

# Celebrating Our Journey

Addendum to **Volume 9**



# **Celebrating** Our Journey

## Addendum to **Volume 9**

A Collection of Life Stories  
written by Oklahoma Adult Learners

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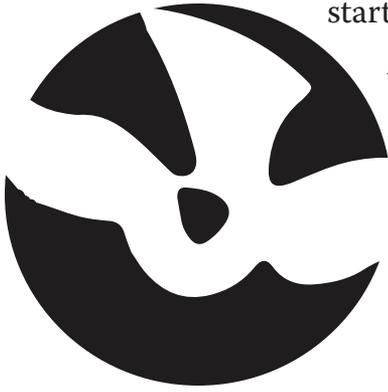
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# When Life Seems Hard

When life seems hard, sometimes we need to hear a story or anecdote to encourage us.

One day, a farmer's donkey fell down into a well and



started to cry for hours. The farmer

tried to get him out. Finally he

decided it was almost impos-

sible, since the animal was

old and the well was dry. So

the farmer began to shovel dirt

into the well. At first, the donkey

realized what was happening and cried horribly.

Then, surprisingly, he stopped crying. After a while

the farmer looked down the well and he was aston-

ished at what he saw. With every shovel of dirt that

hit his back, the donkey did something amazing. He

shook it off and began to take steps until he made

it out of the well.

In the first year of college in my home country, I felt a bit like the donkey trying to get out of the well.

The classes I was taking were so hard that I even thought about quitting college!

Some weeks later, we had mid-semester course exams. The courses were so hard to understand and remember, but I did my best.

After the exam period came the results. At the lecture hall, the professor stepped in, looking disappointed. He told us that most of us didn't pass. To be honest, I was a bit relieved, because after all I wouldn't be the only one.

Then the professor handed my test paper back to me. I was surprised! I had passed!

There are several morals to this story:

- never give up,

- what happens to you isn't nearly as important as how you react to it, and
  - don't compare yourself to others; just do what you have to do, and be the best that you can be!
- 

Soufiane Belmir  
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

## Chicken Soup

On my first visit to Stillwater, Oklahoma, I met a very nice young mother of two boys at a laundromat. I tried to talk to her about her baby boys being so cute. Despite her best attempts at Spanish, I was unable to communicate with her. Within a couple of months, we met again at the laundromat. By this time, I was able to ask the babies' names. She really tried to communicate with me, but at that time I had only been in the US for about two months.

Within a couple of days, we met again at the laundromat and she kept saying something about chicken

pox. I thought she was asking me to come over for chicken soup, since she gave me her phone number and address.

I discovered she was a neighbor so I decided to go visit for “chicken soup.” To her surprise, when I knocked at her door she kept saying “chicken pox” and all I could think of was “chicken soup.” I really thought her soup must be really good since she kept telling me about it. She was surprised to see me and she ran back to the boys’ room and brought out one of the boys and showed me his face.

When I realized he had chicken pox, I tried to tell her I already had it as a child and not to worry. To my surprise she brought out a Spanish-English dictionary, and after that we communicated with a dictionary.

And if you are wondering if I caught chicken pox, the answer is yes. The next day my face and back were covered with chicken pox. From that point on

we laughed about it and she actually visited me and brought me some chicken soup.

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Jinett Bennett  
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

## Hope: Never Let Me Go

My mother was on welfare, and although we didn't have everything, we always had momma. I lost my mother January 15, 2014, and I just knew my life was over. Somehow God gave me the will to live on.

These quotes don't even begin to summarize the tribulations that I had to endure in my lifespan. Living mostly on my own since the age of 12, I've seen the hardships of poverty, life as a drug dealer, and trouble with the law that led to a prison sentence. I've been abused as well as abused myself in so many ways, but the Lord never let me go. He strengthens me on a daily basis.

After my last return home from prison, I real-

ized that, in life, some people are blessed with second chances, and I was determined not to blow this chance. Right now I am at a point in my life where my education is so important. My mother and grandmother left school without a GED, but the cycle stops here.



Since attending Opportunities Industrialization Center, I have excelled academically as well as socially. I have successfully changed my life. I feel reborn. I've gone from not even caring about the next five minutes in front of me, to setting goals and making long term plans. I attribute a lot of this change to the OIC village. Mrs. Kelly and Ms. Victoria lead a loving, peaceful, and caring environment—ideal for learning. Mr. Tom and Mr. Chris have been great instructors, taking the time to work with me one on one to make sure

I understand. They do this for all the students and we never feel like just another face.

