



DIGGING DEEP



Stories of Hope and Inspiration from Growing Home

“Digging Deep” is a result of Writers’ Circle, an 8-week writing workshop created by Literacy Works in partnership with Growing Home.

Literacy Works’ mission is to fulfill the promise of a basic human right: the right to read, write, and interpret the world.



To fulfill its mission, Literacy Works provides workshops, trainings and direct literacy services to member and non-member agencies.

Literacy Works
c/o 6216 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL 60660
773-334-8255

www.litworks.org

©Literacy Works 2008

Photos by Andrew Collings

www.andrewcollings.com

Book Design by Charlene M. Epple

charlene.epple@gmail.com



Providing job training through a non-profit organic agriculture business.

Growing Home provides job training for homeless and low-income individuals in Chicago through a social enterprise business based on organic agriculture. Our program provides experiential learning opportunities and employment in the horticulture field as well as a unique job readiness curriculum that helps reintroduce participants back into the workforce.

Growing Home was started in 1992 by Les Brown, Director of Policy for the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, who recognized that not only was the critical lack of living-wage jobs one of the major factors that leads to homelessness, but that a sense of purpose was also a necessary component of breaking out of the cycle of homelessness.

Growing Home
2732 N. Clark St., Suite 310
Chicago, IL 60614
773 549-1336
www.growinghomeinc.org

*Growing Home
is committed
to helping
individuals
transform
their lives.*

A Few Words from Growing Home and Literacy Works

Growing Home's interns come from varying backgrounds and bring with them many different experiences. Our interns have decided to make a conscious change to their lives, learning new skills and actively pursuing their goals of employment and further education. Literacy Works Writers' Circle has given our participants an opportunity to express their feelings, guiding them to a voice that they did not realize they have. Growing Home thanks Literacy Works staff for the time and effort that they have shared with our interns, and we thank our interns for sharing their stories.

Tegan Brace
Volunteer Coordinator
Growing Home

Our Writers' Circle took place at Growing Home's Wood Street Urban Farm in Englewood. What was once an empty lot is now turning into Chicago's first permanent, year-round urban farm. It is also a place where lives are being transformed. I am truly impressed with Growing Home's program and the dedication of its participants.

Being part of the Writers' Circle at Growing Home has been such a wonderful experience. I have learned so much from all of the writers! They have taught me about organic farming, community supported agriculture, and Farmers' Markets, as well as the importance of being patient with life and each other.

I am so proud of the writers for their honesty and hard work, which is evident in this book. I wish them all the best as they graduate from Growing Home!

This workshop would not have been possible without the support of Growing Home staff, especially Orrin Williams, Avram Golden-Trist, and Tegan Brace.

Very special thanks go to Andrew Collings and Dane Deasy for the beautiful photography and Charlene Epple for the wonderful book design.

Alison Szopinski
Program Director
Literacy Works

Writings from Growing Home Writers' Circle, Fall 2008

Keeshun Hunt
Shauntae Harvey
Allen Rogers
Kalvina Green
Willie Riley
Davyatta Gray
Damion Richardson
Debra Coleman
Faith White
Tina Dillard
Raheal Hanna
Margaret Parnock
Louis Moore
Glenda Davenport
Isaac Wright Jr.
Valencia Hodrick
Demetrius Burley

My Life

My name is Keeshun (nickname Granny). I have three children, Ta'shawn (Tay-Tay), he is four, Keeshuna (Pig), she is three, Ta'shawna (Chiyna), she is one. I admire my kids because everything I do they look to it. Tay-Tay is a dancer and he's smart. Pig is quiet and knows a lot. She likes writing. Chiyna is a little bad. She knows a lot and she will tell you what she knows. She also likes to dance. I have my own house. I take care of myself and my kids. I'm very friendly and I like playing with kids. I like making kids happy and people too. I love doing hair and drawing, and like making new friends. I like writing about the things that go on in the world and why the world is so messed up and why people have to kill one another.

-Keeshun Hunt

KEESHUN HUNT

A Day at Growing Home

When I wake up I am tired and don't really want to come to work. I am aching from the day before. I wake up at 5:30-6:00 a.m. when I'm working in the city, 4:00-4:30 a.m. when working in Marseilles. I am really tired and want to sleep. I say to myself, "I'll be glad when Friday gets here." I don't eat breakfast. When I'm ready to leave I take the bus and then I walk west to Wood Street, then walk north past the viaduct.

