

IN OUR WORDS



NASHVILLE ADULT LITERACY COUNCIL
LEARNER & TUTOR STORIES

Nashville Adult Literacy Council Presents

In Our Words

2023 Learner and Tutor Stories

The following stories have been written by adult learners, tutors, and staff of the Nashville Adult Literacy Council.



**Nashville Adult
Literacy Council**

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Acknowledgments

The Nashville Adult Literacy Council would like to thank all of the learners and tutors who have contributed to this year’s edition of *In Our Words*.

We would also like to thank our staff and board members (listed below) for their continuing dedication to our mission.

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NALC Values

In keeping with NALC's values, students were encouraged to write freely and tell their story in their own words, regardless of skill level, topic, or future goals. They were reminded that learning can be fun, and there is no shame in our mistakes because mistakes are just part of the process. Join us in the following pages as we support and admire the journey of Nashville's adult learners.

Literacy matters.

Literacy is how we all understand and are understood in the world. Reading, writing, speaking, and listening are essential – and remarkable – acts of human connection. Literacy transforms the experience of living.

Curiosity leads to confidence.

When we work hard and stay focused, we can achieve our goals at any age. It can be difficult, so it's okay to feel frustrated, but when we stay patient and curious, we can keep improving.

Learning can be fun.

This is a safe place where there is no shame in our mistakes, because mistakes are just part of the process. They show we are trying. Instead, we try to have fun with our lessons, because laughter makes learning a joy.

Everyone is different.

We are all individuals with unique strengths and needs. We are encouraged to ask for what we need so we can make progress.

Every goal is important.

We value and prioritize each individual's reason to learn, including – but not limited to – working toward a new job, earning a degree, obtaining healthcare, shopping independently, making friends, helping a child with homework, or writing a love letter for the very first time.

Together is better.

This all works because we don't do it alone. We partner through mutual responsibility, accountability, respect, trust, and kindness.

We are all lifelong learners.

Students, employees, volunteers, and supporters of NALC all remain open to new learning experiences. Using data, we enthusiastically and continuously question what we know and how we do things so we can grow our impact. Together, we share the angst and the thrill of learning new things that make the world better.

Foreword

Dear Donors, Volunteers, Students, and Supporters,



With fall again upon us, a friend said to me how sad it is to see the leaves drop from the trees. “Everything looks dead,” he said. His expression even looked like he was at a funeral.

That’s not how I see it at all.

The colorful leaves falling remind me of a curtain dropping after an incredible theatrical show. And then, preparations begin for the next season.

In winter, I’m reminded of the time I got to see “O” by Cirque du Soleil in Las Vegas. I was there for work and bought a cheap, last-minute ticket that had me sitting all the way to the right. I was so far to the edge, I could see backstage. Before the show started, the backstage was busy and active and alive, like chaotic bees building a hive, everyone filling a role. The audience in the “good seats” stared idly at the bare stage, as if to say, “Nothing is happening yet.” But I...I was already enjoying a show.

We’re told nature slumbers in winter, but the tiniest, electric-green bud blows this cover story. Nature doesn’t sleep! It goes backstage, and it prepares. Those falling leaves are the energy source for next spring’s growth – what a wonderful production!

IN OUR WORDS

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the Nashville Adult Literacy Council (NALC) has been working “backstage” to transform our services to be delivered online. If you drive by our office that was once filled with people, you might think we’ve been sleeping. But like nature, we’ve actually been busy and active, preparing for what is next. Thanks to your support, we’ve improved the quality of our programs such that learners are staying longer and receiving better instruction than ever. Everything is new and vibrant and ready to grow.

There is just one thing that hasn’t changed: the waitlist. At any given time, we have more than 300 people waiting six months or longer for literacy services. But they aren’t just waiting for literacy...they’re waiting to get better jobs, talk to doctors, read to children, and do all the other things literate people do every day. They’re waiting to grow.

This is NALC’s season to grow. It’s time. We’re ready. To move people from our waitlist into their transformed futures, our two greatest needs are 1) monetary donations and 2) volunteer tutors. Please help learners at NALC by donating, volunteering your time, and sharing this message with others.

We appreciate your kindness, and in the following pages, you’ll see the optimism, gratitude, and joy your support brings. Thank you for sharing this gift of literacy. This year, join us as we grow into giving.

Sincerely,



Kim Karesh, CEO

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Learner Submissions

The following pieces have been submitted by learners. Some have also been included in our monthly student newsletter, *In Our Words*, which is emailed to all active learners once a month. This newsletter is also a place for learners to share celebrations and staff to share organization updates with learners on a regular basis.

My Future Plan

— Chika

I want to be a medical interpreter because I am originally from Japan and speak Japanese. I am currently working in a hospital and realize that many immigrants are not comfortable visiting doctor's offices because of communication problems. I like helping people, so I believe this is the perfect job for me. To become an interpreter, I need to do a few things.

First, I need to improve my English skills and build confidence. I am grateful that I found NALC. I needed help and clear direction for my future. My counselor, Ms. Maggie from NALC; my former teacher, Mr. Daniel and my tutor, Mrs. Edith, are supporting me. I have been taking lessons since last year, and I have learned so much.

I must take an ALTA test and pass to enroll into the medical interpreter class. ALTA test is the one of the global seals of biliteracy's test. Unfortunately, I failed the test this summer. However, I will not give up. Since I moved to the U.S., I stopped dreaming and set limits on my abilities. I made excuses because I came from a foreign country. NALC gave me an opportunity to dream again. I met many people who want to be successful even though they are from different countries.

Many foreigners move to the U.S. with hopes and dreams including me. I want to be a successful woman. If I want to succeed in my dream, I need to make a good plan and work hard. Now, I believe I am ready to work.

What is a Dream Job?

— Isabel Moreno

For some people a dream job is the one that lets them make a lot of money, for some others it is the one that lets them enjoy what they do, and for others it is the one where they find balance between money and enjoying what they like to do. For me, at this stage of my life, it is the balance between money and enjoying what I like to do.

Along my life I have had three different dream jobs. The first one was when I finished high school. At that moment my dream job was to be a psychologist, but unfortunately my parents didn't have enough money to pay for this career, and also I did not have any scholarship opportunities. My second dream job was born when I came to this country, and this was to become an immigration lawyer, and one more time the money was my obstacle, but it wasn't the only one, the time and the language were added to this. My third one, and the most reachable dream is to work for the school system supporting immigrant families by providing information and resources of better opportunities for their children. It is sad that a lot of children with great intellectual potential do not achieve their dreams due to the lack of information and support.

