

LIFE CHANGING EXPERIENCES

A Collection of Student Articles

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Toronto Centre for Community Learning & Development

Building human capacity in our community

A Life Changing Experience

By Zainab

My life-changing experience was when I came to Canada because my life became a little bit better, especially the weather and education.

I came from Zanzibar. My country is an island and so hot! We have beaches, and very green plants. We eat fresh foods like fish, fruits and vegetables. And we have attractions such as mountains. The people speak the Swahili language.

When I came to Canada, it took me two days from Zanzibar to land here. My transit was started from Zanzibar to Dubai, and from Dubai to London Heathrow Airport where I changed from Emirates Airlines to Air Canada, and then I flew from Heathrow to Canada.

In Canada, I realized many things are expensive, for example jewelry, clothes and rent. Education is easier to get if you have an interest in studying. My life changed, especially when I learned to improve my English, and the ways I can use English to write. I believe that I can bring out the best in myself, and it makes me feel better, because I think without education, life is nothing.



My Life Changing Experience

By Tsering

My name is Tsering, and I will be talking about my dear friend, Nadem.

When I came to North America, I didn't know much. I was having problems with O.C.D. (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) Then one day I was watching TV and I saw an ad on O.C.D. which kind of changed my life. Through that ad, I did some research on O.C.D. and I will never forget the person who helped me the most. His name is Nadem. He was like my boss at work.



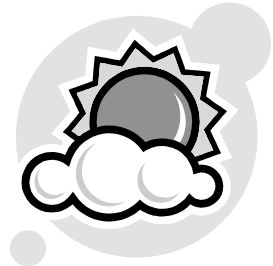
This person, Nadem, is a very important person for me in my life. You see when I first met Nadem, I knew it! He was a good person. At work I was having a hard time with customers and whenever he saw me with a customer, he would come and help me. And then one morning I was sad and my O.C.D. was giving me a hard time. Nadem came over and asked me, "What's wrong?" I told him about my O.C.D., and then he told me not to worry about it. He told me that he would help me and he did!

I feel blessed.

Then one evening we didn't have the address for the doctor, but we did know where his building was. We kept on going. Then the next day Nadem spoke to the doctor about me, and then I got help. This happened only because Nadem was there. I really think that there are still good people in this world.

When I compare myself before and now, I feel like living now! And I think this change was very important for me. Now the future looks good for me, and I would like to keep working on my O.C.D. while going to school.





Life Change

By Trevor

My life changing experience was when my mother got sick when I was a kid. She told me that she was dying of a disease and that there was nothing anyone could do. So I found out at a young age that it was going to be a tough road ahead. That life was not full of happy thoughts or wonderful surprises.

I wanted to save my mother from dying, I wanted to make life better, but the more time went by, so did the disease. A close relative/friend of the family at one point told me that if my mother hadn't had my baby sister the disease wouldn't have accelerated so quickly. I felt weird about that piece of information for some time, but it made me realize that things happen for a reason.

By the time I was ten my mother was not able to walk, sit in her wheelchair, or eat/drink properly without difficulty. At that point in my life I was going through a lot of confusion towards myself and my life, because of the stench of death looming over me everyday since I was five years old.

I sometimes couldn't think of anything else other than sad, depressing thoughts about life, and why things happened the way they did. My grades at school were becoming a problem. Also the kids at school picked on me because I was always in such a rut, which didn't help.

In my mind my mother was becoming dead, my father an alcoholic, and my sister was very young and happy. As my mother was deteriorating, I myself felt like I was dying inside in a lost world. When my mother was taken away from the family to live out her last months in a nursing home, I decided to run away, and live far from the only life I knew; to somewhere I didn't know.

The city life was like something I could eat all of and never get full. There was a feeling of endless possibilities and great success, but that quickly changed when I realized that I was getting lured into street life. I needed to get out, and fast!

The sudden death of my mother made me realize that life just happens with or without you, yet I felt a rush of relief because her suffering was over.

Days come and go and I feel positive choices equal positive changes.



Life Changing Experience

By Sumana

My life changing experience?...hmmmm...It is definitely meeting with the women who are currently pursuing the IWIP program with me. Most of these women are of my mother's age. Some of them are mothers, too. So, as the youngest over there, I have a lot to learn from them. When they discuss about their problems and experiences, I acquire a great deal of knowledge from these conversations which might help me in the future. And the laughs... examples are pregnancy talks, dealing with kids, married life experiences, etc. Another major thing to learn is their level of patience and tactfulness in dealing with certain issues. I guess they have acquired that over the years and through their experiences. Hence, I will conclude here by saying that meeting with these women has definitely been a life changing experience for me.



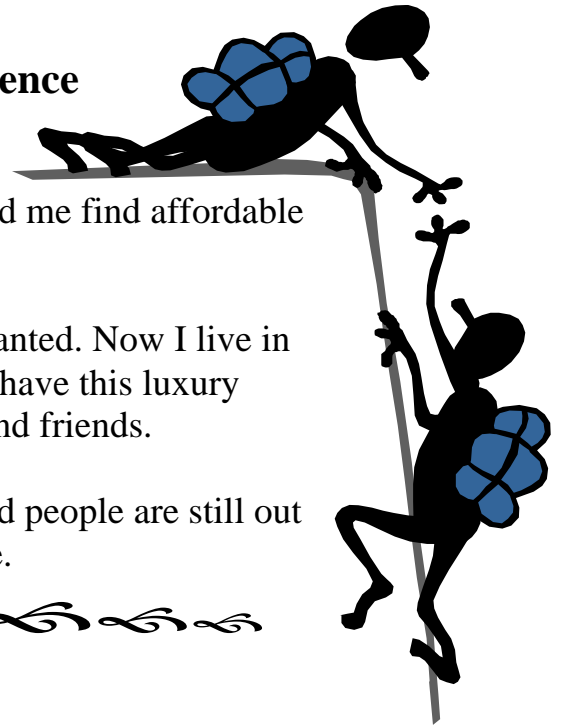
A Life Changing Experience

By Darryl

I met with an Aboriginal Canadian woman who helped me find affordable housing. That was a life changing experience for me.