I like the work that I do because I am always active. It's just tiring and a lot of hard work. The good thing is you get hands-on training and you get to watch what you plant grow. You also get to taste/eat the produce and sell it to people...and see the smiles you can put on their faces.

When I first started this program the weather was cool. Then it started to get hot, and I mean hot! Now it's cooling off, but still hot.

It's nice to know that there are farms in the city. I like it because when I tell people what I do, they crack jokes. Then when I say I work here they can't say anything. It's a good experience to work out of the city and get to see new things. When I dress for work, I put on some old clothes. I wouldn't suggest putting on something you don't want dirty or stained.

I farm/work with great people (some). I have fun when I work with them. They make me laugh and we talk about some great things, and

continued on next page

SHAUNTAE HARVEY

if I have a problem I can come to them about it. At the end of the day I feel better than I did earlier, until I get home. I am sore and tired. But I go home, get fresh, and hit the streets.

My Neighborhood

I live in two different places. On Millard nothing happens as much. There are a lot of old people so you can't do too much of anything because they are nosy and will call the police.

On Roosevelt and Avers it's always something. There is always someone arguing about nothing. Either it's over a dice game, who has the most money, and most of all over some trifling person. There are shootings every once in a while and most of all people love to fight, which leads to other stuff.

There are several schools and churches around. Not too many grocery stores. They just closed down Dominick's. We don't have activities because of gang banging. The only thing I can think of that's halfway decent is that the police ride the streets. But that ain't worth sh** because some stop and talk and hang with you.

My neighborhoods are similar to others, just that you might not see it in the paper or on the news. I do enjoy where I'm at, but it's just not safe all the time. Other people will say that it's okay, but there are too many kids. If I could change anything, it would be the gang activities. I can't do anything by myself.

A Place of Refuge

I like to go to the park and sit next to the water and watch the geese and ducks... Hear the different birds and the frogs and just listen to nature. That keeps me calm and relaxed. I like going to this place because I can be by myself with no one there to bother me. No one knows where I'm at. When I'm at home, it won't work. The kids are constantly knocking at the door, the phone/doorbell ringing, parents call you "do this," "come do that." So the only quiet place is at the park.

I can only go here when the weather is nice. I prefer it when it's not too hot or too cold. But in the winter when it gets too much to handle in my household, I might go into the room, lock the door and listen to my headphones. Or, I will get a motel room for a few hours and be by myself.

-Shauntae Harvey



ALLEN ROGERS

Why I Came to Growing Home

I am in a treatment center and I was placed in this program called Family Enrichment. This program assists you with job leads. One day one of the instructors asked for two people to sign up for Growing Home. I needed a job at that time so I took that chance, which was a good decision. I have learned so much from this program. I had no idea about it, but when I started coming it gave me an opportunity to learn different skills and to learn about farming, harvesting, growing, and much more.

Living in the Ghetto

Living in the ghetto ain't never been easy. I grew up in an inner city and let me tell you something, it wasn't fun. Growing up on the south side was like being in Vietnam. I witnessed so many things. People getting killed and everybody hanging out. I haven't been in the hood for years. I got out of the game and I am now trying to walk a straight path. I just try to stay positive because people always talk about bad things. I try to remember the good times. It was really hard on me as I was growing up in the ghetto, but with people praying for me and me praying, God made a way out for me. I was blessed to get away from that lifestyle. I am so glad to be free from that bondage that I was in. Free at last. Thank God I'm free.

Going to Treatment

On the day of December 17th I walked into a treatment center to get some help. It wasn't easy, but my faith in God gave me strength. Before I checked myself in I was exhausted, tired, frustrated, worried, and

continued on next page

beat up. I just needed some good rest and to eat a good meal. I thank God for making it possible to get help. I have been rescued from danger. I was just so sick out of my mind that I didn't know how to get any help. I am thankful for this program because I wouldn't know what to do without it. I am very grateful.

A Meal I Shared with Someone I Love

I shared cooked food with my parents when my dad was alive. My dad cooked good food all the time. The last good meal I had was with my parents. It has been five years ago that I ate a good meal from scratch.

-Allen Rogers

My Life in the Ghetto

My life in the ghetto has been crazy and sometimes I enjoy my life. I can say I've seen a lot of things go on like people getting shot and killed. Anything can happen and something is always going on. And then again, I have had a ton of exciting times in the ghetto, like family affairs, hanging out with friends, and doing what we do – just have a good time. All I can say is that you can take me out the ghetto, but you can't take the ghetto out of me.