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Vernessa Carr

Opportunities Industrialization Center of Oklahoma County, OKC

## My Story

When my sister was 7 years old, she took me to school almost every day. She used to hit me because I was playing with a friend in the street. It took me 45 minutes to get to school because of this. I was never on time. I was too young and I wasn't thinking. I can remember saying to myself, "Oh my Goodness," because my mom was always telling me to take care of my sister, and she would get upset with me for playing instead of looking after my sister.

I was born in 1979. I started school in 1987 and finished my formal schooling in 1993 at the sixth grade. In 2002, I came to the USA from Guatemala and began my new life here with a friend who was

already living in Oklahoma City. Leaving my country was very hard for me. I missed my family, my friends—everything. Also, I couldn't even speak Spanish very well, since in my family, we spoke a local dialect known as Cakchikel. Learning English didn't seem very important to me at that time. My plan then was to stay in the USA for three years, and then return to my home in Guatemala.

Time passed quickly, however, and I began to realize that I really liked this country called America and wanted stay here. So English became a lot more important—and I needed to learn it well.

Although this is hard work, I am slowly progressing and learning a lot in my ESL class at Oklahoma City Community College. In fact, my English is getting better every day.

I thank God for my life, my family, OCCC, and my teachers. I have great hope for my future.

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Santos Chali  
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

## On the Way

My name is Chenliang. My wife, my daughter, and I moved to Norman, Oklahoma from China 11 months ago. Living in a foreign country is exciting, but many challenges were waiting for us; among these, English is the biggest.

Although I had learned English in high school and in college, it was still difficult for me to speak in English. After we settled down, I started to learn English in church. I only took a few classes in the summer break. Almost every day I learned English at home and took a walk in the morning. I got to know a lady living nearby. She usually walked her dog and fed the geese in the morning. We talked

almost every day. At first, I needed to think about the sentences before we started. When the summer was over, I made some progress in spoken English.

After summer break, I went back to the church school. The teachers were very nice. They offered me free English classes. They even helped me get a job at a supermarket. In January, I started to go to OCCC to take ESL class. I still like to go to the church if I have time.



Everything is going well for me so far. I work while I am learning English at school. I don't feel nervous when I speak to other people, although I feel frustrated when I can't understand what they are talking about.

I plan to take the TOEFL test in the next year. I hope this test can make me eligible to advance my stud-

ies at OCCC. I'd like to choose a course and get an associate degree. I hope I can get a better job at last.

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Li Chenliang  
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

## My Story

My name is Sang Chung. I am 42 years old and I came to the United States in 1997. When I first arrived here, I did not know any English. During that time, my son was born. In my first job, I did not learn English because I had the help of interpreters. Then in 2006 I got laid off.

One day, I met an old friend who introduced me to the Balon Corporation. She told me it had good benefits and a very kind boss. I applied and got the job as a temporary assembly worker. Then the co-owner of the corporation moved me from assembly worker to machine operator. After about a year of working many different machines, he gave me an

opportunity to train as a quality controller. I really appreciate that he gave me a chance to learn many things, including how to read different blue prints and how to connect with other workers. He was very uplifting and gave me a lot of advice. After about a year of working in quality control, one of the co-owners and his brother started to teach my co-workers and me about the details of checking parts. They were both so inspiring to me.

I appreciate that I had so many chances to learn. I am also happy that I have had good and nice leaders and co-workers. I always do the best I can.

I want to do better in my job and organize my life—so I am going to ESL class to do just that. So I hope that I can communicate better at work and so that more people can understand me wherever I go. In

life you can meet many extremely nice and kind people.

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Sang Chung  
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

## Hope from Education

My name is Susana Cisneros. When I came to the U.S. in 1995, I didn't know any English. Some years later, I started a program called Even Start. This program helps parents with little children. We can learn English and they have their own personal babysitter to take care of our children.

In this program, I learned how to speak basic English. I also got my GED. Some years later, my friend Holga commented to me about the OCCC Family and Community Education (FACE) Center. After one month, somebody called me and I took the test. In September 2014, I started the classes with Mr. Diggs in Intermediate Level. Some months after

that, I changed classes to Advanced ESL with Mr. Anthony. In my first class, I was scared, quiet, and nervous; but the teacher was patient with me and he turned out to be a good teacher. Now I'm doing better with my English. I can spell and pronounce most words; I know many things that I didn't know before. I can write a paragraph and I can help my little child with his homework.

My goals are to continue the classes and improve my conversation skills. Speaking is still my biggest challenge. I also hope to take and pass the citizenship test. I recommend OCCC for other people like me.

