

Humans of Gateway:



Portraits of the First Year

Forward

A literary profile blends anecdote, description, and interview to create a portrait of an individual. Effective profile writers employ both keen listening and observation abilities. Above all, quality profilers must create a sense of trust between themselves and their subject. The best literary profiler writers are empathetic and open. They withhold the world's judgment and allow the subjects to reveal themselves on their own terms.

After studying a series of literary profiles and photo essays, students in Introduction to Academic Reading and Writing (English 066) interviewed peers and created the authentic portraits included in this volume. What follows are honest portrayals of the struggles, ambitions, and triumphs that Gateway Community College students experience. From the journey of an asylum seeker, to the loss of a brother, a mother, a father, a child, a home, these stories represent the victories and perseverance of Gateway's diverse student body.

As faculty, we are honored and humbled to share this collection. To have borne witness to the words and the lives of our community college students is a gift like no other. We share this gift with you.

Elizabeth Keefe & Eric W. Maroney

First-Year Studies Department

This book is dedicated to the fall 2019 ENG 066 classes. Keep telling your stories; the world needs to hear them.

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It's Really Hard To Say "DAD" When I Didn't Have One Around

by Alberto Bermudez

My name is Shameen Brown. I am 18, and I live in New Haven Connecticut; I'm a short, stocky longhaired black male with a clock tattoo on my right shoulder that represents the time I was born, and it also shows my birthday and my brother's birthday. I'm going to tell you the story of how my life has changed. When I was a child, it was not as

easy for me as it is now. Growing up, everything was normal when I was between one and four years old. I had a full family in my house. I had two little brothers and one little sister, and of course, a mother and a father. My entire life changed on my fifth birthday when my mom decided to kick my dad out of the house. From that day, I have not really spoken to my father, nor have I seen him.

Growing up without my dad was hard because I didn't want him to leave, I saw my dad as my idol, and I wanted to be just like him. He was a hard worker, and he had goals, but he was not a follower. He led in everything he did and did everything on his own. As the years went by, I wouldn't receive birthday gifts from my dad, and we lost touch. That's when I realized I had to be the man of the house and help my mom out. I helped watching my siblings while she was at work, and I did all the chores. I'd wash dishes, clean the bathrooms, get my brothers and sister up and ready for school, I would also pick them up from the bus stop so she wouldn't have to because I knew after a long day of work, she would be really tired.

Once I turned 15, I started working at Champs Sport for thirty hours a week so I could help my mom with bills and groceries. Around the same time, I started to attend high school at New Haven Academy, and it got to a point where I was more focused on working and taking care of chores or watching my siblings than doing my school work. My grades began to suffer to the point, at which I was kicked out of school.

At one point, I almost got taken from my mom, but I refused to leave because my mom is my everything. She's the one who taught me how to be a man, how to cook, and how not to be a follower but a leader, and she's been by my side through it all.



A. Bermudez



Fazila Mansoori's Biography

by Arlett Hernandez

In the world there are many women who are considered heroes, women who have done many good things. But there are also many women who have gone through many difficult times in their life. They have been oppressed, or even scared out of their country. My dear friend, Fazila Mansoori, is a perfect example of this. She has been oppressed and scared out of her country due to war and fear for her life.

Fazila was born in Afghanistan on January 01, 1977.

During her adolescent years she went to school and always stood out from the rest. However, years passed and troubles came upon her years of study. When Fazila was in eighth grade, her school was closed down for a year due to war. When the war finally concluded, schools were opened and Fazila didn't hesitate to get back to her schooling. Since Fazila missed a year of school, she decided to take a test to see where she was academically. Her results were astonishing and lead her to go straight into tenth grade, skipping ninth. As the years passed, she finished high school at Lisa Naswan and went on to the University of Kandahar.

Fazila grew up in a poor household. Even though she was poor, her parents never failed to show her the love she deserved. During her juvenile years, she was bullied, but she managed to pull through. Later on at the age of fourteen Fazila became pregnant and due to her pregnancy she was forced to get married. Unfortunately, years later in 1997 her husband died during the war between the Taliban and the Afghanistan army. This was a very hard time for Fazila but her family never left her side, they supported her and were always there for her. At the time, the violence and death rate in Afghanistan was really high, so she decided to move to Pakistan. She lived in Pakistan six years but violence and oppression there was no different. In 2015 Fazila moved to the US with her child in search of a better life and a brighter future.

When she came to the US, she had the opportunity to work with the United Nation in New York City. After working there for three years, she noticed that the job wasn't enough for her expenses so she looked for a new one. Fazila knows how to speak eight languages so she used that as an advantage. In the newspaper, she saw a job opportunity as an interpreter, so she immediately applied and was later accepted. Later on she decided to move to CT but she had to leave her job because it was too far to travel on a daily basis. She then started working in a company in Wallingford and had an extra job on the side. As time went by, she noticed that working from job to job wasn't getting her anywhere so she decided to go to college and is now attending Gateway Community College.