A Place of Refuge

I feel safe nowhere 'cause anywhere you go – you can be in your own house – and something can happen. Especially in this world today, a lot of things go on every second, every minute something is happening. You can get shot, robbed, killed, you can get into a fight and get hurt real bad. They might still do you the wrong way and you may not survive. This is why I feel safe nowhere.

If I had to choose, though, it would be in my house with my people. In my house where I live we sit around, crack jokes, we party together, but most of all we just have fun.

The Definition of Kalvina

Kalvina is a strong, educated, black queen who enjoys life. She is the type of person brightening up people's days. But sometimes she can be mean, or nice.

-Kalvina Green

My Best Memory of Growing Home

When I first came to Growing Home and saw that everything was just as my friend had told me, it was a joy. Growing Home can make friends of enemies because we make a lot of friends here. That is my best memory of Growing Home. Now I am stable for myself. Growing Home has shown me how to be independent day by day and hour by hour. It is teaching me how to be on time, how to control myself, how to do things and to be open. Because I am you and you are me.

A Day at the Farm

Getting ready to go to the farm, I feel just great because I am going to do some things. Smelling the fresh air there. I like to go to the farm because it gives you a sense of growth. It makes you feel like a person. What I do on the farm is pick the greens, onions, and peppers. It's a good thing too because I can see what I am eating. A lot of people don't understand why their mothers were so hard on them about eating right. Now I know, especially after I pick vegetables. It's important. It really is. I love Marseilles because the ride is great because you are with friends – smiling, laughing, talking all the time. I have a friend I talk to every day.

I get up at 5:30 a.m. and get myself ready for a long day's work. At 8:30 we are in Marseilles, IL on the farm. We get out of the bus and go into the trailer. Now I go to the board and sign what I'm going to do. I'm going to pick potatoes. I'm going to do greens next week. I smile because they all know I like working on the farm. I never miss a day. I get tired, but it doesn't stop me from going to work. Now I get off at 2:30. We get on the bus. When I get home, I take a shower, go into my room and lay down on my bed.

-Willie Riley



My Neighborhood

The neighborhood I'm going to talk about is the one I grew up in and still live in today. In my hood there are churches and liquor stores right by each other. Then there are restaurants and more liquor stores, but besides that there are people always on the grind. Everyone is trying to make a deal, selling or buying something.

A Day at Growing Home

It is early in the morning, about 5:30 a.m. and I'm on my way to work. On a Saturday, at that, but I have no problem with going to work at 5:30. I have a problem with there being a thunderstorm while I have to wait for the bus to get to work. I also have a problem with wearing a t-shirt

about two sizes too little, even if it is a part of the uniform we wear there. Even with all that, I can't wait to get there because I know at the Farmers' Market, no matter how bad the weather, the people will be there. Plus, I enjoy all the money being transacted at the market. I try to talk to all the people I can at the market because if you can talk to them you probably can talk them into a sale. I also enjoy all the different types of dogs that they bring with them to the market. In between sales I talk to my coworkers and pack what is not needed anymore, so when market is over we can leave fast as possible. The Farmers' Market is important because that's how we make money off what we've harvested.

Davyatta

Weird, intelligent, best, crazy

Son of Mary Smith

Brother of Latoya Smith

Who feels like the world is against me

Who likes to be by myself

Who needs love, money, family, and friends

Who lives at home in the hood with my Ma

Gray

-Davyatta Gray

Being Incarcerated

It's f**cked up being incarcerated. You don't have any rights. You get treated like a dog and fed like a bird. C/O's (correction officers) talk to you like s**t. They put you in a room with anybody...they can be a rapist, murderer, or just plain crazy. You never get any rest and you have to stay focused or you will go crazy! You only get one life to live and I don't want to live it incarcerated.

A Day at Growing Home

I love my job on Wood Street, but I hate that I have to be at work at 8:30 a.m. It's alright because my job is right across the street from my house. I wake up Tuesday through Friday, don't eat any breakfast and go straight to work. It's very hot in the hoop houses in the morning. I try to stay active 'cause when it's really hot I get tired.

My Hood

My hood is full of bulls**t, but I love my hood. A lot of people got killed in my hood.