Maybe tomorrow my dream job will be different, but for now this is my dream job, and I'm going to do everything I can to try to reach it.

A Girl and Her Unusual Dream

— Sabrina Lima

She didn't want to be a princess. She didn't care much about her hairstyle or wanted to live in a mansion. She had the chance to study and had a good job. But she didn't make plans about getting rich despite always having worked hard. She always had a dream, one no one could ever imagine. She wanted to drive a truck.

This Brazilian woman could never imagine that this dream would come true one day. She was from a country where women weren't used to driving heavy vehicles. The law does not forbid it. It's just a cultural thing. Now it's getting more common, but the truth is that you rarely see a woman driving buses or big trucks in Brazil.

This woman moved to the United States. In her daily errands, she started seeing a lot of women driving school buses, and she admired them. She didn't want to be a professional driver; she just wondered about how cool it would be to have the chance to drive a truck once and couldn't ever imagine that this day would arrive.

She was living in Pennsylvania with her family when her husband was hired to start a new job in Tennessee. They decided to make the move themselves. Despite some friends' contrary opinions, they rented a U-Haul to drive all the way down to Tennessee. They would also need to tow a car for this

almost 12-hour drive. Since they have kids, they tried to make the trip smoother and divided it into two days.

Her husband knew she wanted to drive the truck. They had a good conversation, and he would never try to make her give up on this. This was her chance to make her dream come true, and she took it. The first day of driving was fun, even though she felt tired. However, the second day was exhausting. She was driving the truck while her husband was driving their car. He asked to take the truck in her place because he was worried about her. However, she would never accept this.

She arrived in their new home with very swollen legs. She was feeling so good, although her body was hurting. It was a victory. She was starting a new life in this fantastic place, feeling strong and ready for this chapter of her life.

Now please let me tell you one last secret. This girl was me. Driving this truck was like a great moment for me. I hope you also have the chance to make your wildest dreams come true.

Nowroz Plans

— Leila Taherifar

My husband and I are looking forward to next month for Nowroz: Nowroz is our new year. We will have a traditional holiday. We're going to go to Fall Creek Falls for a picnic in the morning and afternoon. We're going to hike several miles. We're going to grill and drink fire tea and I'll take a lot of pictures. We'll enjoy our plan.

Past Continuous Tense Mystery Story

— Low Intermediate English Class

This is a group writing from our online, Low Intermediate English class. Students in the class worked together to create this story!

What were you doing and saying when something scary and funny happened at our English Class?

Marnie was teaching our English Class when Aml heard a loud noise. Aml was mute and Ane was laughing when it happened. While this was going on, Angy asked, "Ane, why are you laughing?" Ane said, "A balloon was popping with my kids." Djorffre said, "Keep quiet everybody. Look outside. Someone is coming."

When Emly saw an intruder, Haidy was really scared. Jenny said to them, “Come down everybody!” Then Martina went to the kitchen. She saw Mei Qiu there. While Martina was watching her, Mei Qiu was cooking some chicken and fried rice and she put the food in the bowl.

Meanwhile, Sharon was taking the class. Simon saw Sharon and asked, “What subject are you learning?” Sharon replied, “I’m learning grammar in Burlington English.” While Sharon was learning grammar, Tetiana made some flashcards. Djorffre said, “I like Burlington English, but I’m really busy because I work from 2 pm to 3 am. I wake up at 9 am. So I can do homework a little on Saturday and Sunday.” Then all the students explained to Marnie, “We were focusing on you when the intruder made a noise.”

The students called 911 and the police came. When the police arrived, the intruder was trying to escape. The police had a big dog who tried to catch the man. When the police caught up with him, the man said, “I didn’t do anything.”

The police took the man to a judge. The man explained, “I was trying to join the English class!”

Shaved Ice!

— Karol Loyola

Five years ago my mom was very unhealthy, but my mom was always working. This time no work for her health. Sometimes she cried. Mom told all her children in a meeting, I need to work. My life is terrible. My brother said, Calm please. It's possible next year you are better health and you can work then, but my mom only cried.

Then one day my mom tell me, Karol I make a shaved ice. Help me please. I respond my mom, I give money to you. She says, No, No, I need to work. My mom then made much shaved ice. Then I speak with my siblings, Please I need help me. I will go to the beach and sell shaved ice of my mom. Come with me.

My sister laughed and say, Are you crazy? You are a lawyer, I am a professional too. No, No. Then I call my brothers. Come with me to the beach. I need to sell shaved ice. My brother and sister came with me. We tell the people at the beach, Buy, Buy shaved ice! My brother put on sunglasses and a hat so you cannot recognize him. Then we say, Shaved Ice, Shaved Ice!

This day sold shaved ice. Returned my home with the money. Told my mom, this is for your work. Mom is happy and says, I will make more shaved ice for next week, and we all shouted, Shaved ice!!! Now when I remember with my siblings, we laugh for this story. We did many things together because we are almost the same age.

My Experience Learning English and Living in Nashville

— Yoko Kawamura

It's been a year when I came to US. For the first six months, I was just trying to organize our life, especially my sons' schools. Fortunately, they are enjoying school life in US little by little, surrounded by kind teachers and friends. Well, how about me? I have always enjoyed learning about Western culture and learning English, so I can hold a simple conversation. But....If I go to the supermarket, I can shop and use self-checkout. McDonald's has touch-screen ordering and paying. Online ordering makes it easy to order even Starbucks' complex customized drinks. I can get what I want shopping on Amazon without having to talk to a store clerk. I can read letters from my sons' schools in seconds, if I put them into Google Translate. If I watched YouTube in my native language and met only with friends in my native language community then I am not part of US. Can I say I am in US, but I'm not yet confident in my life in US. With this mind, I decided to learn conversational English in NALC.