In the life of Fazila there were many ups and downs but she always managed to pull through. "I never give up, even if people tell me I can't do it. I believe in god, and I believe in myself". In the world that we live in there are many women that have shown us that nothing is impossible, you just have to work for what you want. Fazila is a perfect example of this and of a woman that has pulled through even when the world around her was falling apart. With this I conclude the biography of Fazila Mansoori.

Generation Z

by Arrianna Worthy

Be yourself they say, because that's really the only way,

But how can I really be me, if no one sees me the way I see me?

How can I live my life, if I can't do anything right?

I hate it here, I really do,

and I don't understand why I have to do so much just to be part of the "crew".

We live in a generation where everything is wrong.

Where having little money is bad,

Where getting a different brand of Jordan's means you're broke,

Where being in a gang means you're tough,

Where if you're a female everything is your fault,

Where guys have to sleep with a girl in order to be cool,

Where if a girl sleeps with 2 guys she's nasty, but if a boy sleeps with 2 girls he's "wavy",

Where not losing your virginity means you're lame,

Where being skinny means you don't eat, and being big means you eat too much,

Where being smart is a bad thing,

And where you're constantly being judged about the things you like.

This is our generation as you can see,

So Welcome to Generation Z.



I Am Glad That I Have Changed from the Old Me

by Arrianna Worthy

Jordan Turner. I bet when you hear that name you think to yourself, “Who the heck is Jordan Turner?” Well, let me tell you a little about myself. As you know, my name is Jordan, but some people call me “J.O”. I am an African American 18-year-old boy. I recently graduated from high school and am now starting a new chapter of my life in my life as a freshman in college. I live with my mom and my two brothers, and I grew up in New Haven,

Connecticut. Now, I know that’s not really a good place to grow up and live, but living there was a learning experience for me. For example, people would always be caught up in violence or any problem that can turn deadly. There are gangs in every area, and because of that, every five minutes someone is either getting killed or getting hurt over nothing. Living here taught me that I don’t want to grow up and live like that. I don’t want to be the next person who gets killed.

Let’s move on and talk about my childhood and my family for a second. My childhood wasn’t all that great growing up. My father was not in my life, and I don’t really know much about him. It bothers me to just think about him not being in my life but I have learned to live with it and move on. My mom is very important to me, and she is the biggest influence in my life. She motivates me every day, and she is the reason I wake up and put in more than enough energy in my work and life itself. All I ever want to do is make her proud. She has done a lot for me, and I just want to show her how much I appreciate her. Along with my mother, my brothers have also found a way to motivate me. You see, my brothers never graduated from high school. So, I would like to say that I am very proud that I was able to do so. Not only did it make my brothers and mother proud, it made me very proud as well. I really did cherish that moment when I walked across the stage and got my diploma. I wanted to be different than my brothers and graduate so that I could make a name for myself. The decisions I have made in life brought me to where I am now and taught me the lessons that made me who I am.

For example, when I was younger, I hung around the wrong people. The people I hung around were known as troublemakers. Because I wanted to be what was labeled as “cool” growing up, I didn’t know that trying to be cool would get me in a lot of trouble. While going through the “I want to be cool” phase, I realized that I don’t want to be like them. People like them get into trouble very often and will grow up either to be nothing in life or have a bad reputation. I have also made a lot of other bad decisions like never listening to anything anyone would tell me, doing things without thinking, and focusing on the wrong things. I am human. I make mistakes. Everyone makes mistakes, but they help you grow and learn. My mistakes have made me a better person. So, am I proud of those mistakes? No, I am not, but in the end, these mistakes helped me become the person I am now and will forever be. I am glad that I have changed from the old me. What I plan on doing from here on out is to stick to what I’m doing now which is hang with the right people and make the right decisions.



Something Tragic Happened, But Here's The Outcome

by Ayanna Andrade

Evelyn Flores has such a beautiful soul. She's very unique, very outgoing, and comes from a single-parent home. Evelyn has learned that people can never know what's going to happen next, because in a blink of an eye, her mother passed away in a terrible car accident.

On September 25th, 1985, during Hurricane Gloria, Evelyn was in the car with her mother taking her grandmother back to Norwalk, Connecticut. As they pulled onto the highway after merging, Evelyn's mother's car started stalling, so she put on her hazard lights to pull over to the right, and as she was pulling over, a car came flying and hit the back of the car near the gas tank. Immediately, the car caught on fire, and in seconds, the fire rushed to her mother and grandmother. Evelyn's mother was covered in flames along with her grandmother, and Evelyn's arm was burned as well.

Tragically, Evelyn's mother died at the scene while her grandmother was rushed to the hospital. Her grandmother made it to the hospital, but she had sixteen surgeries because she was burned on eighty- five percent of her body. Evelyn's grandmother woke up after her final surgery, and her first question was, "Where's my daughter?" The doctor told her she didn't make it, and right then and there, her grandmother passed away.