Before, I did not have freedom to come and go as I wanted. Now I live in an apartment. This means I have a lot of freedom. To have this luxury gave me the chance to concentrate on my schooling and friends.

It shocked me as well as pleased me to know that good people are still out there. And finally, I thank God for such an experience.



My Life Changing Experience

By Vasiliy

My life changing experience was when I moved from school to school. I really liked my old high school teacher, Mr. Venboxmeer. He saw that I was wasting my time and I wasn't learning anything at Dante Academy. I came to Bishop Marrocco Secondary School to grade 12. I got my diploma June 13, 2005. I was proud of my achievements.



When I finished high school, I went to my summer break. I took all the work I did at school and I re-studied and saw where I made my mistakes at high school. After all, when summer finished, I was happy to get to college and study.

When I got to George Brown College, I thought that I wouldn't meet lovely people. After all, I thought wrong. I can't wait to get back to college.



Life Changing Experience

By Shova

It was an event of around four years ago. I used to work at a Non- Profit- Organization (NGO) called Didi-Bahini in Nepal. It was an organization mainly focused on upgrading the income of the people especially in the Western rural parts of the country. On the execution of my job, I occasionally had to visit those areas. One day, I was on the way to attend a program at a Village Development Committee of Sallayan District with my two co-workers.

We had to go for 10 hours by bus and 1 hour on foot to reach the area. It was the hot sunny day of July so after around half an hour of walking, we felt tired and decided to take a rest for some while under the shadow of a tree. As we were taking a rest and chatting with each other, I saw an old woman trying to make a bundle of sticks collected by her from a nearby forest. She was having trouble tying them, so I decided to help her. As I approached her, she requested me to help her to fix the bundle. With contributions of both of us, we tied the sticks and made a bundle. I asked her if there wasn't there anyone in her family who could help her collect sticks? She mentioned that she had a loving son and a daughter-in-law but she was doing that job with her own accord.

I thought that I could help her along the way, if our ways were both the same. I asked which way was her home. She replied that she was not going to her home with the bundle of wood, but to market to sell it. I was surprised and asked for the reason. She said that she wanted to sell those sticks and collect some money. She added that she lived in the village nearby the place. There was only one school which was turning old day by day and had a dripping roof. Children used to suffer a lot while studying, particularly on the rainy days. She wanted to change the roofing of the school so that children could study even on the rainy days without any difficulties. For that purpose, she was collecting sticks everyday from the forest and selling them in the market.

She said that when she used to be young and just married, being an illiterate she had to face difficulties a lot. Her husband used to work in the Army. He used to send her letters but she had to find someone else to read the letters and reply to him. She said that she would die in a few years, but everyone would remember and bless her as a result of her good work even after her death.

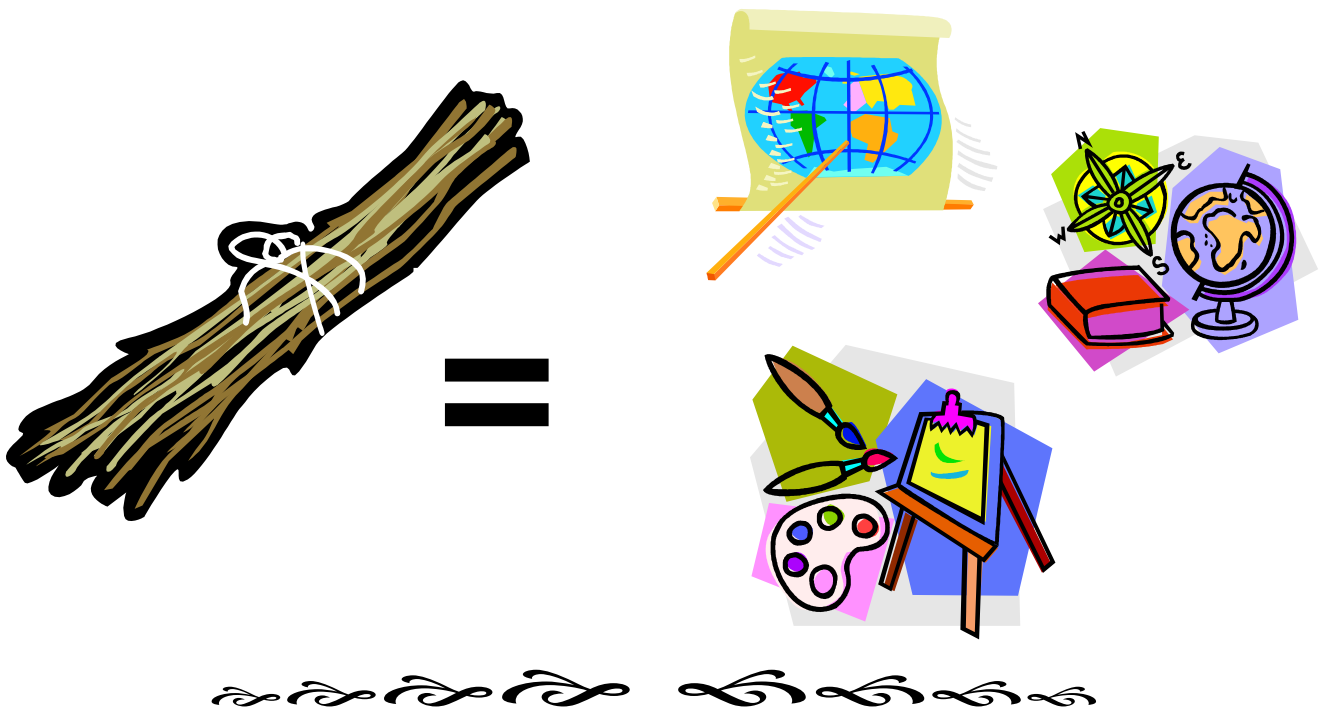
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Life Changing Experience By Shova, continued