I have been taking online lessons twice a week for the past 6 months. My tutor, Laurie is very supportive and passionate in my progress with English. She gives me different kinds of homework. For example, having a small talk with moms of my son's soccer teammates. She knows that speaking English outside of class is an important part of improving my English. Learning another country's language is not easy. Sometimes

I can speak well, but when I talk to a different person on another day, it doesn't go well. I continue to be depressed and happy over and over again. The time I spend talking with her on ZOOM is a lot of fun for me. Maybe it is because she is a great human being. She does a lot of volunteer work. Teaching English to me is also a volunteer activity. Is there anything I can do to not only express my gratitude to her and to pay it forward? I was told that are volunteers who speak Japanese with Vanderbilt University students who are studying Japanese. If I can be of any help to anyone in Nashville, I guess I could say I'm part of the Nashville community. I'm really looking forward to my second year living in the US!

My Adventure:

“Across seas never sailed before...”

inspired by Luís Vaz de Camões, Portuguese writer

— Fabrício Ramos dos Santos

In this compendium of stories, “In Our Words,” readers will be able to know a little better about the personal and collective dramas of people who embarked on the same adventure that I embarked on one day: living in the USA and learning a new language, English. For a long time the human being has ventured in search of new places to live, our curiosity and intrepidity launched us to the sea in the 15th and 16th centuries (1501-1600), in the period of the great navigations, undertaken by the Europeans, who led to the discovery of the Americas. Overcoming real and imaginary

dangers they discovered new maritime routes that led to an intense globalization by the Portuguese and Spanish. 500 years after the Maritime Expansion human beings continue to venture around the world, moved by the same feeling that boosted the “first” navigators in search of the “New World,” this curiosity and sagacity in tackling the unconvinced led us to a space race led by Americans and Russians. On July 20, 1969, the Americans conquered Space by stepping on the Moon.

This human characteristic has moved and continues to move nations in this same adventurous and pioneering spirit continues to drive individuals around the world, the immigration movement is intense and many are looking for better living conditions including freedom, protection, and religious freedom. And many choose the United States as land to call home.

I had my reasons, like many others, for coming to the United States of America, perhaps my reasons were no different than the others, but I came to stay, I did not come to this country to “try to make America”, a phrase that is often repeated among the Latino immigrants who come to America with the aim of earning money and fortune and returning to their countries of origin. I came fleeing violence and to get to my family who already lived here. When I decided to move to this country, I had left behind of many things, people and feelings. I had to leave my puppy, the house where I was born and raised, my toys, my collection of cards from the 1994, 1998 and 2002 soccer world championships, my childhood friends, my colleagues from school, college friends, cousins and relatives.

I had to pack everything I wanted to take with me in two carryable suitcases. I left half of my heart there in Brazil and brought the other half with me to plant in this country. After years of living here I had a lot of difficulties, but I got over them. I can say that life gave me the best I could even ask for. Life give me new friends in America, friends I can call best friends. Now I collect baseball cards, I learned to like sweet tea, fried chicken and mashed potatoes. Thanksgiving is my favorite holiday, but I still missing Carnaval. I still don't having a new dog and I don't think I will ever have another one, but I have no doubt I love this land. God bless the United States of America.

I'm grateful for everything I've achieved on this land, my first car for example, simple things like being able to take my mother to a good restaurant on the weekends. The half of my heart that brought with me I planted in this land and this grew and became a whole heart. I am learning to speak English and getting to know the culture and America history has been an incredible journey full of challenges. I still have a dream of buying my own house in this country and maybe one day return to be a nurse in the USA and be an active and productive citizen, helping as many people as possible. When I left Brazil I couldn't imagine everything that would happen to me in this land that I love so much today and learned to call HOME, when you chase a dream success will come with readjustments and restarts "... It's not always a straight line, it's not always an easy path." That's what Barack Obama said in his victory speech in 2012.

I want to tell you something I suffered prejudice I suffered social stigma of just being an immigrant, I want to share with you guys some poems that helped me not to give up:

“I’m nothing. I’ll never be nothing. I can’t want to be anything. I’ll always be the person who waited for someone to open the door at the foot of a wall without doors. Apart from that, I have it in me all the dreams of the world, I have it in me all the dreams of the world in me.” Fernando Pessoa, (1888-1935) Portuguese poet.

I’m not giving up now, neither are you, never give up, you never know if someone is taking inspiration from you.

Untitled

— Janiree Noriega

My name is Janiree Noriega. I’m from Venezuela and 4 years ago we arrived in this country. This meant a big change in our lives. It was an opportunity to learn a lot of new things. One thing that I love is the different seasons because in my country they do not exist. I like spring for the beautiful and different flowers. During the fall I like to see the trees change colors. For the first time in my life I saw snow in the winter and it was amazing.

Untitled

— Snahider Vega

Hello, it's Snahider Vega again. Maybe you might remember me. I wrote in last year's book and I talked about my experience. In 2021 I started my journey learning the English language and the experience was very good. But I never thought how great it would be to learn English and meet amazing people. My new life in this country is incredible. We are happy now, though we had a difficult start. We are more comfortable here thanks to the NALC team. The people are professional and passionate. My wife and I are very grateful for them. Learning English is easy and fun thanks to them.

Untitled

— Marionth Escalante

Oh dear, I was thinking about what to say and what to write. I was putting myself into a bunch of scenarios, considering each of my steps and trying to make some sense of my crazy life. Like that time I wished time would pass quickly and I'd become an adult. What nonsense! It's funny, I think. When you are a child, the only thing you want in life is to grow up and be an adult, to become what you always dreamed of being. But when you are an adult, your fondest dream is to enjoy your childhood days again. What a life!

I would like to remember the day when adult life knocked on my door. If I could just give that event shape, texture, and color, I think it would be like a “magic” floating box. Just imagine it, a day like any other, having fun at home and suddenly a floating package with a beautiful sign that says, “Open me and see what awaits you” knocks on your door letting you know that it’s time to grow up and climb another step on the ladder of the life. How scary, honestly! I would never open the door, much less that magic box! I would stay like a little girl for life!

But life is not like that, nobody and nothing notifies you when the day comes when you finally need to mature and grow up. There is no magic box that teaches you to make the best decisions or at least how to be less wrong. There are no instructions or manuals that can save you. (I’m sure we’d all like one of those, but there aren’t any). We had to learn along the way and make mistakes several times before understanding what the right decision was. We had to stop being children and get on the roller coaster of adult life without being prepared. We had to adapt and continue without asking ourselves many times if that was really what we wanted for our lives, and we spend our lives asking for time to achieve what we believe will be our moment of ecstasy and success.