And as a result, Evelyn was alone. She had to work and continue going to school, and at the age of seventeen, Evelyn had her first daughter. Evelyn says it was extremely difficult raising six children and a child of her own while she was a teen herself. However, Evelyn never gave up! She earned her CNA License (Certified Nursing Assistant) at the age of seventeen. Then, Evelyn kept climbing the ladder and has worked at the West Haven Vet's hospital as an LPN (Licensed Practical Nurse) for 28 years.

Through all of her struggles and difficult times, Evelyn learned how to be patient and interact with other patients professionally and kindly. She's now back in school at Gateway to become a Counselor. She wants to help people get through their hard times, like she did. Evelyn Flores is a fighter!



A. Andrade



Family, Friends, and Fun

by Daniel Bedoya

Cameron and I are in English class together. He has brown hair, dark-brown eyes, and he is a bit taller than I am. We talked about what his favorite holiday is, and he told me it is Christmas. He likes to spend the holiday time with his family, and he hopes for snow because it is so much fun to play in, even if it's really cold outside. On Christmas Day, he

goes to his mom's cousin's house for a family Christmas party where they like to talk, laugh, get together, and open up presents. To Cameron, Christmas is the best holiday of the year because of family togetherness.

Cameron also told me about his parents. He said his mother grew up in Milford, Connecticut, and his stepfather grew up in Maine. His parents got married in 2013 when he was eleven years old and they work together at the same company. He says the kindest person in his life is his mother because she's always there when he needs her, especially when it's time to go shopping for clothes, and they enjoy doing that together and have a lot of laughs.

He also shared a funny anecdote about him and his dad, and an early memory. Cameron remembered that when he was three years old, he liked to play in the dog's cage and his dad would laugh every time he'd get stuck in there. This is still a very funny family joke. It's clear that his family likes to have fun together.

I asked Cameron, "If you were to go back and relive your teenage years, what would you do?" He said he would like to hang out with his friends more. He shared that he missed his friends so much and he has good memories from the time they spent together. Hanging out with his friends brings out the fun person in him, and this is how he would always like to be remembered. His greatest joys are with his family and friends.



D. Bedoya



My Life

by Daniel Bedoya

My life is filled with joy
Like having fun and
Spending time
with family
My life with family is beautiful
Like the clear blue sky
But my life can be hard sometimes,
It's hard to learn how to make eye contact
With one person
And more than that
It's hard to make new friends too
Because I'm shy
And don't always know what to say
Fitness and exercise help me relax
My fear and emotions
Because with all of the training, they go away
Being and staying active is paying off
Sometimes I thought that I could
Change the past or restart
But it doesn't work like that
What I can do is learn that yesterday is history
And tomorrow will be a mystery
But today is a gift



The Struggles I Went Through in Life

by D'Quan Christopher

My name is Rashad Rahee. I'm 5'6" with brown eyes, and I'm a very friendly person who likes to ride bikes and play video games, but as a young child, I didn't have many toys like other kids, and I was not like them. Very often I'd ask myself "Why am I here?"

Unfortunately, in my childhood, I did not have anyone by my side to walk me to school and pick me up every day. Arriving at school, I noticed children with their parents and this made me very emotional because I was always alone. And when I was growing up, I didn't have any responsibilities like other kids because my dad and his family were not around. As a result, I thought about my father all the time. I would often ask my mom about him, and she would always reply the same way, looking at me sadly and saying, "He's in another country." I just accepted what she said and didn't ask any questions because I was still young and never paid any mind to where he really was.

Getting older and growing up isn't a problem if you have both parents see you through your childhood. Because my dad wasn't there, that actually motivated me to do better in life. My mom and grandparents seemed to forget about my dad's absence and moved on, but for me it was difficult. When I needed him the most, he wasn't there, and it wasn't easy not having a dad. No one taught me how to be a man and be independent. I know I had my mom and grandparents, but it wasn't the same.

Now I'm an eighteen year-old young man, and I can do anything I want. I've learned that if it wasn't for my grandfather, I don't think I would be the same person I am today. He taught me how to fix cars, sell cars and find the right car for the customers. He also helped me started a business called "Boss and Tires". This business helps me tremendously because I see that I have potential, and if I put my mind to it, I can accomplish anything. Knowing that I am in business on my own with some help from my grandfather shows that I never needed my dad in the first place. So now I know life can be a struggle, but it pays off!



D. Christopher



Charismatic Young Woman

by Evelyn Flores

As I sit in class talking to my neighbor, Ayanna Andrade, I realize how different everyone's lives are. Ayanna is a quiet and petite woman with a great smile. Her energy is very bright, cheerful, and intelligent, and she is a very charismatic woman, to say the least. She seems to be very eager and mature for someone who graduated from high school

recently. She was very involved in high school as well; she played on the Volleyball team and made it to the JV team, and she was also a cheerleader.