She again requested me to help to lift the bundle so that she could carry it on her back. I did that and she started her journey towards market. We also started our journey towards our destination. On the way, I started to reminisce about all the events and sayings of the old woman. For such an uneducated old woman, she possessed a lot of eagerness and courage to do such work for the betterment of her village and future generations. She indeed enlightened me and provided knowledge that people would die but their good work would always remain alive. Being old and illiterate, she was really devoted to doing something for bringing change to her village. I got quite inspired from her deed and came to realize that being human, we should contribute whatever we can to our society.

It is natural that all shall die one day, so why not do something which not only helps to change the life of people, but also helps to keep our name alive even after death. I still do remember that old woman and contemplate that if everyone thought in the way the old woman was thinking, the society would be changed and even remote places would be bright and livable.

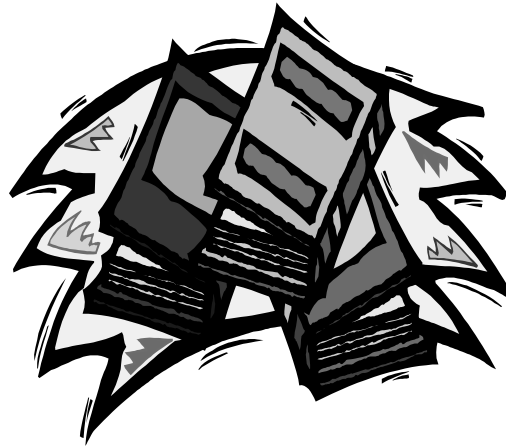


A Life Changing Experience

By Rocky

It was a Saturday morning. I woke up broke from all the excitement from Friday night. I didn't have a dime in my wallet, so I decided to make a call to one of my family members asking them for a little change, you know at least \$20 or something more for the rest of the week, until I got my cheque.

After calling almost all my family, I finally got through to one of them and that was my mother. So, I told her thanks and I will be there in about an hour's time, because it's about an hour from where I live to her place, and I will certainly take the T.T.C. for the trip.



So now I am on my way to my mom's riding on the Subway. When riding on the Subway, I don't like to be without a newspaper or an article or something of that nature to read. I got off at Yonge and Bloor Station to change trains in order to go east. At that moment I realized I needed something to read. I came across the magazine stand. First I was thinking since it is Saturday morning, and it's the weekend there will be no free news papers there at the stall, but anything will do for me at that moment.

I looked and I saw a magazine entitled, SWAY. I said to myself, "That can't be for free, and it's a multicultural too. Wow! That's interesting." I looked at the cover and saw a picture of a smiling black man, who looked like he was in some big business or corporation. Then I started to read the editorial, which stated "Michael Lee-Chin an unprecedented glimpse into the life of a Canadian billionaire on page 18." I said to myself, "Looks interesting enough to read on my way."

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A Life Changing Experience By Rocky, continued

Now remember, that before I saw this magazine I was always finding myself in some financial difficulty. However I am in school now trying to work on my career goals. I started to read the magazine on the train, and in this magazine it talks about Michael Lee-Chin being a success story of rare proportions. He was born the child of a shopkeeper, and his mother in Jamaica in 1951. He is today one of only three black billionaires in North America. (Oprah Winfrey and Robert Johnson of Black Entertainment Television are the other two.)

I said to myself, “This is getting to be more and more interesting,” and so I started to ask myself this question, “If he can do it why can’t I? After all, he is from Jamaica like me.” I thought he must have some thoughts and advice on how to make it in the business world today if that is your potential or your goal.

In the magazine, he talks about a life growing up in Jamaica with his parents when he was 11 or 12. He remembered his parents working three jobs. Both were clerks at a supermarket and they were very ambitious, and they had what they call in Jamaica a “Dry Goods Store.”

He also talked about when he was in Canada in 1970, he started working and he went back to Jamaica from 1974 to 1976 because he got a scholarship from the Jamaican Government to take him through the rest of University. So I said to myself that his potential is similar to mine. The only thing is that his is much bigger than mine, but this has motivated me to pursue my goals and career a lot more.

Right now for me this magazine article gave me a new gain, insight, and a new idea to get myself to where I am going, and to push myself to not give up! After all if he can do it, so can I! And further more he is from Jamaica, like me.



The Day I Met God

By Rita

The experience which changed my life is the day I found the Lord.

It was a gray day. I was looking for a room to rent. Then all at once I felt a gray cloud come over me and a horrible presence.

I got to the rooming house and saw the room, then I waited and I asked the lady, “Do you know a psychiatrist?” I said.

“No, but I know the Lord, would you like to pray?”

At this point I would try anything.

The lady called some of the women downstairs to pray with us. About 4 women came, she opened the Bible and we read the scripture while praying. I felt a light in my stomach filling up my whole body, the changing, the peace, grace, and a joy that I never knew.

