

stories from



Our Lives

*Writings by the students at
Howard Area Community Center*

June 2017

realconditions





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Guadalupe Perez (Mexico)

Maria Rodriguez (Mexico)

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IRENE VILLEGAS

My Life in My Village and My Life in Chicago

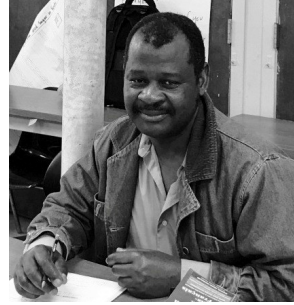
This is my true story. In my country, I have a big family. We are 17 siblings with me. We grew up in a little village. It was in a forest. There were only my parents' house and my oldest brothers' house. There were only five houses around my parents' house in my little village. There was no electricity and there were no stores nearby my house to buy food. My parents worked very hard to raise us. They sowed many things in the field to give us food to eat.

We grew up very poor. We helped my parents in the field and helped them in many things. In my little village there were no schools near my house. We didn't have the opportunity to study, but I wanted to learn to write and to read. Then, my brother got married. So I asked my sister-in-law, "Can you help me to write and to read a little bit?" And she said to me, "Oh, sure." She was my teacher for only 15 days. Every evening she taught me to write and to read. Not correctly, but I learned a little. Because before my operations in my head I could learn faster. I am thankful to God for that. After my operations I can't learn as fast, but I'm trying and trying.

Little by little I can learn more English with the help of my God and my teachers. Because English is my dream. In this country, to speak English is very important for immigrants. For example, to help our children with their homework and when we go to the doctor. It is very important to communicate with other people in English in person or to talk on the phone. My first language is Spanish, but now I speak a little bit of English.

GASTON KUYISANA

Howard Area Community Center



What is Howard Area Community Center, and how I did I get information about this place? The Howard Area Community Center is a place for adult education, and also other activities like food pantry, garden school, looking for a job, computer class, and so on.

I got a lot of information on the flier around the Howard train station. Somebody distributed the fliers. I was looking for where to study English and I thought that it is good to try. When I came the first day, I met the staff and they said, "You need a test. After the test, we can know what to do for you." I said, "Okay." I took a test and they said, "Your test is good so you need to start beginning in ESL level 5 and you go up step by step." I said, "Okay."

The beginning of school was surprising for me because I met a lot of classmates, and I made a lot of friends who speak French. Nice teachers, nice classmates, nice staff, and a lot of opportunities because I got a garden. Amazing for me because I didn't think in America they can give you an area for free to plant a garden. I was very happy.

In the class, there are different activities like writing on Tuesdays, conversation with classmates, observations, describing the graph. Very nice activities to open the mind.

I am very happy with Howard Area Community Center. I wish the government would give money to continue our education, to attain our goal. Even if you are old, you have an opportunity to study more. Thank you to the government.



MARIA RODRIGUEZ

What I Have Learned at Howard Area Community Center

My story is about the Howard Area Community Center (HACC) in Rogers Park. It is a very good place. Here we have many opportunities. I have my son in childcare at HACC. That is a big help for me. I learn English, and my son also learns. I come for two hours every day instead of four hours every day because I have to go to take my son to his school. But here in HACC it is a quiet and relaxing place. We have teachers who help us a lot, so that we learn English. And also there are many interesting programs for us, and everything is free. One of the other programs I take is family literacy. I also use the Food Pantry.

I am learning to read, write and speak English at Howard Area Community Center. When I came to HACC I didn't understand any English. Little by little, I'm learning English, and now I know more people from different countries. They are good people, and now I know how to find places where I need to go. I can ask people questions about things or places I need to know.

I like going downtown with my family, and my children like it too. I can speak English, so I can go with my children to very many places here in Chicago. I thank HACC for giving so many opportunities to us.

FLORIE FORESTAL

How Can Anyone Live without Education?

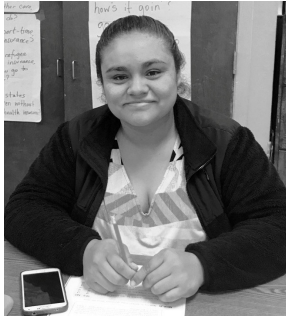


Education is an essential right which enables everyone to receive instruction and to develop in his or her social life. The right to education is vital to the economic, social, and cultural development of all societies.