Ayanna is nineteen years-old and is very determined because she is youngest of seven children who came from a single-family household. Because Ayanna's mother passed away at a very young age, Ayanna endured a time of brokenness. She felt unstable because she did not have someone to lean on and motivate her as her mom always did. Ayanna's mom was a loving, caring and motivational person, her number one supporter. After losing her, Ayanna had to be strong and more family-oriented.

Ayanna's older sister Abby took care of Ayanna and sister Alisia after their tragic loss. Since Abby was the oldest, she knew it was important to her to keep the family together because that was their mom's fondest wish, for them to have a bright future. Ayanna sometimes reminisces about the good memories with her mom, like preparing a meal and smelling the aroma of her comforting food.

Despite her difficult and sometimes sad childhood, Ayanna has been defeating the odds as a young, hard-working woman since day one. She has maintained a standing job at Griffin Hospital for over a year as a dietary aide while attending Gateway Community College. Ayanna loves to talk to people and to help them find nutritional diets. She is very determined to fulfill her goal to become a Radiology Technician. Ayanna comes from a legacy of hard work and independent women who believe in following their dreams. She is destined for success.



E. Flores



Never Give Up on Your Dreams Even Though You're Different

by Nayeli Garcia Romero

I am Juliana Ruggiero, but my friends call me Jules. By the age of three I was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy (CP), and I have vision problems from CP. I'm 20 years-old, with a beautiful child's soul, but I am a very mature, kind person. I am sweet, but don't try me! Sometimes I can be a little sassy. I work hard, and I'm not afraid of any kind of challenge.

This is my first semester in college, also my first college class. For the past 18 years, I was with special professor that helped me before and in each class that I had in middle school and high school, but now I'm by myself. I'm not scared. I am getting through day by day; it's difficult for me, but there is nothing that I cannot do. It's a big challenge for me to be successful in college and I'm going for it.

It was a big step for me to get into college classes because nobody will hold my hand if I am having difficulties. I've been preparing myself in a program for the past two years. They keep me on track, they help me manage my schedule, they teach me the most important things, but it will change this year because this is my last year of the program. Now I will be on my own. I am very responsible about college; I do homework on time, and everything is going well and I am determined that it will be the same in the future; I am proud of myself because upon my first walk in, I felt scared. There were many thoughts on my head, good ones and bad ones, but I was sure no matter what, I would get everything in order, so it's a good thing my English class is organized.

I want people to remember me as someone inspirational, someone who works her butt off for what she wants, and someone who never gives up. I have problems and issues, and sometimes I struggle like everyone. When people see me they might think "she has no problems," that I have an easy life, but the cold truth is different. With CP and vision problems I have to put double effort, and give the best of me every day; I like to be great at school; I love success, but it's not easy. Also, not all my family members help me or my parents when we need them, and my aunt was never in my life. My mom asked her to take care of me when she was at work many times, and my aunt always had some excuse. I have three other cousins and she treats them differently than me. I've seen her doing things with them, but not with me.

Thank God my mom is a hard worker, as was my dad, but last year, sadly, my dad died. That was the biggest challenge in my life, to survive without him. I'm still missing him like the first day, but I know he is looking out for me with a big smile because he is proud of me and how I'm doing in life, like he taught me. I grew up kinda fast, and I know that sometimes people think bad things won't happen to you or your family, but no, life is short. You only get one. So, go crazy, eat that cake, live your life the fullest, be grateful, and most important, spend time with your family. Tell them how much you love them, don't wait until it's too late because I learned that the hard way.



Reading and Writing about Serian's Life.

by Justin Suarez

Serian informs me that she isn't from CT, that she from Caribbean, but she grew up in New York City. Serian didn't come to New Haven until she graduated from high school. She started a journey in a new city that she had never been to before. Serian is not an outside person, and she will only leave the house if it's for school or work. The most important

person in Serian's life is her mom because her mom is a very hardworking and independent person who doesn't give up on her. Serian's mom put a lot of pressure on her because she is the oldest out of three. Her mom pushes her to do better in life.

Serian describes herself as a person who can conquer obstacles and overcome challenges that come her way. For example, working hard is important for Serian because she can better herself and make the people around her proud. When Serian was in 11th grade, she got her first official job at Burlington to help and support her mom because her mother had lost her job at the time and they were struggling a little bit. Serian started to work a lot of hours to help out her mom until her mom found another job. When she got her very first paycheck Serian was happy to see how much money she made. However once she opened the envelope, the check turned out to be only 87 dollars. It wasn't satisfying to her at all for all the quality work she put in but her mom wasn't angry with Serian. Her mother pointed out at least she was able to do her best with helping out her mom in the best possible way. Her mom couldn't be more proud. Serian ended up with a much better opportunity with better pay.

Serian says, "I share my happy and sad moments with God." She believes God will always come to her when she needs him most or for whatever she has to share.



J. Suarez



"How I See Her"

by Lely Alicea

I tell her every day but I don't think she understands.