For 4 months I felt like my feet were off the ground. I think that the Lord did not want me to forget that day. I have not been the same since. I have grown. The Lord has become a friend of mine.

My Lord has never let go, so I love him forever. I will always be grateful because of what he has done in my life. He saved my life.

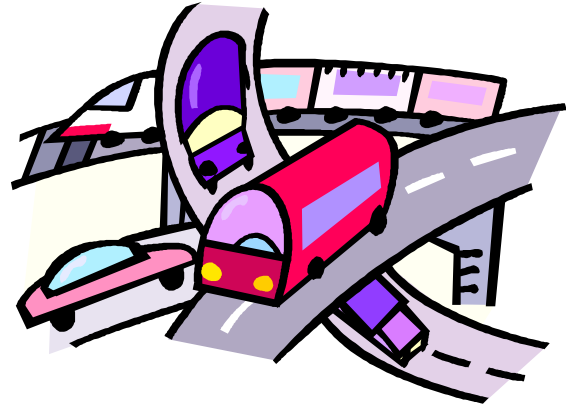
Thank you. Thank you.



A Life Changing Experience

By Joseph

Moving from Ottawa, Ontario, to Toronto, Ontario, in 2004 was a big environmental change for me. After being laid off from the best job I ever had, I struggled to find another job that could match it. This is the reason for my move from one city to the other. I did not know that this move would ring such drastic changes, both negative and positive.



First, the untidy, filthy streets of Toronto compared to clean, tidy Ottawa. It was shocking indeed to me to have just left Ottawa where I lived for eighteen years and found myself in the littered streets of Toronto. Though I was disgusted with the dirty streets of Toronto, I do love the size of the city. I am a “big city boy.” I always feel at home in big cities.

Also, I should stress that the flexibility of Toronto Public Transit gives me a positive outlook on Toronto. Ottawa public transport is extremely lousy. There is a saying that there is always something good about every city in the world, thus Toronto’s good public transport, its International Airport, its exciting new Opera House, bring joy to me. These are things I was missing in Ottawa.

The other life-changing experience is the coldness I experienced from most of its residents. I am still shocked by the way a number of people here in Toronto use the English language. They seem to turn to violence quickly with unpleasant faces almost every time I’m in public places.

Finally, the number of homeless people in Toronto is shattering! I thought a thing like this happens only in my native South Africa (Johannesburg). Never in my eighteen years in Ottawa have I encountered such a plight.

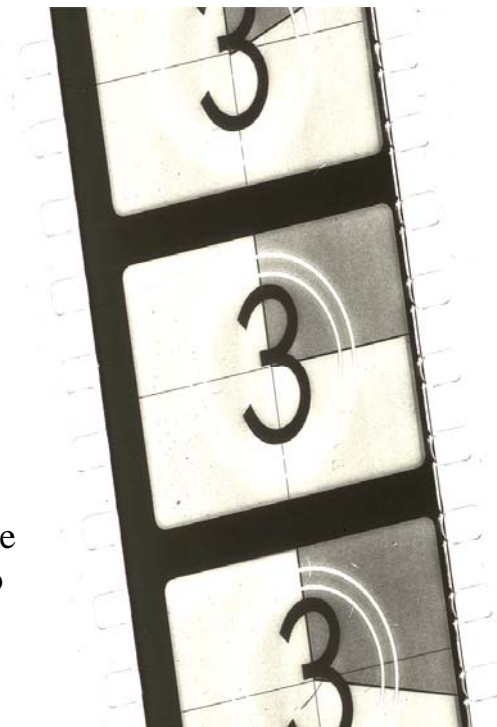
Even though I went through such a shocking experience, I love Toronto. I am happy to call Toronto my home.



A Life Changing Event: A Mystery

By Grace

Among the lessons I learned as a child, love was never on the curriculum. Even when I had studied in a ‘top-ten’ university for almost four years, I still felt it a mystery how other schoolmates of mine found their boyfriends or girlfriends. So when I came back home for vacation, I could not help asking my parents how to deal with some boy who showed special affinity to me. After many talks, Mom felt worried. She said to my Dad, “Shouldn’t we teach her some techniques on how to find a boyfriend? She is really naive.” Yet, this topic was turned down by my Dad. He said, “Everyone should automatically know when to love, how to love and who to love. It’s from the nature.” So even two years after I had graduated from the university, I still had no boyfriend.



As more and more of my same-aged friends began to marry, I felt more and more lonely. What is my fate in love? As time passed, the only person I could cling to was my younger sister. She had just started her teaching career in a university and lived in a teacher dormitory in the campus. The more I felt lonely, the more time I stayed in her dorm.

On weekends, we usually went to a movie in the Campus Theater. The price was always \$2 and the movies were usually famous old or new-made popular ones. We used to buy 4 tickets although we had only the 2 of us. If we had some friends to visit us, it would be a good entertainment. If we had no visitors, it wouldn’t be a problem to sell them out.

One day my sister came back with exciting news. There was going to be a Charlie Chaplin movie, *Monsieur Verdoux*, on that weekend evening. We were definitely going to see it. Then at a free time, we bought 4 tickets of good seats as usual and then waited for the movie time coming.