Don’t get me wrong; I don’t like being an adult at all. I declare myself a little girl until someone proves me otherwise!

Why I Want to be a Nurse

— John Faust

I want to help people. I am very good at listening and being kind to people. I am very good at paying attention to details. As a nurse, it is important to do the job right.

A good nurse needs the desire to help people, because the patients need help. They are looking for someone to help and understand them, when the answer is not clear.

When patients are in pain, there are times they can lose focus. Listening to the patient can help them understand the process and let them know you are helping them.

A Panda Bear Eats All of Crystal's Food

— A. L. W.

One day, Crystal came home and was trying to figure out who was eating all of the food out of the refrigerator. She came home early and saw a panda bear sitting on the couch watching The Big Bang Theory and eating caramel corn. The panda bear jumped up and said, "Hey there, Crystal, what it do!"

My Story

— Humberto Doval

I am from Cuba and I have been in Nashville for 44 years. I like Nashville, but I do not like when it is cold. I like it more when it is warm. I like to work. I like to dress well and use cologne. I am from a good family in Cuba, but I like living in Nashville. I want to learn English and reading, so that I can have a better life. I want to obtain my driver's license so I am able to drive without problems with the law, because I am a good citizen. I am learning to read better so I can take the driver's test. I like to walk around Nashville, but I am excited to drive and have a better future.

Good and Bad News for 2023 – How Life's Supposed to Be

— Ahmed Makuag

Three weeks ago I took my daughter to University of Memphis. It's my first one in our family to go to the university. I really happy about that. I'm glad to give NALC a happy story about my family. She was very excited because she's the first in our family to go to the university. My mom in Sudan wanted to come see it, but she says she's too old and cannot make it. But she is very proud.

We went there and I see all the buildings where she will

take the classes, and then after I find her an apartment. She will room with her cousin, so she won't be too lonely. She not gonna be worrying a lot because she has her cousin with her.

I take them shopping. We went to Kroger and it's very close, like one mile away from her apartment. I took her to our cousin house, she live like 15 minutes away from the university. I meet with them and if she need them, she can go with them. They say any time she want to go over, she can stay with them.

I think in October she will come home for a visit, or we can go there. They have a time when family can come. She wants us to make African food for her. I talk to her on the phone every day to be sure she is doing OK. She just turned 18 on September 2nd.

She say she started class and she has a lot of homework. "It's a lot of jobs, Daddy," she said to me. But I told her to work hard, push herself, I don't need her to be Uber driver like me. I still have two more kids, they will learn from her. They are in 9th grade and 7th grade, so they will learn from her and they can see what college look like. They will push themselves to go to college too.

The bad news, I had bad accident in April 14 with my car. It was a total loss. Someone hit me in the back by Nissan stadium, and I went to emergency room for 8 hour. I have no car for a couple months. I don't have time to meet with my beautiful teacher. But now we will start again soon. Finally, I

will go back to school at NALC, and I thank them to work hard for us. They always ask us if we need help, they never forget about us, we pray for them to help us. That's good and we love our teachers at the school, it's a very good school to help everybody for free.

So I had some bad news, but some very happy news this year. This is how life has to be, you have some good and some bad, it all comes from God, so I'm happy for that.

IN OUR WORDS

Burlington English Prompts

Burlington English is the online English Language Learning platform that we use in classes and tutoring. As part of our lessons, many students are prompted to write about themselves and their lives. In the following pages you'll find a variety of writing based on these prompts.

Prompt 1: Write about yourself.

— Shamal

I used to live in Kurdistan. I moved to the United States in 2021. My wife helped me when I moved here. She was born in the United States in 1995. Right now I live in Nashville, Tennessee. Currently I have a full time job. One day I will go to college again to get a degree.

— Yvo

My name is Yvo.
I am from Venezuela.
I came to America to get an education.
I live in Nashville, TN.
I work as a driver and musician.
I study English at morning.
In the future, I want to be a Lawyer.

— Naomi Watanabe

I used to live in Tokyo, Japan then I got married in 2009.

I moved to Fukuoka in 2010 and I had my first son in 2011 and my second son in 2014. I returned in Tokyo 2014.

I had my daughter in 2018.

I moved to North Carolina, United States in 2019. There were many new things to learn. My husband's coworker helped us find my kid's school and doctor and they introduce American life.

Today, I live in Franklin, Tennessee.

I'm taking care of 3 kids and learning English. I hope I will speak English more.

— L. S.

I am from Colombia. I have a part-time job as a Au pair. I moved to the U.S in 2022. My first's months wasn't easy because I'm originally speak Spanish so the communication in English it's difficult. One months later I did start take to class for improve my English. I am studying English because I want get a better job and improve my skills with the English.

Prompt 2: Write a description of your personality and the job that you think is right for you.

— Tamara Rakhnina

What kind of person am I? I'm polite. I treat other people with respect and understanding and I always try to help people in anyway I can. I'm sociable. I try to keep up a conversation with people on different topics. I'm smart. I'm always interested in new information on various topics. My friends are interested in talking to me.

What should I do for a living? I think I should become a librarian. Librarian has to be smart, polite and sociable. I like to communicate with people and participate in different activities. I can also build relationships with others and can help library users with useful information. For all these reasons, I think a job as a librarian is right for me.

— A. K.

My name is Aluet. I would like to describe myself as an open and honey preson, and not afraid to face the challenge. I'm a hard working and driven individual, I'm passionat about my cooking and i know how get the job done.

— R. Y.

What kind of people am I? I am a little bit shy. My friends say I am an honest man. I always help people to do some mechanic fixing.

What should I do for a living? I think I am not good at communicating with people, but I always can do the job very well by myself. So I choose to be a trader in the finance market. You must be calm down and think on your feet. You should be lonely.

— Faten

What kind of person am I? I'm empathetic. I try to understand people's feelings. My friends say I'm very kind. I always help people. I'm also practical. I solve any problem with my children. What should I do for a living? I think I should become a teacher. A teacher has to be empathetic, kind, and practical. My children sometimes feel frustrated. I need to understand this and help them to solve any problem. For these reasons I think a job as a teacher is right for me.