How I see her I don't believe anyone else can.

To me, she is more than beauty and I'll tell you why.

She is so charismatic, She is so joyful and kind.

She's smarter than she believes she is.

I love the fact that her smile reflects her beauty in

Such a powerful way.

I love the fact that I see her the way no one else can.

For example, how she scrunches her nose every time she looks

At me or how she gets flustered every time I don't stop looking

At her.

No one will ever see her the way I see her.

She is so beautiful, I tell myself everyday how lucky I am

She is my sunshine, she is my world, no one will ever compare

To her.

If I lose her, I don't know what I would do

Because having someone that is your sunshine and your muse is devastating to lose.

But that would never happen because I see the real her.

The one girl that rocks my world.

That's how I see her.



Land of Opportunity

by Mahfuz Rahee

Quan Christopher is a friendly person who is 5' 11" with expressive brown eyes and thick wavy hair. He grew up on a picturesque British Virgin Island called Tortola. Tortola has many beautiful, clear blue beaches and has a large resort and adventure parks. Breathtaking mountain views can be found everywhere. When he was young, he loved to

boat and swim with the dolphins. Quan's story is a unique one.

My father was not around when I was growing up. That's why I grew up so strong. I have a lot of love for my mom for raising me and making me the man I am today. I had a fun childhood, and I remember once I hopped on a dolphin's back, and it jumped so high, it sent me flying in the air and I landed in the water. That was one of the best feelings I have ever experienced. I remember the first time I rode a boat and was feeling nervous, yet so excited at the same time. I can still almost feel the cool breeze hitting me on a hot summer day. As I got older, I used to ride my boat into the sea and just enjoy the view while sipping some cool drinks. That all changed when I was sixteen years old.

Unfortunately, I had to leave Tortola because of Hurricane Irma. This hurricane destroyed approximately 85% of housing stock, and over 4,000 homes were destroyed! It made me sad to see the beautiful island I grew up on just get devastated by the hurricane, but I came to America to start a new and better life. I currently live with my uncle and attend Gateway Community college in the morning and work in the afternoon. I work hard so I can have a better future. My plan is to get a good education and graduate from Gateway Community College. But I really can't wait to go back to my beautiful island of Tortola soon, so I can visit my family.



M. Rahee



A Young Man's Goal Is to Graduate College

by Patricia Norfleet

Maleek is a seventeen-year-old man who graduated from high school last year. He is 5'11", friendly, a little goofy, and he really loves his family. Maleek seems very quiet, but he is really outgoing when you get to know him. He says he's not the smartest or brightest person, but he intends to always have love for school and to try his hardest

at work. Maleek likes to play basketball on the side for fun, and he likes to roller skate. His favorite subject in school is American History because he wants to learn about the past. He loves learning new things, he says, and his childhood was filled with love from family. He told me his story.

"My mother was the greatest influence in my life. Because she has been through so much, watching the way my mom took care of her children makes me want to do better. Mommy wasn't the richest person in the world, but she showed us how to make money and take care of our responsibilities.

My auntie was also very important to me, and when I was seven or eight, I lost her. Words can't explain how I felt when she died. I was so confused and sad because I couldn't show her what I could do, but I am making it up to her now by going to school and getting my degree. I wish she could watch me walk across the stage and get my degree.

My goal? To stay focused and really maintain very good grades so I can transfer into a four-year college. After that, my goal is to have a decent paying job so I can be comfortable and at ease."



P. Norfleet



Nicole's Life Lesson

by Zoe Collazo

When Nicole walked into class and started to get ready, she was wearing a white t-shirt with a pair of jeans. Nicole is a very pretty and friendly girl. She is 19 years old and lives in Milford, CT. She wears her short blonde hair down and has a nose piercing.

Nicole grew up in East Haven, CT. When asked about her childhood, Nicole says, "My childhood was good and bad. Bad because my parents got divorced. Jumping from house to house wasn't the best thing. It was really hard for me, but it was also good because things started to get better after the divorce. I started to understand why things had to be the way they were and why my parents just weren't meant to be together. Other than that, I lived a normal childhood."

Even though Nicole had a hard time when her parents got divorced, she still has a good relationship with both of them. For Nicole both her parents are the most important people in her life. She feels that without them she does not know where she would be. They are always there for her through thick and thin. Nicole's siblings are also a big part of her life. "I would feel alone without them," she says.

Nicole is a very independent girl. She has three different jobs: Subway, American Eagle and currently a day care center. With the money she earns, Nicole pays her car bill and treats herself to things like clothing, shoes, hair and nail appointments, etc.

If Nicole could go back and relive her teenage years, she would do some things differently. "I feel there is a lot more that I could have done that I never did," she tells me.

Nicole was in an unhealthy relationship in high school which caused her to lose a lot of friends. She felt like she was in lock down for three years. That held her back from doing most of the stuff she wanted to do, and she regrets it.