A Life Changing Experience By Grace, continued

When the day came, no friends visited us. We left for the movie two hours early. We walked through the campus, asking the students whether anyone wanted tickets. For the first time to our surprise, each student we asked refused to go to the movie. Finally we figured out it was the final test week. Everyone was busy with final tests. So we had a great risk that we could not sell the extra tickets. Then we rushed to the box-office. Not as before, there was no line and only a few people hanging around. At that moment two boys rushed to the box-office and quickly handed in their money. I hurriedly tapped one of the boys on the shoulder, telling him we had two extra tickets. Without a hesitation, they withdrew their hands and turned to me. One of them picked up some change and handed it to me. I checked and put the money into my pocket and walked into the theater.

The movie soon started and the boys came in just in time. Through the dim light I saw each one of them had two ice creams in their hands. So I joked, “Were the extra two for us?” They were so shy and insisted on giving the two ice creams to my sister and me. At last, we took the ice creams and said thanks to them. The movie was excellent, yet would not last forever. When we stood up I said thanks to the boys again. The audience moved outside very slowly. In order to avoid embarrassment, I tried to find some topic to talk with them. “Are you freshmen or sophomores?” I chatted in a tone like an experienced senior, because since the first sight of the two boys, I never questioned they were two undergraduate students. They burst into laughter, “We are postgraduate freshmen.” I could not tell if they were serious. Anyway, I didn’t pay much attention to them. When we were outside in the dim moonlight, we had a short chat. They both had graduated two years before. One was studying as a postgraduate, the other was his friend, who came to visit. They were living in the postgraduate student’s residence. Whatever, I was not supposed to talk too much with strangers. So we said bye and rushed to our separate ways.

The next day, my sister and I went shopping. To go to the shop, it was unavoidable to take the pathway beside the postgraduate student residence. When we walked by the front gate of the building, I almost ran into somebody. I suddenly looked up and found a face with a smile was just in front of me.

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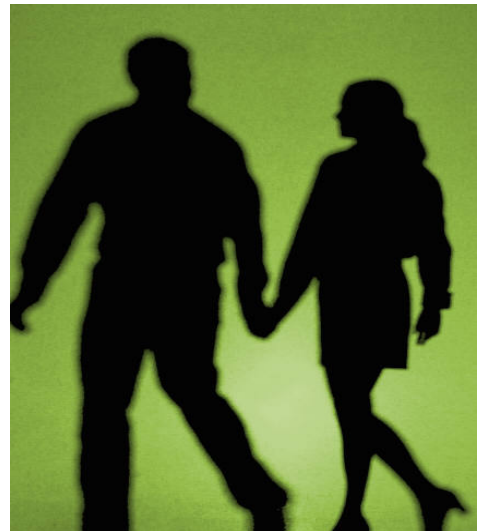


A Life Changing Experience By Grace, continued

I couldn't remember where I had ever met him, but it was so familiar. Almost at the same minute, both of us realized and laughed, "Is that you?!" He was one of the boys who bought the movie tickets from us last evening. He had finished his visit and was just leaving. Then he asked us to go inside the building to see his friend. We agreed and there we introduced ourselves in more detail to each other. It was a big surprise that they graduated the same year as I did. We talked about the affairs that happened in our school years. We talked about the experiences after graduation. Then we decided to go shopping together and cooked together and had a dinner together. We exchanged our phone numbers and made plans to meet later.

It doesn't mean I fell in love with one of them on that day. Usually it took me a long time to be interested in someone. However, after several meetings, one day I suddenly found one of the two boys, the visitor, was so good looking. He was so gentle, handsome and intelligent. It took me a few months to observe him. Finally, I made an appointment with his friend, the postgraduate, and had a further talk. At the moment he said, "He is a very excellent young man", I could not hold my heartbeats. I was about to call him right away. I told myself he was the one I could not miss. He was the one I must get.

The rest of my love story went smooth. We fell in love with each other. I felt like a teenager again. I never thought that I would ever meet someone who I would fall in love with like this. I couldn't believe that I met someone who I felt so comfortable around that made me content and would cherish me for who I am.



The next time the four of us went to the Campus Theatre, I had been married to my true love. I would not feel it a mystery any longer how to find a boyfriend. However, a new mystery came to my mind, and till today, the four of us still cannot figure out, who was the person sitting beside the other? Which day was the real chance encounter, the first day or the second day?



Life-Changing Experiences

By Crystal

My greatest life-changing experience was moving out of Regent Park. Living in Regent Park was a bad experience and a bad neighborhood. For some reason my house became a flop house. There were drug sellers and drug users. They trashed my house, they disrespected me and my family, they abused us both physically and mentally, they beat my pets and threw bleach in their faces. We had been going to Housing almost every day with complaints but it wasn't enough because we didn't have any proof. So the next time they hit my mom, she called the police and took pictures of the bruises and brought them to Housing.

Finally Housing got us out of there and told us to stay at a friend's or family member's house until they found us a place to live. So we packed up and left for my grandmother's house in the country. We lived there for a couple of months before they found a place for us. Once we moved out it was like we had found peace and we were able to start living our own lives.

I was out of school for a while so I didn't know what to do. I looked for work and got my first job at Coffee Time at the age of seventeen. I worked there long enough to find out that I didn't want to do that, so I looked some more and found a position in a cook training course that I enjoyed. From that course, I earned Food Handler, WHMIS and first aid certificates. I met my boss Jim, who is my good friend now, and I made new friends and learned new things.

After taking that course, I got a job in Sodexo, which is a cafeteria for the University of Toronto college students. I worked there for two years. I met a whole bunch of friends, I had a really funny and nice boss and I learned a lot. But my boss had to leave and they found new management, who expected too much from me. Unfortunately I had to quit, but I did get something good out of it. I started attending school at East End Literacy and I learned a lot and met some great people.

Now I'm really happy with my life and what it has made me.