— Alex Nguyen

I am empathetic and outgoing. I love to meet new people, have conversations and always try to understand their feelings. I am a kind person and I usually help everyone. I am interested in medicine and work out a lot to be healthy. I

always stay calm under pressure when I solve difficult problems and feel happy to see everyone stay strong. Therefore, I think I should be a nurse. A nurse has to be empathetic, kind, calm, and healthy. I need to be courteous and empathetic in order to listen to my patients. I can talk and take time with them. I help patients feel more comfortable and stay healthy in order to prevent diseases. Becoming a nurse is a job that fits with my personality traits.

— A. B.

If I could make an alias of myself, how would she be? The other Ana would be the most calm person in the world. Would not be anxious, nor multitask. Would stop trying to do several things at the same time, that makes her losing focus of the important ones sometimes. I would keep her empathy, because it is a bless to understand people's feeling, putting herself in the other's feet. I would also maintain her outgoing way of living. It is good to talk and know new people. Also would keep her love for outdoor activities, like hiking, biking and running. It keeps her healthy and physically fit.

What would she do for living? Ana's alias needs a challenging job. She would be hungry for learning new things, always. Being a translator would be a great job for her. Because, translating is a non stop challenge, no matter the genre of the book. It is a hard work even to whom is really fluent in both languages. It is not merely a matching words play, nor an endless search of the atmospheres and new scenarios. It is also the art of keeping the author's voice without accent. That is hardest challenge.

Prompt 3: Write about a positive school experience.

— A. K.

My name is Aluet. i came to unite state fourteen years ago. when i come to America didn't speak English like i speak now. year ago i start English class online and i become an English speaker. i like online class because it very easy for me, i don't have to drive.

My negative experience ended with a good habit.

— Maria Isabel Moreno

Where I grew up parents allow teachers to hit students if they do mistakes on the sagments, so when was in the elementary school I had very bad experiences because this reason.

The teacher usually went over the lesson with the students, and then he called one studen in front to solve an excersice, and he usually picked the ones that do the most mistakes or the most BURROS (how used to call them). Everytime a student passed in front to solve an excersice the teacher said "Don't forget that every wrong answer is five hits with my stick on your hands." No one wanted to pass to the board because we were afraid to do mistakes and get hit. I was so afraid and tired to get hit, so told my self "No more hits with the stick." And soon I become with a solution.

— Faten

My first English class was a excited. When i moved to U.S. four years ago. I wanted to continue my Education quickly. So i enrolled in Hiset program. But i did not good in Hiset program. Ms, Maria said, "Don't be a rush you have to improve your English first to be good with your Hiset."

I enrolled in an English class first i scard to make mistaks. But Ms, Sousan said, "It's ok to make mistaks, We are her to learn from your mistaks."

Today my English is well and I enrolled again to Hiset program. I'm so happy to be continue my Education.

— A. B.

The positive school experience I had was when i started to face my fear of failure. I had all kinds of fear, from class assignments to job interviews.

I was afraid of not being accepted by my colleagues, teachers and future employees. I was nervous that my spoken English level would be a barrier to get a job, even though speaking the language would not be a requirement, but a plus.

In the beginning of my student years, I felt like I would fail in all oral tests. Before the graduation, the fear of failure grew

really strong. I was sure I would fail in the exams and in all intern job interviews. The fear would black out my mind, and would freeze my ability to think.

A teacher, a really kind lady, helped me to build confidence in my skills. It worked.

“Fear of failure is an invisible stone blocking our mind. By building self-confidence, we free our mind, being able to display the best of our knowledge.”

Even knowing how to manage my fears, it is a battle to be faced day by day.

— Raissa Amah

When I first started computer class, I was scared to touch the computer. I was embarrassed when I made mistakes. But I needed to perform in computer science to get better job. so I enrolled in an computer class.

When our teacher told us that we had to give a presentation in front of the class, I didn't think I could do it. My teacher said, “it will help you build confidence. It's important to do difficult things, even when they scare you.”

I practiced alot with the key board. When the day finally arrived, i was very nervous. But after I gave my presentation, I felt really good. I spoke with my teacher. “You were right. Now

that I've done it, I feel less nervous about working on computer," I said.

Today, I'm a warehouse associate. I'm working on computer at work. I'll always remember that it's ok to be scared to do something difficult. But you should still do it.

Prompt 4: Write an essay about your goals.

— Krisha Dioteles

I have many goals in life that keeps me motivated and driven. One of which is to have a successful art business. As a self-taught artist, my journey began when my husband gave me a painting set on my birthday. It led me to experiment with canvas and explore my creativity.

Despite working in a restaurant during the day, I devote my free afternoons to my passion to art. Witnessing the magic of my paintings translating into a source of income has been a truly exhilarating experience to me.

While Instagram has been a great platform for me to attract customers, I now aspire to showcase my artwork on Etsy to expand my reach and sales. Additionally, I plan to create a professional website to further establish my brand.

I am confident that I can make it happen with my dedication and consistency. With every brush stroke, I believe that I am one step closer to my dream of building a successful art business.

— Su Jung Yoon

I have a goal that interact with americans.

Right now, I have two sons who were born in America and we are going to stay here for a while. I have met very close korean friends about 2 years during the Covid. However, I need to interact with americans since my first son started to go to pre-k. I found myself to be afraid of having a small talk with teachers and other moms and tried to step back from meeting. I realized that I should set up my mind and interact with americans.

To achieve my goal, I can make my own list of examples to match different occasion. It will take a time to adjust in my life but I know this is best way to reach my goal.

— Kathy Zhang

I want to graduate from M.E. Civil Engineering Program in 2 years.

I did not like my major when I studied at university 30 years ago. I wasted 4 years in the university and it took me 5 years to explore my career. When I got the opportunity to study M.E. Civil Engineering Program at TSU, I thought it was a good opportunity to improve my working ability and my knowledge of project management. Since I had worked as Cost Control Manager in industry engineering companies for more than 20 years. I think if I graduate from this master's program, I will be

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a professional project manager and can find a better job. In addition, I think it will be an amazing experience if I graduate from the master's program and be a professional engineer even though I was retired.

To achieve my goal, I need to study Math & Computer Science. They are big challenges for me because I never studied computer science before, and I had almost forgotten all the concepts of Math. It usually takes 1.5 to 2 years to graduate. But it will probably take me longer because I need to take time to study the foundation knowledge of computer science and restudy Math, especially Math in English. All in all, I need to study hard and be ready for the big challenge.