Moreover, Nicole learned a good lesson while she was growing up. "I learned in life that we always have to be grateful for what we have and who we have because it can be taken away from us at any time," she says. Everyone should learn Nicole's lesson because it's important to tell the people we love how grateful we are to have them in our lives.



Z. Collazo

My Brother is My Keeper

by Alosany Janneh

I was born in a small city in Guinea Conakry, but my story begins when I touched down in the United States. Growing up in the North side of Bridgeport, CT forced me straight into adulthood; therefore, it wasn't easy and there was no time for a childhood. I wasn't used to the environment around me. When I first saw the metal detectors at the entrance of the school, I realized that living in Bridgeport was no joke. I learned that I could stay safe, but only if I adapted to my new environment, and this is when my downfall began.

It all started when I wanted to fit in; however, I wanted to fit in with the wrong crowd. This wasn't the usual crowd. They used drugs, robbed and committed violence, but they were like the father I never had. I looked up to these people and I was allowed to follow them as long as I did what they said. This went on until I learned to be my own man.

By my sophomore year I had begun to learn to care for myself and make my own decisions. I had started off on the wrong foot and fell in with the wrong crowd, so I basically had to grow up on my own. Nevertheless, I didn't blame myself because I didn't know any better. Then I met my brother...

My brother had been in jail since I was born. When I finally met him, it took only fifteen minutes to feel like I knew him, and those fifteen minutes were powerful. My mother had forbidden anyone to tell me about him or that I even had a brother. We were so alike. We both started off on the wrong foot with the wrong crowd. The only difference between the two of us was that I knew how to control myself and I learned my lesson as I grew. Also, I never made the same mistake twice. My brother, on the other hand, couldn't learn any lessons from his mistakes. He was too in love with the lifestyle he was living, until he reached the final chapter of his life as a free man.

My brother went to the wrong place at the wrong time and was forced into things that lead to the killing of two people. Now he is serving more years in jail than I can even count. At the same time, he is still the most important person in my life. He steered me into a path that led me into a college seat, which I never thought I would be in.

The journey wasn't easy because I was also in love with the way I was already living. My brother told me the story about how he ended up in jail and he told me about life inside of jail; however, none of that seemed to have any effect on me. Finally, he told me that he loved me and that's when it hit.

I have never, since the day I was born, heard my brother say that he loves anyone, not his girlfriend, not even our mom. Thus, when he said it, I knew that he meant it. This hit me in many different ways and made me feel that I wanted to cry. I even had to ask him again just to make sure I had heard him right. "I love you little bro," he said again.

I felt like I was on top of the world and at that moment, I began to make decisions I never thought that I would make. "You made me feel like I could fly," I told him. "Is there anything in the world I can do to make you happy?" I asked.

"Make your mother happy and listen to her. Make her feel the same way I made you feel," he told me. This caused the biggest turn in my life. I started to focus on school and bettering myself. Now I am sitting in a college seat with a big smile on my face knowing that I am making my mother and my brother proud most of all.



Tattoos and Takeaways

by Yumarly De la Cruz

When Nate comes into the classroom, he looks through his backpack for his English notebook. Nate is tall with long arms and a fresh tattoo that reads “Teeka 5-31-18.” This tattoo is his aunt’s name, which he stares at throughout class. Nate wears an all-black outfit including a black shirt with red designs and lettering. His shoes are red too.

Nate had a good childhood. “I’m from New Haven” he says. I grew up on the west side of New Haven. My childhood was straight. I did a lot of things, made new friends. Basically kid things and that’s about it,” he tells me.

Nate liked going to school. “Overall, I enjoyed going to school. I love getting to know new people and learning new things.” Nate has a lot of vivid memories from high school. He liked baseball with friends and he also liked the teachers. Nate seems to have been impacted greatly by a teacher. “My history teacher taught me how to do things the correct way,” he says.

During the summer, Nate enjoys quality time with his family and playing his favorite sport. He told me, “During the summer I worked, worked on baseball and spent time with my family. When asked about what he would do different, if he could go back in time, Nate’s answer was, “If I could go back in time and relive my teenage years, I would take school more seriously. I would have worked harder in general and worked harder in basketball.”



Y. De la Cruz



Loss in the Family

by Nate Fuller-Morrison

Yumarly walks into class at 8:45 on the dot. She sits down at her desk wearing a marvelous pink hoodie that reads “love.” Her hair is neat; in addition, it’s well-done. She also wears a delightful, long chain with a heart on it. Yumarly is very outgoing, and she always says, “I want to be remembered as a very noble and happy person.” This really

inspired me, more than Yumarly knows.

Yumarly loves family. They always look out for her as she does for them. She pays attention to everything and takes constructive criticism very well. Yumarly started out with nothing, but worked her way to where she is now. Being able to come to Gateway is one of her biggest accomplishments. She feels that most people don’t make it to college and so being able to get here, she is very grateful. Like many of us, Yumarly has faced a lot of obstacles in her life. She lost someone in her family who she loves very much, someone she went to when times got tough. That person was her great grandmother. However, Yumarly has fought back and that’s an important characteristic to have.