I Changed My Life

By Yolanda



The changes which have affected my life in a positive way are my work, becoming a mother, and going back to school.

Changing my work was a good idea to do. Compared to before, I had a poor life. Not much money and almost no food. It was very sad, but I thank God I got a new job.

I became a mother three years after I got married. I had to wait for nine months to deliver the baby. It was my first time. I like being a mother, although it wasn't easy to become a mother.

When I went back to school it wasn't easy. It was hard to decide at first, and I had to find somebody to watch my kids. I couldn't pay a babysitter and daycare was very expensive. Finally at last, the kids started going to school, so I was able to go back to school.

You see, change can bring you a more positive life.



Life Changing Experience

By Gosia

My mother and I were very close while I was a child. Although, it would be too much to say that we were friends, I could not imagine my life without her. When I entered my teenage years, I had become quite rebellious and started questioning endless rules and limitations which had been imposed on me. The situation got even worse, and my whole world collapsed after discovering my mother's other side.

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A Life Changing Experience By Gosia, continued

She had become not the mother I had known and loved. She was deliberately hurting my feelings and humiliating me in front of others, in an attempt to regain my emotional dependency on her. All this time, I tried to understand the reasoning behind her actions but I could not. Every night I cried myself to sleep feeling betrayed and cheated out of warmth and love I needed so badly.

We started drifting apart, turning into enemies, which even intensified my mother's abusive behavior towards me. At that point, all I had dreamed of was to run as far as I could to be away from that distress. I realized that this whole situation was gradually poisoning my future self and well being. One day, I decided to put an end to my pain, so I packed my bags and left, not only her, but also my country. I "sentenced" myself to being an emotional fugitive but anything was better than living with constant stress and fear. I hoped I would never have to see her again.

It took me many years of nightmares, guilty thoughts and hatred towards my mother until I gradually settled into my own, tightly guarded world. Still, there was a never-ending struggle to rediscover myself, free of ever present negative judgment and criticism. My self esteem was shattered since I had never measured up to her expectations, no matter how hard I tried. In the long run, the past experiences and my inability to let them go, deeply affected my relationships. So my bitterness deepened even more, because I knew what the core of my personal problems was.

Then my son was born which graduated me from being just a child to being a child as well as a mother. This is every woman's turning point in life and slowly started reversing my thinking process. Now, I had a hands-on opportunity to get a different perspective on motherhood and everything that goes with it. Day by day, I was remembering single scenes from my childhood and adolescence, and to my surprise, I discovered that my thoughts were filled with vague understanding of what and why it might have gone wrong in the past. I was analyzing previous situations casting on them a different sense of meaning. Some have become clearer, some still stayed obscure.

One day, during the last visit to my home country, I suddenly felt an instant urge to reach out to my mother. We have not spoken since I left. I decided to follow my heart even though I was not quite sure if this was what I really wanted.

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A Life Changing Experience By Gosia, continued

I definitely wanted to give her an opportunity to meet her grandson, and that drove me to finding her and knocking on her door. I was extremely nervous, because I was hoping that she would not bring up our past. Given the circumstances, I approached it as a social visit. Well, the reaction was not exactly what I expected but being now older and wiser, I was able to see beyond that, into her heart. I looked at her through mother's eyes and that fact put me at ease. She was trembling and shaking the whole time I was there and could not express enough how happy and grateful she was to see me. That reassured me I made a right decision by following my sudden feelings. I needed some kind of a closure so I could carry on with my life. She also well deserved the right to see me. She is my mother after all. She showed me an essay I wrote in sixth grade which is one of her most precious possessions. The topic was "Why I Love My Mother". Reading it was like recharging a battery. Now I could remember also good things about her but at the same time it made me wish even more, things did not go wrong between us. All these years I missed having a mom in my life... I was happy to show her who I turned out to be and for the first time in my life I saw pride and respect in her eyes. Is it possible that I finally delivered? This was all I was capable of during this visit. There may be some to come, maybe not? Either way, I know we both needed it and now we found peace in our separate worlds. I am still hurting deeply but need not punish her for that any more... We all have our demons. They need to make us stronger so we can carry on with our heads up, believing in tomorrow, turning our negative experiences into positive ones so we can leave a better and improved legacy for our children.

Ever since I left home, there was one thing I always remembered. In response to my "why" questions, my mother used to say "You will understand it when you have your own children".

Subconsciously, I was waiting for that moment to come as it was supposed to deliver some explanations. On that day, I left her apartment not even knowing whether I was going to see her again. But somehow it did not matter any more. As selfish as it may sound, I cannot win her battles. She will have to face her emotions and look for the closure on her own. I hope she found one on that day. I know I did and that was my life changing experience.



A Life Changing Experience

By Ashley

There was a time in my life when I had no existence, for myself or for others. About six years ago, I fell into some heavy drugs with this crowd of friends that I was hanging with. I was pretty messed up.

My mother was stressed. My family looked down on me, and my friends disowned me. I didn't care that I was alone. I had new "friends" and I was happy with my drug friends. That's all I cared about.

In reality I wasn't alone. My friends and family were there for me. I just had to let them in.

I finally came around because of my cousin Liz. No one saw me for about two months, and when she saw me, she pushed me down on the floor and was yelling at me. We ended up talking for three hours, and that was when I realized I had to change.

I've finished my Grade 12. I'm upgrading my English so that I can go to college. I stopped taking drugs. I have more respect for those who are around me and were there for me back then. I am a better person.



A Life Changed Experience

By Caroline N.

The three experiences which have changed me and my life for the positive are Congolese Independence Day, Refugees Day, and coming to Canada.