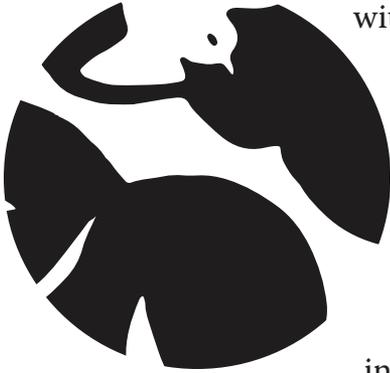
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Susana Cisneros  
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

## Hope of Better Jobs

I've been here in the United States since 2007. I stayed home for four years to take care of my second daughter. At that time, I didn't know how to drive.

In 2010, I got my driver's license. In 2011, I got my first job at the Veteran's Center in Norman, Oklahoma. I worked as a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA). Six months later, I decided to move forward



with my career. I went to school to become a Certified Medical Assistant (CMA).

In 2012, my mother-in-law passed away and I got divorced in the same year. It was so hard for me because I had to work at night and my kids weren't old enough to stay at home. I was lucky that my ex-husband let me leave the kids with him, and I picked them up after work.

I'm still continuing my school. I started working on my pre-requisites at OCCC last year. I'm planning on getting my nursing degree (LPN). It is not easy to get into this program because you need to have points and you need to take an entrance exam for

the LPN. I tried this at Moore Norman Technology Center (MTNC) last year, but I didn't pass. It is so hard—especially the math and the comprehensive.

This year I decided to go to ESL class at OCCC because grammar is a big problem for me, and I find the classes help me a lot.

I haven't given up on my goal to reach my LPN. I'm still working on it. I hope I can be accepted into the LPN program this year.

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Rhosemarie Daison  
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

## Learning English

My journey through the English language started when I was in high school in Mexico, and it lasted three years.

Four years later, I came to the U.S. By that time I had forgotten everything I learned. I remember the

first time I tried to speak to an American. It was in a restaurant and I wanted more soda. I had no clue about how to ask for more, so I just called the waitress, “hey.” She came to the table and I said, “more.” She just stared at me and I felt embarrassed. I think my face turned bright red. Then I said, “please?” She started laughing and talked to me in Spanish saying, “Ahora, le traigo mas.”

I was living in Dallas, and in my job most of the people were Hispanic and we spoke Spanish all the time, so I didn’t feel the need to learn English. When I got another job, it was a different story. There were more Americans working in that company, and I felt frustrated every time they said something to me because I barely understood what they said.

I had an American co-worker named Spencer. He knew a little bit of Spanish so we taught each other how to speak the other’s native language. I learned a lot from him, and I think he learned from me as well.

Even when people could understand what I said, it wasn't enough. I wanted to join a school but I never did until last year when I joined my current class. I love to come to class but sometimes I can't attend because of my job. I have to travel sometimes, and on short notice. I don't know how long it will take, but I will learn and improve my English.

---

Luis Del Angel  
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

## Never Give Up

I was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, and I am the fourth of five children. My childhood was poor but happy. My dad worked in a factory. His salary was low, so my mom had to work, washing and ironing, to help with the expenses. When I finished my elementary school, I started to work cleaning houses to pay my way through high school; so I studied

mornings and I went to work evenings while my brother also worked.

Four years later, my father got sick and he couldn't work anymore. My three brothers



got married which left just my younger brother and me at home. I had to quit school and work full-time. Five years later, I got married, and two years after that I moved to

Oklahoma City. I never thought that I would leave my country, but it was for the best. I am now very grateful to this country for all the opportunities it has given to my husband, to my children, and to me.

Now I am studying English and I am very grateful to my English teacher and to OCCC. They have helped me a lot to achieve some of my goals: I am now able to help my children with their homework,

attend parent-teacher conferences without interpreters, and communicate with my doctor (who is American). In fact, I am fluent enough now that I can speak to anyone in any situation I find myself. Even volunteering at my church is more effective now that my English is improving. I know that I still need to learn more and I will keep working on it with God's help. I thank God for my parents, who taught me how to accomplish my goals and to never give up.

---

Maria Coquis Garcia  
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

## Hope: My Sister

I was born in Mexico City. I came to the United States nine years ago. I have had to make many adjustments coming to a different country with a different language and culture. But my biggest challenge has been finding a new career.

I was an accountant in my country. When I arrived in the USA, I never thought I would have a different job other than my previous profession.

One day, I lost my job as an accountant. A couple of months later, my sister asked me if I wanted to learn how to cut hair. I told her I didn't want to touch other people's heads. But the economy at that time was in recession, and it was very difficult to find work as an accountant.

