everything had been set up for a traditional African wedding for me.

I changed into some beautiful wedding clothes and a beaded headdress. These items had been waiting for me in the house. I looked like a queen!

After I changed my clothes, there was a celebration – a feast and a party! The party went on for two days. My children were so happy. During these two days, I wore three fabulous traditional outfits. Both families were filled with joy. Everyone had a wonderful time!



WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL

BY J.F.

My mother was only 15 years old when her mother died in childbirth. They lived in a big house with a lot of property around.

After the death of her mother, my mother's father sold the house and property and moved to Trinidad, leaving my mother and her three brothers with their grandparents.

When my mother was around 17 years old, I was born. She was still a young adult, unmarried. She did not know what to do, so she left home, leaving me, only 2 weeks old, with her grandparents.

My great-grandmother died when I was 4 years old and now my great-grandfather looked after me. He was everything to me.

During this time, I met a rich lady, Mrs. McClean, who walked past our house every day. She would talk to my grandpa and ask after me. She got to know me and became fond of me.

One day she heard me sing and liked my singing. From that day on, she would call me out every time she passed by the house. She would ask me to sing to her. The song was:

"I have no mother, no father, and no friend.

Mother in Heaven and I am down here.

Peace to this poor orphan child.

Look at my clothes that have never been clean.

Look at the hands that have never been washed.

Mother in Heaven and I am down here.

Peace to this orphan child."

Mrs. McClean would give me a penny every time I sang to her, sometimes 4 or 5 times a week.

This went on for a couple of years till my great-grandfather passed away and I then went to live with my great aunt.



RIDDLES FROM MY CHILDHOOD

BY B.S.

In my Jamaican childhood, my dad used to tell me riddles. When I was a little boy, I liked these riddles so much. They used to make me laugh.

Riddle me this,

Riddle me that,

Guess this riddle,

Or perhaps not?

1. What goes in the fridge hot and comes out hot?
2. What goes up and does not come down?
3. What is sweet water standing up?
4. What is rope around stand up?
5. What is room full, all full, can't get a spoonful?
6. What is hell on top and hell on the bottom and hallelujah in the middle?
- This is a new riddle for me.
7. What is the longest word in the dictionary?

I hope you laughed, too!

Answers:	4. Pumpkin	5. Smoke	1. Pepper	2. Age	6. Pudding (desert)	7. Smiles because there's a mile between each "s"	3. Sugar Cane!
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