Congolese Independence Day is on June 30th of every year. When I was back in Africa in 1995, Congolese were arranging for their Independence Day, inviting people like Rwandese, Ethiopians, Somalian, and many more. But before the party started people who were going to perform in their games, spots, or dance usually practiced first. I remember my father used to teach us how to dance a cultural music dance. It was fun, because we got to perform in front of many different people.

(Continued on [next page](#))



A Life Changed Experience by Caroline N., continued

Black women can cook food until you want to “bite your hand”. So before evening women will be preparing the food, and you can see how everybody is busy doing something. Some are practicing for their dance, spots, games, and some others are creating clothing, fun and poems. I was twelve years old when I experienced this. For me I enjoyed the food because without eating, I felt bored with the people around me.

At seven o'clock people start to be heard, and they come out wearing handsome beautiful clothing. And the sound of music playing can be heard. People begin performing; other people are eating, drinking, and chatting while getting to know others.

I would say this experience changed my life because I am not from the Congo, but they treated me like I was one of them. It also changed my life because I got to know different kinds of things from other cultures, they would speak their language and share their dances, and you would be asking questions like, “How do you say good morning in your language?” Also you get know different parts of Africa by asking people, “Are you from Somalia?” Different kinds of people doing things which they not do in your country, and by seeing that, you learn about them, and see if it can work for you.

Refugees Day is May 20th of every year, I don't know about Canada but many countries in Africa do celebrate it. People of all kinds will come, even white people. It is all about Refugees coming together dancing, eating, and performing different kinds of games and sports. I remember we use to play netball in the different communities. The team which wins gets the cup. I used to play centre, so I went everywhere on the court. I used to talk to make other players on another team weak. The reason why I talk about this Refugee Day is because I grew up in a Refugee camp for nine years. This life experience changed me because now I know different languages, cultures, dances and sports. Whenever I am near a Somalian or Congolese person I can speak to them in their language, and it makes it more comfortable between us. It's not every African who can speak English and French!

Continued on [next page](#)



A Life Changed Experience by Caroline N., continued

Coming to Canada was a dream came true. I always wanted to finish my education at a high level up to College. I came to Canada 2000-8-14. It was hot, and hot like where we came from, but different. There were many cars, and people passing by.

I remember before coming we stayed in (Kenya) Nairobi for one month and the city is very expensive. So my father said we had to go back to camp until the day the (UN) United Nations was going to be ready to call us. As for my mother, “Believe in God, and say God knows tomorrow”. So we left everything to God. I remember when they called us for our flight. I was not even done doing my hair, but still we ran like crazy. Coming to Canada changed my life because I am now able to pursue my dream of finishing my education, and working so that I can help my family back in Africa.

So you can see all of these experiences have impacted my life in a positive way, and have shaped the person I am today.



A Life Changing Experience

By Darius

I was born in Rwanda. I grew up and worked there until I was 36 years old. Since I moved to Canada in 1993, everything changed: the food I eat, the clothes I wear, the friends I have. I enjoy life in Canada. It is a good country. One thing I don't like is the weather. In winter it is extremely cold; in summer it is extremely hot. When I was in Rwanda, I spoke Kimyarwanda with my friends and relatives. I didn't speak English or other languages to them. Rwanda used to have two official languages, French and Kimyarwanda. Now it has changed. There are three official languages. The third language is English. The students now learn three languages in schools. When I was young I didn't study English.

When I came to Canada it was very difficult to learn English. I started at level one, beginner. It was hard. It has taken a long time to sink in. Every day I speak English with my friends and classmates. I still struggle in English.



My Life Changing Experience

By Madolina

The year 1990 brought me unbelievable life experiences in my native country, Sudan. The war brought killing, raping of women, suffering of children, while the bombing went on. Families were displaced; ultimately hunger took over. Refugee pregnant women were having babies. There was untold sorrow for the Sudanese people. I have several reasons to not forget the war in Sudan.

In June 1990, when the government bombed the small countryside south of Uganda, it was heavy bombardment. I could see people running north, south, and east. They didn't know which area was safe. Even animals were looking for a place to hide.

We ran to a small town that my family thought was safe for us. It was at night when we arrived. We found a woman with four children. The oldest one was fourteen and the youngest one was two years old. My father asked this woman, "Where is the father of the kids?" She said he was sleeping, but it did not make sense to my father, how could this man could be sleeping at this time when you could see the shelling and bombing? Even the sky looked red from the flames of the heavy artillery falling on people's houses.

My father went inside the room where the husband was sleeping. He found the husband, who was shot in his right leg. The wife didn't know what to do, so she covered him and left him to sleep. My father and mother went to see him. My father brought five sticks, which he cut to shape and put around the man's broken leg. He cut some material with a knife and tied the man's leg.

I could see how this man was in pain because there was no remedy to take away the pain. The next day the man asked my father if he would take care of his family. The reason was that he didn't want his kids to see how he was going to die. My father did not hesitate. He called my mother and the man's wife to come in to listen to what the man had to say. Then the man took my dad's hand, my mom's hand and his wife's hand, all together. He looked at his wife and said, "Could you allow me to say my wishes before I die?" The wife said yes. The man was crying when he said this. He told them, "Now you're one family, no matter what happens. Wherever you go, stay together." He told his kids also to listen to my dad and my mom.



A Life Changing Experience By Madolina, continued

My dad decided we had to be here for two weeks, because he wanted to make sure the man was getting better. He did not give up on him. He tried to see how the man's leg was doing. Finally, he determined to take all of us to Khartoum with the other family.