My favorite class is writing because when I am writing the ideas come into my head more. I have never taken ESL class anywhere else.

I care about education because in my country if you don't have education it's difficult to work somewhere. I have one idea for everyone, especially the teenagers. When your parents ask you to go to school, don't ignore that. It's because we love you and we want the best for you in the future. I am proud of my parents. They gave me a good example. Today I understand why they cared about my education.

How can anyone live without education? Their life will be limited because there are some things you have to do that require education, but you cannot do them. I suggest to everyone, if you have the opportunity, go to school whatever your age or social class. Education is base of all society.



MARIA GARCIA

My First Job

This story is about my work in the restaurant. When I came to Chicago I worked in a restaurant. My experience was funny because I did not understand English, but I liked my work. Sometimes, my manager got angry because he did not understand me, but I was laughing because I did not understand the manager either.

In this restaurant, I worked for five years. I liked to eat in the restaurant. The paninis and coffee were very good. My favorite was the salads, many different salads. I learned to make paninis. My workmates learned to make paninis and sometimes I read with them and understood the English panini recipes. The nice people always helped me in this job.

I miss my job and the people, too. In the restaurant, I worked with good people.

VICTORINE MBERI

My Life in the USA



When I came here, my friend referred me to the refugee shelter where I could get asylum as a refugee.

I went to Michigan to the Detroit Refugee Center. I met with the lawyers. We talked about my refugee status, and then the director of the center gave me one bedroom, bed clothes, lotions, deodorants, creams, etcetera.

I was very happy. All stress was gone. Every month we used to go to the doctors and psychologist for our checkups. I lived in Michigan for a year until the lawyers finished my refugee case.

I really thank the USA for granting me asylum to live in this country.

After I got my asylum, I came to Chicago. I started to learn English because I didn't understand anyone. I started at ESL Level One. I couldn't do shopping alone. It was very difficult for me.

But now my life is good. I can do everything: listening, watching TV, reading, applying for a job. I really thank again the USA.



MARIA I. NIETO

My First Time in Chicago

In June, 2000 I was married in Mexico, and then came to Chicago in October of the same year. I flew to Los Angeles to take the airplane to Chicago. When I saw the city of Chicago, I asked my husband, "What happened? Where are the people? I don't see them." My husband had lived in Chicago before for two years and he said to me, "Here it is too cold. The people are inside their homes." But the third day, I saw the sun was very clear, and my brother said to me, "Come, let's go to the store." I saw him put his warmest jacket on, and I thought, "Why did he put that jacket on? The sun is good outside. Maybe he didn't look outside." I smiled and I took my warm jacket. But when I was outside, it was very cold and I thought, "What happened here? The weather is not the same in my country." And then my brother explained to me about the weather in Chicago.

Now all the time, I need to see the temperature on my cell phone. But I like the seasons now in Chicago. I like the flowers in the Spring. I like the beach in the Summer. I like the pretty leaves in the Fall, and my son likes to jump in the piles of leaves. I like the snow in the Winter. The end.

YOLANDA BAHENA

My Life in Mexico and the United States



When I came to the United States, I lived in California with my sister, but it was difficult for me because I didn't have friends. Only my sister. I missed my family, my friends, my country.

My sister helped me to find a job in the restaurant. When I was working, nobody showed me how to work. I felt very sad, but one day my sister told me, "You need to go to English class, it's good for you." I started to come to the English class. I liked to learn English and many things in this country.

Three years later I went to Mexico. In Mexico, it's difficult to find a job. I was looking for a job in my country, but I never found a job. One year later, I came back to the U.S., to Chicago with my brother. Now I can speak a little English and I'm proud of myself and all that I have learned in this country.



GLORIA NIETO MIRANDA

My Childhood Adventures

I grew up in a small town in Mexico with my family — my mother, my father, and my siblings. I had five sisters and five brothers. When I was younger I loved to play so much. I wanted to play with my sisters, but they were always busy at home. They were doing different activities. Each one had her job. They cleaned the house, made tortillas, washed the clothes, collected the water from the river with the donkeys, and gathered fire wood. I also had my job. That was to take care of animals, like sheep, goats, and donkeys.