It won't be easy. But I believe that I'll achieve my goal because I am so eager to study at the U.S. University.

— Sabrina Lima

Since I moved to Tennessee almost a year ago, I have set a goal for myself. I want to start working in the United States.

I am a Brazilian journalist with much experience in my home country. I have already worked as a producer in a broadcasting news television, as a newspaper reporter, as head of public relations, as a marketing manager, and as public communications director. I know all my professional experience is important to find a job in the United States, but first, I need to improve my English skills and have a work permit.

To achieve my goal, I'm studying English. I read all the books I can, watch movies with the original sound, and try to get surrounded by native English speakers. Most important for all this, I have tutoring sessions. It is helping me to feel more confident and ready. Also, my husband and I have already sent all the necessary documents to complete our Green Card application. I hope it won't take too long.

At this point, I'm anxious. I'm also confident everything will work out.

— M. M.

When I think of a goal, above all is to buy a house.

Why the reason? Because is more private, there are no problems with the parking cars, however that not is easily finding a exactly house.

To achieve it we were saving money for the down payment, for a while time don't eating in restaurant, spend in unnecessary items, nevertheless an ice cream some time was good.

I hope and believe it's soon. I believe in God and teamwork is very strong.

— Fabrício Ramos dos Santos

Think SMART acronym, stands for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.

The general or big goal in my life is to be happy and have a better life for my mother and me. In order to do that I need to become a nurse in the USA. I have two specific goals: pass the English proficiency test and pass the Nursing Board test. I will measure my progress by trying to pass the English exam in 4 months even if I'm not prepared. I just want to measure how much I need to progress in order to pass in the test and how much do I need to progress. In order to become a nurse in the USA, I need to pass the English test and a nursing test. I have these skills, but I need to refresh my knowledge so that my goals are perfectly achievable. My goals are relevant to my life because/since I studied many years to become a nurse in Brazil and practiced nursing for ten years. Being a professional nurse in the United States could give me a more peaceful life. It's better to be a nurse than a house cleaner, which I am now. My time base is 6 to 8 months. That is the time I need to wait until my certification application is processed and approved.

— Mitoe K

I have set an important goal for myself. I want to get a driver's license in the U.S. There are several reasons why I want to do so.

First of all, it's convenient and it gives me more opportunities if I have a driver's license here. I want to be able to drive a car by myself so I can go wherever and whenever I want or need to go. Since I moved to the U.S., my husband or my friends always give me rides when I need. So if I get one, I don't have to ask anyone for a ride anymore. Second, if I get a driver's license, I don't have to carry my passport as an ID every time I go out. A driver's license will be another way to prove who I am here. Lastly, if I end up getting a job here, I will need to drive to go to the workplace. It will definitely be easier for me to find a job, too.

To achieve my goal, I need to study for a knowledge test and practice driving for a driving test. I also need to take both tests and pass them. It might take a lot of time for me to get the license, but all I have to do is to keep working on it.

My goal is to take and pass the tests by the end of October. It won't be easy but I'm confident that I will reach my goal.

Prompt 5: Write about a financial plan or goal.

— Sabrina Lima

It may not look like it, but building a new life is hard, especially if you are an immigrant. I want to buy a house in the USA. My husband and I set up a financial goal to have a good life in America.

We want to settle down here in Tennessee. Buying a house in the USA will be a dream coming true. At this point, I don't have a job. I live in a rental house. I don't even use my native language most of the time, and I know I need to improve my English skills.

To achieve our goal, we started saving all the money we can. We also sold our house in Brazil and put the money in savings.

Another important thing for me is to start working. We applied for a Green Card. This document will allow me to have a work permit.

In addition, I'm taking English classes. They will help me to be more employable.

I hope one year from now, things will be different. I wish we could finally have our own home.

— M. M.

When arrive to US we have a big dream, get a good job, saving money, buy a house, them, when the kid coming, the dream growing. We want to send to college.

work to hard and the free time started study English because don't undertood the language, some time the people don't undertand to me, when can't to go the English school I wach the TV, I listened to radio, and few years ago againg retake my English classes, in NALC.

Now some American drean succeed, some continue in rute.

In conclude no mater do you realizer your dreams is your time, don't forget ,and will be realizer.

Prompt 6: Write about a problem in your community.

— A. K.

I have a very beautiful community. People are friendly, amazing basketball court, and large swimming pool.

But the problem is that no enough parking lot.

my suggestion is that, since there is enough space nearest swimming pool, they should turn it to the parking lot.

I think it good idea because people parks at a very long distances, and it very challenge special when you walking with children.

— S. K.

I love my neighbor, school zone and environment. There is a big park around my house. I can walk down the park. That is my best things. When I go to park, I can see my neighbor and say hello everyday. they are kindness.

But I have big problem. When they have walk with their pet, they did clean up their pet poop. I took my friends about this issue. They tool me many solution. They said “tell dog owner” “put the sign on the yard”...But I couldn’t tell dog owner.

I watch my yard and I find problem. When young guys had

walk with thier dog, they didn't clean up thier dog poop. I will tell this issue my HOA and HOA send a notis letter to every house and then each parent teach for kids about the importance of clean up. I will put the sign on my yard too. I hope better than before. I hope good result.

— Alex Nguyen

Love my town because it's really good place for living. That is why now a day there are so many people move to this town. Most of them are young people but the disadvantages are not enough entertainment centers or sport centers in town for them to do exercise or relax after work. Almost equipments are old and need to replace.The city should build up more sport centers. Due to doing exercise or playing sports can help them build up their health, staying healthy, it helps every one stay wells and make a great job.

Prompt 7: Write a description of your shopping habits.

— Hind Alchalabi

My shopping habits change depending on the purchase. I'm usually responsible, but sometimes I buy things on impulse.

If I need to make a big purchase, like a TV, I take my time and plan ahead. I think about how much I'm able to pay, compare prices online, what brand and ask my friends for recommendations. I try to be a smart shopper.

On the other hand, I can't resist a good deal. If I see an item on sale, I buy it. I might buy several shoes because they're 50% off. or buy one get one 50% for my family in Baghdad. I waste more money on things just to make them happy and I don't want to miss out on a good deal.