The day we left the town, the news came to my father that the road was closed by the enemy. If we proceeded we might die in an ambush. My dad was eager to go, whether the road was closed or not. He said, "Do not listen to anyone." He ordered two cars from his main office to come and pick up his family.

On September 24, we arrived in Khartoum. If my dad was not a strong man, we would not have made it. One man was responsible for two families, all of them. That is something I will never forget.



A Life Changing Experience

By Rudy

I was suspended from high school at the age of sixteen. I decided not to go back to school, so my parents said to do something with my life. It took me two years to decide my future goal. While I was living with my parents, I couldn't come up with a decision, so they kicked me out to live on my own.



At the age of eighteen I went to work and live in downtown Toronto. As I was working with my colleague and watching other business people going to their offices, I was doing a general labour job. After a few years watching those career and professional people, in the back of my mind I knew I wanted to be one of them. But I didn't know where to start or what career to choose.

After moving from one job to another and living in different places with different roommates, I was so stressed out. One of my roommates, Roger, decided to finish his Grade 12. When he came home I asked him, "Where did you go?" He said, "I enrolled for school." "Where did you enroll? Can you show me?" He said, "Tomorrow I will take you there." I went the next day with him and the counselor gave me the address of a proper school for me.

My experience going back to school was one of the best choices I ever made. Every morning when I ate my breakfast and looked out the window, I saw high school kids going to their school and I thought to myself, "These kids will finish their school in five years or more and they will work in an office of their career and professional choice. I was so excited to go back to school at the age of 30.

Since I decided to attend George Brown College I met a lot of people in my class of different ages and cultures, and they all had their reason why they decided to go back to school. It made me feel that I'm not the only one who made a wrong decision in life. Every day I go to class, it gives me confidence to continue my education, to achieve the goal I chose. It makes me feel good to see everyone in school trying to accomplish whatever they want to become.



What Life Changing Experience Really Means To Me

“We touch the lives of others in ways we often never know. People sometimes come into our personal world for fleeting moments and can leave us forever changed. We have more power to create or to destroy than we can imagine. We can leave things or individuals better or worse than we found them. A look, a word, a gesture has tremendous impact and frequently we blither along through our existence unaware of the mighty power that our communication wields.

Our interactions with the people we encounter can impact at least the next five people that person encounters. A smile and words of simple appreciation multiply themselves geometrically. We cannot control people and situations that come to us, but we can always control our response to them. And in such positive decisions lie our control and personal power to make a positive difference. And it's something anyone and everyone can do. It is a real legacy that can impact both the present and the future.”

Have a meaningful holiday season and we look forward to working on bigger and greater things with you in 2007!

- Maria -



To all our students:

Have a wonderful (and safe) holiday!

Come back in January, rested and ready for the “life-changing experiences” that 2007 will bring.

- Eleanor -



Life is Change

life is a cycle
my song
an energy
ebb & flow
transformation
reclamation
a new beginning

life is highs and lows
realizations
imaginations
forgotten
told
emerging slowly
dancing bold

life is change
a step in time
a rhythm and rhyme
the voice of knowing
glance unsure

change is life

life is wonderful

despite

the change

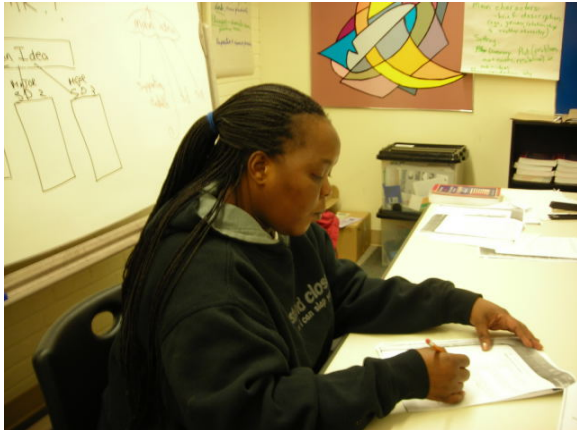
- *Sistah Caroline* -



Best wishes for the changes you are anticipating in 2007.

- *Satha Vivekananthan* -





Madolina

A Life Changing Experience

My life changing experience happens every day at East End Literacy. The students I have been honoured to work with have shown that, in spite of great difficulties, with a will to succeed, a positive attitude and hard work, one can reach great heights. East End Literacy students have been my inspiration.



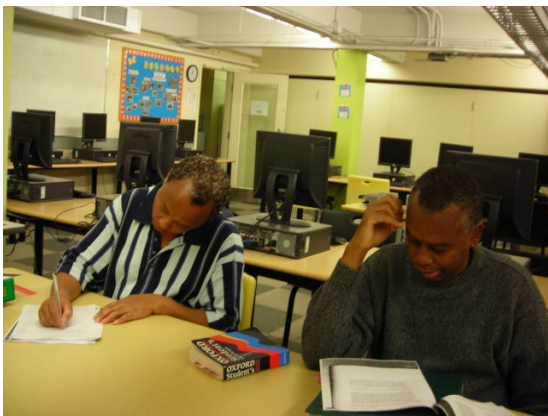
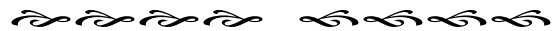
Crystal, Rudy and Kathy

One cannot always control the sometimes adverse circumstances of our lives, but one can work to rise above. This is being proven every day, year after year, over and over, at our Centre.

Thank you to all our students. You make my life richer, and give me the positive energy and enthusiasm to come to work each day.

Have a wonderful, well deserved holiday. I look forward to working with you in the coming New Year, 2007.

- Brenda -



Joseph and Darius