I worked with two of my brothers. I liked my job because I could play with them in the prairies. I liked to play with the boys because I didn't have another option. I wanted to play with girls but I didn't have sisters younger than me, only brothers. So I had to learn the rules of men, to be able to play with them. We played spinning tops, marbles, bows and arrows, and climbing trees. I really loved marbles. I was like a tomboy, but I loved fashion too.

In my country, all the kids have responsibilities. It is difficult, but it's fun, too.

ZENAB IBRAHIM

A Refugee Story



I was born in the Sudan but I grew up in Chad. I moved to Chad because it is too dangerous to stay in my country because they're killing people every day.

When I went to the refugee camp it was better than to stay in Sudan. It's a little bit safer. People from the United States set up the tents, brought food every month, and the water was free. I was a farmer in the refugee camp. I learned how to grow the vegetables and other things.

When I came to the United States it was difficult for me because I didn't know how to speak English. My first time I started my English classes in the U.S. I met so many different people. They're friendly and helpful. I love this place, Chicago. I appreciate my teachers!

The Catholic Charities has also helped in the life of me and my family. Catholic Charities has been a support and encouragement to all of us. Specifically, the organization has helped with the transition from Africa to the United States by helping with resources for daily life such as school materials, job placement, medical advocacy, providing access to government aid, and helping connect me with the community. The social workers have really helped those back home. I would also like to become a social worker in the future. I have seen how the social workers help refugees.



GUADALUPE PEREZ

Remembering Where I Came From

My favorite place to live is my native country Mexico. Because there's all my family and all the people I grew up with. In my family there is my father, my brother, and my four sisters. My father is a school bus driver. He gets paid every two weeks, but it is a low salary, because only people who have a diploma from school can obtain a little more money. That's why my brother and I also work to contribute to the family.

My brother has built houses since he was 17 years old. He works very hard to help my mom to buy food or pay bills. I work as a waitress to get money to send them. I know that for me it is very important to remember where I came from and how I suffered to get here to the United States by walking six days in the desert. I wish all my family could be with me, but it is not possible. I hope one day I can go back to Mexico to be with my family.

LUISA JARAMILLO

My Village

My favorite place to live is in my village with my parents, because it is the place where I was born and also there I grew up well, together with my brothers and sisters. I have seven brothers and four sisters. My parents were very good with us.

I have five children, four daughters and one son. Two daughters live in the United States, three live in Mexico. I miss my country but I like to live here because here there are different opportunities for our life. Now I like to live in Chicago because it is a beautiful place. Here I am calm.



JESSICA MBONGOLO

My Favorite Place to Live

Between my country and here my favorite place to live is the USA, because in the United States we have a lot of opportunity. If you did not study in your country, you can study here, even if you are any age. Even if you do not have the money, you can learn more. If you need to go to university and you don't have money, you can take out a loan. They help everybody.

For me, I like to live in the big cities or states like California, Chicago, or Washington. Once I went to Nebraska. The rent is very cheap. But if I want to live in the big city, I need to work more, because the big city is very expensive, not easy.

REBECCA

ADU

Sharing My Values With Family



Some things I like to teach my family are my values which are: to love others, to show respect to others, and to help people all over the world. I also teach my family to help children in school and in churches, and to help older people.

For example, last week my 15-year-old son saw a lady pushing a stroller and running to catch a bus. She dropped her cell phone in the middle of the road. My son saw this happen. He ran back into the road and waved to the bus driver to stop. He gave the cell phone to the lady. The lady and the bus driver said, "Thank you. God bless you. You are a very good boy."

I am so proud because I can see that my family has learned the values I have taught them.



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This writing workshop was a collaboration between the Howard Area Community Center (HACC) and the Community Writing Project.

HACC is a social service agency that provides affordable and free education, employment, and health assistance and programs for the greater Rogers Park area. Find more information at www.howardarea.org.

The Community Writing Project offers writing and publishing workshops to residents of poor and immigrant neighborhoods in Chicago and beyond. Visit the website at www.communitywritingworkshop.org.



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