I want to cut back on my spending and stop buying things on impulse. What should I do? If I make a budget, I'll probably think more carefully before I make a purchase. A budget might stop me from buying things on impulse and waste more money.

Prompt 8: Write a short biography about Martin Luther King, Jr.

— Alex Nguyen

Martin Luther King, Jr. was born in 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia. When he was growing up, African-Americans didn't have the same rights as white people did. In 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested for sitting in a women's seat on the bus in Alabama. After Rosa Parks was arrested, King organized a protest. In 1963, King made a famous speech in Washington, DC. In 1964, the U.S. government passed the Civil Rights Act, making discrimination illegal. King was shot and killed in 1968 at only 39 years of age. King is remembered today for his work to end discrimination against African-Americans.

— I. Q.

Martin Luther King Jr was born in Atlanta in 1929. King graduated from Morehouse with a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in sociology. In 1948, aged nineteen. King enrolled in Crozer Theological Seminary in Upland, Pennsylvania. In 1951, King began doctoral studies in systematic theology at Boston University. King married Coretta Scott on June 18, 1953, on the lawn of her parents' house in her hometown of Heiberger, Alabama. He fought for the rights of African- Americans. Kings life changed in 1955, after Rosa Parks was arrested by the police. King believe the bus law was wrong, so he organized a protest. For the next 381 days, African - Americans did not

take buses. After that, King organized many protest to fight for all people's rights. In 1963, he made a speech in from of more than 200,000 people in Washington, D. C. In 1964, the U. S. government passed a law called the civil rights Act. Discrimination became illegal. King was a shot and killed in 1968. Today, we still remember his many achievements. In the U.S., the third Monday of every January is Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

Prompt 9: Write a description of an accident.

— S. K.

When I young, I played at the river with my friend. We were swimming and played at housekeeping. We played everyday.

One day, when my friend walked throw in the water, she was screaming. Everyboby looked her. She hold her foot. She foot was comeing bleed. We were young... We were very scary of bleed. Then, older sister came to her she tied her foot with clothes and took her home.

MY friend mom applied medicine she didn't see the doctor.

After that day, when we played in the water, we were wearing shoes and watch out for the front.

— Aneyra Rivera

My baby and I stay in my home every morning. But 1 week ago, I was making cookies, when my baby stand up. I put down the knif pot at the end of the table and ran to my baby's room. While I was put the baby in a chair in the living room, the baby's ran at the kitchen and his take the knif a table. The knif pot fell on the floor.

I went to the baby and put in the chair In the future, I'll make sure to put the knif safe in the table.

Prompt 10: Write an opinion essay about the type of employment you prefer: being your own boss or working for someone else.

— Yanitza Monteon

Some people say that working for a company is safer than starting your own business; for example it's better working for a company because the employees have a regular payment and also they get health insurance and other benefits. Other reason is a stable work time however they don't have the freedom for any personal activities during their work hours.

I would say that the business owners has most benefits than the employees. I know some business owners that have been successful and they recommend creating your own company. Some of the reasons they give are:

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The owner can make their own schedule for work. They have a lot of freedom and control of over their time.

The business owners face a lot of pressure and risks at the beginning of their companies. When they achieve consolidation, there are not profit limits.

In my opinion being self-employed is better than being an employee of a company.

— Marceline Sibomana

Some people say that being self-employed is better than working for a company.

Example, small business owners can take a day off any time they want. They have time to spend with their family. But, starting a business is too stressful for most people.

I like to say that working in a company is much better than being your own boss. There is a lot of pressure when you own a company. But the good thing the company offers are benefits.

In my opinion, working for a company is safer than starting your own business.

— A. C.

Some people say being a Construction self-employer is risky but you can make a lot a money in a short time. For example you can have free time and spend that time with your family.

I think it's better being your own boss because you can have a lot of free time to do more things.

Prompt 11: Write a letter to the mayor.

— Yanitza Monteon

Dear Mayor Cooper.

As a Mayor of Nashville, I appreciate your efforts and work on Nashville. I recently read your notice to build a traffic light at LaVergne Couchville Pike and Maxwell Road in Antioch.

On the first hand, the problem that you are trying to solve is a lot of traffic leaving the neighborhood, and I agree that is a terrible problem because every day increases the accidents; I know sounds awful, however, I don't consider it to be the solution. Actually many developers building new neighborhoods in the area, and this investment increases the value of the county but for anyone is a priority to create roads as alternative routes to existing roads; if not done the consequences are more traffic and accidents.

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From my perspective, a different solution is to invest to build more roads for every new neighborhood, this effort is together with developers and the government.

I hope you will rethink my suggestion. My neighbors and I will be thankful to you forever.

— Rima Zakhour

From: Rima Zakhour
To: Mayor Michael
Subject: new fire station

Dear Mayor Michael,

You recently announced plans to build a new fire station next to the high school. You claimed that it would help our city to quickly extinguish fires, but I unfortunately disagree with you.

I agree that the city needs more fire stations. But in my view, the new fire station should be away from the school. It would cause annoying noises and also distract students. In addition, the speed limit around the school is low, and fire fighters tracks would have to run at high speed.

Near our schools we need more playgrounds and a library for student's activities. I suggest to find another place to build the new fire station. I hope you will consider this suggestion.

Sincerely,
Rima Zakhour

Prompt 12: Write a persuasive essay about civic responsibility.

— Sabrina Lima

Voting in the elections is one of the most important things citizens living in democratic countries can do. When you vote, you have the opportunity to choose your leaders. Also, you show clearly how you want your country to be governed. If they don't do what you think is right, you have a say and feel free to express your disagreement.

I understand that voting takes a lot of time. We need to research the candidates and comprehend their platforms. In addition, going to a voting poll takes time. Sometimes we have to wait in line. For me, the worst part, most of the time, is finding a candidate I like. When you vote, you are choosing the people who will represent you. If you decide not to vote, you allow others to choose in your place. This is a big decision because you might have to live for years under a Government you disagree with and don't fight for your rights.

However, it is important to bring back to the memory that voting is a right we need to fight for. We should not take it for granted and dismiss it.

Prompt 13: Write a description of your home.