During this transition period I found other jobs, like cleaning, waitressing, and sales; but I think I was meant to be a stylist.

After trying all these different jobs, and still not being happy, I decided to tell my sister that I was ready to learn a new profession—stylist.

My sister trusts me and she makes me feel confident that I can do anything. The first couple of months were very hard, but now I know what I am doing and

feel more relaxed cutting people's hair and touching their heads. Now I sometimes even laugh because, when I first saw my sister cutting hair, it looked so difficult and I thought, how can I do that? But now I have 3 years of experience and I like it.

I have plans of being able to work in the future in the two professions—even start my own business.

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Noemi Mandujano  
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

## Humor

When I lived in Mexico, I traveled alone many times by plane to different parts of my country. In October of 2011, I traveled for the first time to the United States alone.

I was very nervous because at that time, I had no idea about the English language; but my boyfriend told me, “Don't worry, it's very easy. Most of the people at the airport speak Spanish.”



I believed him. Everything was perfect. He paid for and sent me the tickets. I called my bank and my cellphone provider, because I wanted to use my cell in the United States. However, by the time I arrived at Dallas airport, my cellphone had lost its signal. I could not find a public phone to call my boyfriend, and I was going around asking people if they could help me find one; but all they could tell me was “I don’t speak Spanish. Sorry.”

I was very sad and nervous, and then a beautiful lady approached me, and speaking in Spanish said, “If you want, you can use my cellphone. Please call the love of your life.”

It was amazing! I was so happy, I called him! And after that he found me!

After that trip, we have had many trips, but now

we make them together as a couple. We have now been married three years!

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Araceli Molina  
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

## A Dream Comes True

Everyone has a dream, and can make it come true by hope, courage, desire, and will. Just follow it and hold on to it, and don't give up because you never know what tomorrow will bring. Living in the United States has been my dream for a long time. I moved to Oklahoma City, Oklahoma two and a half years ago by way of DV (Diversity Visa) lottery. It was like a big reward for me after many attempts. Finally my dream has become a reality.

At the beginning, I had to face many difficulties. Every time I wanted to go somewhere, I needed help. I couldn't do anything by myself, and when people spoke to me, I couldn't understand what

they were saying. I could barely understand what they were trying to tell me. Everything was different and new to me. Fortunately, I had friends that helped me. After only one month, I was able to get a driver's license and a green card. I started working as a cook at McDonalds. After that, I saw the necessity of improving my English so I started studying at home by myself. I realized after a while that I couldn't do it by myself; so I decided to take classes at OCCC to improve my English skills. That led me to go even further and get a diploma and start my own business. Why not? This is my second dream.

To end this story, I would like to thank God, my family, friends, and everyone who helped me and has been patient with me throughout this incredible journey.

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Mohamed Moukadem  
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

## Humor: Jay-Moan vs. Jamon

When I came to the U.S.A., I didn't know anything about English, so for me it was so confusing and hard when I began living here. Every day I learned new words, new vocabulary, and a new culture. One day I was with my family and my sister-in-law. My sister-in-law was showing me a book about her vacation in Europe and where she wrote about each country that they visited.

That day I was reading about Spain, and the whole book was written in English, but I noticed that one word was in Spanish; this word was "jamon." It means "ham." However, I didn't read this word with Spanish pronunciation because I thought it was another English word like the rest of the book. When I read "jamon," I pronounced it with an English accent like, "jay-moan." I was completely sure jamon was spelled the same way in English and Spanish, but with different pronunciation.

When my sister in law heard me saying, “jay-moan,” she laughed immediately and told me, “It isn’t jay-mon; it’s jamon.” I did not understand why she was making fun of me if I was right and knew what it means. After being told six times that I was wrong, finally I could understand what she was trying to tell me, and I couldn’t stop laughing with her. Now all my family makes fun of me because of that, and when they want ham, they say jay-moan. It was a funny moment that I want to share about my time learning English. I hope you can laugh about it the way I did.

When you learn a new language, you will have uncomfortable and funny moments; nevertheless, don’t let it stop you from continuing to work on it. Remember, each mistake is a step toward success.

## Hope: The Lesson Learned

My name is Maximino Salinas and I'm 40 years old. I want to tell you my story. It happened on April 13, 2001. That day my brother and I were working together in a recycling center. That very day after work, our nephew had arrived. We were very happy to see him, so we passed by a gas station to get a beer to celebrate. I never thought it would happen. I remember my wife visiting her sister. She called me to ask if I wanted her to pick me up. I said no because I thought I could drive.