Yumarly loves and appreciates her grandparents more than anyone else. Because her parents weren’t there all the time, her grandparents filled that spot so when she lost her grandmother, she lost a part of herself.

Yumarly grew up in the Dominican Republic where things can get a little rough. As a child Yumarly saw some things that a kid should not see. Growing up in the Dominican Republic left her with very painful and traumatizing memories. However, things weren’t always bad at home. As a little girl, she sometimes ran outside and played with her friends in the big fields or swam in the big rivers. She also remembers playing in the rain for hours. Yumarly cherished life in her hometown.



N. Fuller-Morrison



Adversity for Diversity

by Nicole Phelps

There is a lesson to be learned in any given interaction, situation, or happening. The idea is that you can always take or learn something from the people around you. I found my recent interview with my classmate Zoe, who does have a very different life than me, to be influential and interesting to say the least.

Through speaking with Zoe, I have become more aware of the different lifestyles and hardships the people around me endure and how those hardships may affect them. Zoe is a native Spanish speaker. She is from Ponce, Puerto Rico and currently lives in a large one-parent household. Zoe moved to the United States when she was about twelve years old.

The life that Zoe has lived up to this point has been everything but easy. The separation of a family never stress-free and I bow down to Zoe for keeping a smile on her face and pushing through. “My childhood wasn’t normal. When I was three-years-old, my dad abandoned me and my siblings. He went to live with another family and never spoke to us,” Zoe tells me.

On top of losing her dad, Zoe had to learn how to help take care of her family at a very young age. “I have two sisters who have epilepsy,” Zoe tells me. “They are both older than me, but I was around six or seven when I began to help my mom take care of them. Even though I was a child, I had to start learning some responsibilities, but I would do it all over again for my mom and my siblings.” Zoe is a strong, caring person and even though she has faced obstacles she continues to put her family first. Zoe was almost forced to become the person she is today. She was even willing to give up her childhood.

The obstacles Zoe has faced have made her the strong, brave, independent woman she is today. The struggles she went through not only taught her but also forced her to be responsible. Zoe says, “I wouldn’t change anything in my life because all the things I went through growing up taught me the reality of life. They also taught me to strong and brave.” Zoe looks at life different from many others.



N. Phelps



God

by Maleek Wray

Patricia Norfleet, otherwise known as Pat, has lived in Connecticut for her entire life. She went to Lee High School and graduated in 1982. Pat is very kind and outgoing, and she loves to swim and to be involved in church activities. Most of all, she really loves her family.

“I have three sisters and four brothers, and I am the mother of four boys and three girls. I’ve been married to my husband for thirty-one years and we have been together for forty-one years. Through everything with my family, God has been with me.

The word ‘God’ means a lot to me because I talk to Him every day and really believe in Him. One of my darkest, scariest moments happened when I lost two of my sons. For some time, I was in pain, at a loss for words, and just so confused about how something like this could’ve happened. So, I went to my biggest influencer, God. One day I looked up to the sky and closed my eyes and started praying to God, and I suddenly felt so free for the first time since this tragedy.

God gave me lessons that I will hang on to forever. What He told me was to treat people the way you want to be treated. He helped me to forgive and to help in the same token, meaning “a good deed for people will change their hearts.” Doing good deeds for people is my payback, and I hope that will change someone’s heart forever.

God has helped me out in the craziest, most terrible moments of my life, and He was never too late to heal me. God has had my back at every step and has taught me to show peace and love to everyone, and that’s what we need to strengthen this world. He’s teaching me lessons that are still sticking with me till this day. And I can never thank Him enough.



M. Wray

A New Life Away from Home

Juliana Ruggiero

Andrea is 22 years old, and one look at her tells you that she is honest and kind. One of the things Andrea enjoys the most is lending a helping hand to the elderly. She says this is her favorite thing to do because, “They all remind me of my grandparents.” She thinks of her grandparents and hopes that they get the help they need back home in Mexico without her being there. Andrea is a proud person, but she says she can get angry quickly when things don’t go right, and sometimes she has difficulty controlling her emotions. She left her home country of Mexico to come to the U.S. with no one but her mom and brother by her side. “If I had to pick the two most important people in my life, they would be my mom and brother,” says Andrea.

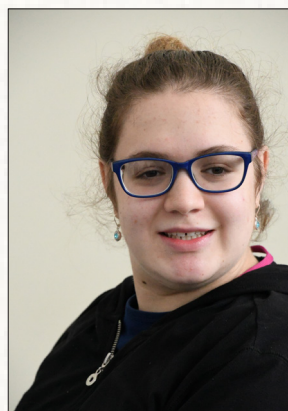
I came to the United States from Mexico where I had lived for 13 years of my life. When I transitioned here from Mexico, it was difficult. I left my whole life behind, including my grandparents, friends, and most of my family. I had to basically start my life from scratch, and I didn’t even know how to speak English. I had zero friends, nor did I know who my real family was, as I had left them back in Mexico. I was miserable when I first came here. In fact, I thought about moving back home for a long time because I wanted to return to the life I had left behind. The only people I had for family were my mom and brother.