— Viacheslav Rakhnin

I live in a cozy two - bedroom house, which is small in size. My house is in good condition with new appliances. There are many shops near my house. We have a washer and a dryer. Everything suits us in our house, but there is no transport nearby. We like the location of our house because we have all the infrastructure near us.

Volunteer and Staff Submissions

The Year Ahead

— René Dillard

I've read my favorite book at least six times and each time, I pick a different character to focus on. Someone who reminds me of me at whatever stage of life I'm in. Sometimes, it's an older character wisened by experiences still on the horizon for me. Sometimes, it's two characters tangled in a romantic storyline. Complicated, much like my life. Sometimes, it's a character who reminds me of my mother. They'll have the same habits as her or the same silly personality. She's far away in Texas and I miss her, but I know just where to look to find a character like her. Sometimes, a character in a book reminds me of me.

Whomever it is, each time I learn something new I missed about that character the first time I read the book. I didn't notice how funny they were. Or how they changed throughout the book. Or even just how much they remind me of me. Each time I learn something new, and in this way, reading never gets old. I find myself laughing out loud when reading a good book or openly weeping when something strikes me as powerful. I get angry when a character is hurt. I feel compassion when a character needs it. I think that's what makes reading so important to me. When I'm lost, I can find myself in a character or a storyline. I don't have to dress up or make plans to leave my house. I don't have to try to impress anyone. It's a chance

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for me to connect with something or someone similar to me with no pre-text. No frills. As an awkward kid, that always meant so much to me.

There are many things NALC learners want to work on when they start their literacy journey. Some want to be able to be more proactive in their child's education. Some want to be more proactive in their own health, personal finances, or work. Some just want to feel seen and included. This desire to center yourself in the world using reading, writing, and language skills is one of the most basic human needs. We all desire to find community, and language is the most unifying tool for doing this. I've always found so much community in books and stories. I found myself, my loved ones, and the experiences I've had and hope to have one day in the pages of some of my favorite books. To me, this is a gift. It's comfort. It's freedom to express myself and be me. If I can do anything during my time as Director of Development for NALC, let it be ensuring that as many people as possible are given this gift.

We're determined to grow this year, and lowering our waitlist and moving learners into active classes and tutoring matches are our highest priorities. Reaching more learners and equipping community members with the skills they need to grow is our number one goal for 2024. One day, I can't wait to read about how we worked together to accomplish this.

In Memoriam

Sadly, English Language Learner Maya (Mukhabbat) Shamsieva passed away in September 2023. We wish Maya's family peace and comfort in their memories of this amazing mother and friend. Maya's instructor, Brennan, wrote the following in her honor.

— Brennan Walsh



Maya was an exceptional student, a true delight to have in the classroom. Studying a language vastly different from one's own native tongue presents numerous challenges. However, despite grappling with a challenging illness, Maya exhibited unwavering dedication, consistently attending every class with an eagerness to learn. It is students like her who inspire my passion for teaching.

About the Nashville Adult Literacy Council

Since 1982, the Nashville Adult Literacy Council (NALC) has been dedicated to empowering adults through literacy. We provide free tutoring and classes to adults seeking to improve their reading, writing and English-speaking skills. This past year, we served 419 adult learners in Nashville with the help of 150 volunteer tutors.

One in five Nashville adults is at the lowest level of literacy. Literacy is the foundation for a better life. Adult literacy rates impact every part of Nashville: employment and poverty levels, healthcare costs, K-12 school performance, family and community relationships, and general dependence on systems for support. NALC offers multi-generational independence through literacy.

13% of Nashville's population was born outside the U.S. Many of these individuals are without basic English language skills, which severely limits their access to jobs, educational opportunities, and citizenship.

Empowering Adults Through Literacy

NALC provides our learners with a safe place to learn and grow. We recognize that not everyone learns in the same way or wants the same things. That's why we offer free one-on-one tutoring in addition to classroom instruction, so each learner gets the attention needed for success. Our lesson plans and materials are adapted to each person's goals so they can feel

the difference in their day-to-day lives. Whether it's working toward getting a driver's license, earning a new job, or simply writing a love letter for the first time, we value and prioritize each individual's learning needs. As a result, we help people become more independent, improving their families' lives for generations to come.

Volunteer

You can help change the life of an adult learner by volunteering as an NALC tutor for just a few hours a week. No teaching or foreign language experience is necessary, as we provide all the training you'll need to be an effective tutor. We have two main programs you can volunteer with: English Language Learning and Adult Basic Education.

English Language Learning

When? At a set meeting time convenient for you and a learner.

Where? Online using Zoom or another meeting software or any public location.

Who do I help? The same English Language Learner weekly.

How often? At minimum: once a week for three months.

What's my support? NALC staff will provide training, ongoing resources, and Burlington English.

Adult Basic Education (Literacy)

When? At a set meeting time convenient for you and a learner.

Where? Online using Zoom or another meeting software or any public location.

Who do I help? The same person each time, someone

who speaks English as their primary language, but wants to improve their reading and writing skills.

How often? At minimum: once a week for three months.

What's my support? NALC staff will provide training, curriculum materials, and ongoing support and guidance.

Donate

Your gift to the Nashville Adult Literacy Council helps our staff and volunteers meet the needs of our current and future learners. Here is what your dollars do at the Nashville Adult Literacy Council:

- \$25 = one book for one learner
- \$50 = one Learning Upgrade License
- \$150 = one Burlington English License
- \$500 = one laptop for a learner or tutor
- \$1,000 = one volunteer tutor training session

Share

Short on time and cash? There are still many ways to help:

- Invite us to your civic club, professional organization, or place of worship to speak about our program.
- Refer an adult who might need our services.
- Recommend us to a friend or family member who might be interested in volunteering.

Learn more about volunteering or making a donation:

www.nashvilleliteracy.org
info@nashvilleliteracy.org
615-298-8060

Connect with us on social media:

Facebook: nashvilleliteracy
Twitter: @NashvilleLit
Instagram: @nashvilleliteracy

Since 1982, NALC has been dedicated to empowering adults through reading, writing, and English-speaking skills. The stories in *In Our Words* offer a profound and moving insight into the struggles, triumphs, and aspirations of learners and tutors in the NALC program. Whether personal histories, expressions of hopes and dreams, or beautifully heartfelt love stories, they offer a glimpse into the lives of people in Nashville who so often go unheard.



**Nashville Adult
Literacy Council**

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