On my way home in the car, the police stopped me. This is how my nightmare began. I asked him why he pulled me over, and he told me I was swerving in an out of lanes. He told me to step out of the car and asked me to take a blood-alcohol test. It came out positive. Then he arrested me and put me in the back of his car. After that, he took me to jail.

That day was a bad one for me, as I had to sleep

a long way from home and far from my family. I thought I would never see them again.

Thanks be to God, everything worked out okay and the situation got resolved. I am now very happy with my family and would like to give you some life advice: Don't drink and drive!

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Maximino Salinas  
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

## American Dream

In 2001, I moved from Juarez, Chihuahua, to Oklahoma City. My two sons came with me. The oldest was almost 9 years old, and the youngest was 6 years old. Everything was beautiful in Oklahoma City. Still, it was very hard for me and my family. I had never been to another country. Juarez was too dangerous for my family. I decided to come here for a better life.

My brother helped me with my sons. Two weeks

after we arrived, they started elementary school. It was very hard for my kids because they didn't speak English—and I didn't either. Everything was different here.



I was scared in my first job, because nobody spoke Spanish and I needed people to talk to me. I couldn't understand what they were saying to me and I would ask myself why I came here. I couldn't work and I couldn't talk to people. I didn't understand anything that was happening with my kids. The little one always cried after school because he couldn't understand the teacher. He always said, "Mom, I don't want to stay here." We wanted go back to Juarez.

Today everything is different. My sons have grown up and they speak English very well. The youngest graduated last year from high school. The old-

est didn't graduate but almost finished the twelfth grade. Now I'm happy because we live in Oklahoma City. We have a better life and I feel happy because I have two beautiful granddaughters and I study English. I can write, read, and speak English. I now say, "Thank you, God!"

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Pabla Sanchez  
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

## My Dream Comes True

Having grown up in a large, poor family with ten siblings, I was never taken good care of by my busy parents. Food and clothing had always been a problem for my hard-working mom and dad. Education was, therefore, a far-fetched ideal for most of my sisters and brothers. However, I always had a dream for my life—education. Getting a good education is a huge challenge for any low income family like mine. When I felt I needed an education, I tried my best

to find a way to go to school despite all of the time and financial difficulties. Though public school did not require tuition and fees, I had to work for school supplies to avoid burdening my mom and dad, since they were too busy trying to support my other siblings. School by day and work by night helped me through high school with an average passing grade. However, a high school diploma could not help me find a good job or a career. College education was my big dream for a bright future. After a few months of diligently searching for a job, I finally found a position in a clothing factory. This job could help me to survive economically but was not enough to put me through school. I could only support myself and help pay bills for my family.

One day, my family had a guest who changed my life forever and made my dream come true. He is my husband now, who took me to America for a new life and a better future. My dream is finally

coming true now that I am back at school with the hope of soon making my way to college after years of interruption.

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Trinette Tran  
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

## Opportunity to Achieve a Better Life

Opportunity is defined as “a good position, a chance for achievement.” When you have a chance for making life better or success in your career, you need to make the decision right away before it’s too late. Opportunity comes and goes quickly. After a decision has been made, dedication must follow.

When I turned 35 years old, I moved to the USA and lived in Oklahoma City. I was very nervous because I had never lived in a big and very modern city. Do you believe I had never studied and spoken English before, and I had never known American culture

either? I was very worried and asked myself, “Could I live in the USA without speaking or understanding English? Could they have an English class for older students?” It took me a long time to think it over.

Finally, I decided to seize the opportunity. I went to OCCC and I found the ESL class. On the first day I went to school, I discovered many older people are still going to school to learn. It really surprised me because my purpose in going to school was first for the language. In Vietnam, once you reach 25, you are longer going to school to get a degree. The longer I lived in America, the more I realized that America is the land of opportunity.

I have also experienced that if I want to have a good job and live a better life, then I must have an education. No matter what degree I earn, I can still find a decent job. After 2 years studying in ESL class, I feel my English is better than compared with when I started.



I have a plan to go to college with the nursing program. It will be very hard for me, but I will try. Now I have the opportunity to work as a nursing assistant and continue to study English. I hope to apply for nursing school next year.

The word opportunity is full of meaning and vital for success—as long as you are dedicated to taking the opportunity to achieve your goal and are convinced that you will be successful. If I don't have the courage to take this opportunity, then I might just have to rely on welfare.

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Ha Vu

OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC



O • K • L • A • H • O • M • A



# LITERACY RESOURCE OFFICE

For information about literacy efforts in Oklahoma  
please visit [www.odl.state.ok.us/literacy](http://www.odl.state.ok.us/literacy) or call  
Literacy Resource Office at 1-800-522-8116



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