I didn’t have a dad for most of my childhood. My mom was always with me, and she was the one who stepped up to raise my brother and myself. It’s hard having an absent parent because it’s like one of the most important pieces of your family is not there. Every girl should grow up with a dad as part of her life. I, however, didn’t have one, and I felt as though I was missing out. For a long time, I thought I would never get to feel or know what it would be like to have a dad or any kind of father figure around to watch me grow or nurture me. That was until my brother decided to step up to the plate.

My brother raised me by taking the role of dad. He helped me with homework, taught me how to play soccer, and showed me how to ride a bike. He took me to everywhere he went. Wherever he was, I was right by his side. He was more of a dad to me than my real dad. Although he earned the title of big brother when I was born, he now has the title of dad from his little sister because he is and always will be my father figure.

Looking back, my mom went through a lot of struggles with my dad. Despite every obstacle she faced with him, she was very unselfish. After my brother and I were born, she put her life on hold, dropped everything, and put us both first. The only thing she wished for me and my brother was for us to have successful lives. She’s always been by both of our sides through everything, good and bad.

My mom and brother are the best people I know and are my inspirations. I wouldn’t trade or change them for the world. They were there for me no matter what, and for that I’m forever grateful. They made me the woman I am today.



J. Ruggiero



From The Bottom to the Top

by Shameen Brown

I grew up in a hospital basement. No exaggeration. It was a basement.

My name Is Alberto Bermudez and this is MY story. Growing up, I was bad and always fighting in school, and when I was expelled, it changed my life forever. When I was six years old, I was put in a “special program for bad kids.” Every kid had a separate, small room, and there was not really much to do. I woke up every day alone, ate breakfast alone, and I pretty much did everything alone. Don’t get me wrong; there were plenty of kids there, but I just wasn’t the mingling type. I remember my arm being sore from the flu shots and other shots I was given to keep me calm. The worst thing was that I missed my family because I only got to see them once a week.

When I was in this program, I missed my older brother the most. He was and is still a big part of my life. I lived in that “basement” for about seven years, up until the age of thirteen, and it was the best feeling ever when I got out. I got to see my brother and I have calmed down a lot since being in that place. I started boxing, and I would never have thought that it could teach me so much. Boxing taught me not to be greedy, to humble myself, and never to take anything for granted. I always thought about those seven years in the basement; they were the worst, and I did not want to end up in a place like that again.

Throughout my life I’ve been up against many different adversities, I don’t let them knock me off my pivot or slow me down. I just shake it off and adjust. That’s kind of really all I know, but it has gotten me this far, so why give up now?



S. Brown



To Feel Comfortable in your Own Skin Shouldn't be too Much to Ask

by Izzy Briers

It's 8:30 a.m. and Messiah walks in English class; a lack of sleep hangs under their dark almost black eyes. Today they have stepped out of their comfort zone and dressed in a way that truly matches their identity. Messiah oozes confidence with long hair falling down around a tight light orange top. Messiah's makeup is done with a deep red lip color

lining their lips. Their lashes seem to curl up to the ceiling and silky smooth long hair flows freely. Everyday Messiah surprises the class with the art they make on themselves. However, today I notice that Messiah speaks softly. The fear of today's clothing choices are clear; however, Messiah doesn't know just how jaw-dropping today's look is. There is fear in finally the being the person one chooses.

Messiah has struggled with not being accepted. "I never fit in; I was an easy target." Nevertheless, this has not stopped them from doing what they love. "Drawing, makeup, fashion, and art have always been my escape, a way to block out a world full of hate."

When I see the way Messiah draws along with the way they walk with confidence about finally dressing and acting as they choose, I see the hopes and dreams of who Messiah see's themselves. A true artistic talent that must be seen, and to feel comfortable in your own skin shouldn't be too much to ask. Unfortunately what is beautiful on the outside may be struggling and upset on the inside.

Messiah has experienced tragedy. It's been two long years since their brother unexpectedly passed away. Messiah tells me they had plans of going to Gateway Community College together. "He was the only one to understand me." When Messiah speaks, I can see the far-away, solemn look in their eyes as though suddenly it's that night again. "Losing him is like losing a part of myself. I won't ever get back. You'll never get over the death of a sibling. They're the one person who knows you best. He was my biggest supporter in life."

Ever since joining Gateway Community, Messiah feels they are more open and accepted. Speaking with a content smile, Messiah tells me, "It's a good change."

Messiah has many battles to fight; however, I can already witness the growth they have made. There's always room for growth and every day the smile on Messiah's face grows wider.