Damion

Leader, thinker, handsome, fearless

Son of Denise

Brother to David

Who feels that life is rough

Who likes women

Who needs lots of money

Who lives in Englewood, South Side Chicago

Richardson

-Damon Richardson

A Day at Growing Home

I woke up at 4:00 am. I really did not want to get up so early, but I wanted to go to the farm in Marseilles. I ran upstairs and jumped in the shower, called Robert to wake him up and got my lunch together. I went back downstairs and got dressed. Robert calls, he is down the street so I go outside. We go pick up the rest of the group. We talk, laugh, sing, and eat on the way to the farm. We arrive at the farm and find out what we have to do.

Today Valencia and I are picking bugs off of the potatoes. At first we are kind of hesitant because we don't really know what we are looking for. Courtney explains what we are

looking for so we walk up and down the rows of potatoes. Then we start to compare the bugs. "Oh man, look at this one! Man I found a lot of babies!" We have cups filled with water and we knock the bugs in the water and smash the babies off the leaves. We are laughing and talking. Then I yell and everyone at the farm raises their head to see why I yelled – the cat came between my legs! Valencia says, "I thought you saw him coming." How can I see something coming from behind me?

Now it is 1:45 and time to wrap it up and discuss what we did today. Then we get back on the van to go home. Everyone is quiet and tired. We just want to get home to take a shower and put on fresh clothes.

My Neighborhood

I live in Gage Park. I have been living here for eight years. I stay right across the street from Gage Park High School. The neighborhood is very quiet during the summer, but when school starts the guys hang on the corner in front of our house. They write on our garage door.

In my area there are mostly Hispanics, but when you go across 59th Street there are mostly African Americans. It is really kind of funny because from 55th St. to 58th St. I hear Latin music. Then when I cross 59th Street I hear rap music. There is a mixture of both in some areas. The stores are different too, like Pete's Market, where there are so many different kinds of fruits and vegetables that are not in the stores like Jewel and Aldi's that are in my neighborhood. I even buy the food from the Hispanic vendors. Also, the block club parties are really great. They have any kind of music you want to hear and there are no conflicts. Everyone just has big fun. My neighborhood is very friendly and I like living here.

The Lesson of My Life

I learned that when you do the right things in life, like having a job, paying your bills and taking care of your kids, family will always have your back. I am the baby in the family of eight (five boys and three girls). We were all two to three years apart in age. We lived in the projects – we were not rich but we were alright. My youngest brother and I visited my father on weekends because he had another family. But he gave us money and bought things we needed. I was spoiled because what my mother couldn't and wouldn't buy for me, my sisters or brothers would. I went to almost all the parties and events that came to town. I grew up, found a nice job, and decided to move out of my mother's house. I was going really well.



When I fell short, someone in the family would have my back. I had two kids, lost my job, and started collecting unemployment. However, I started taking advantage of my family. One day, one by one, they started telling me no so I had to move back in with my mother. My mother was very no nonsense and strict. She didn't play. She said what she meant and meant what she said. During this time, my unemployment stopped so I applied for aid and food stamps.

My mother told me there was no reason for me to be sitting around and that she would watch the kids while I looked for a job. I fooled her for about two months saying that I was looking but couldn't find a job. One day she said, "Baby, sit down. Look, I know you don't think that I believe you've been looking for a job for two months and can't find one. No one believes that you are looking for work. That's why your sisters and brothers will not help you because you are not trying to help yourself." She said, "It's time to pay your rent." What! "You heard me." She gave me an itemized list of things I had to pay. She said, "So tomorrow morning you need to go and find a job because your rent is due three weeks from today." I got my butt up the next day and started looking. By the end of the week I found a job. I stayed with my mother for another six months. I found a place for me and my kids. My sisters and brothers helped me get what I needed. I thank my family for teaching me the lesson of my life.

Fall Season

I like to walk when the leaves are on the ground and hear them crunch when you step on them. It's not too cold and it's not too hot. The kids start back to school and everybody looks like they are all in a hurry to go somewhere important. Then Halloween rolls around and people are dressed in costumes. It is still fun as an adult taking the kids trick-or-treating. Now it is Thanksgiving. Sitting in the kitchen with my sister and our daughters. We listen to music, laugh and talk while we are preparing our meal. The next day the family comes over. Some watch the game, some watch a movie, the kids watch cartoons, and others are playing cards. We don't sit down and eat together, but we bless the food before anyone eats. Now it's time to think about what you're going to buy everyone for Christmas. Then we have that first snow. I go out to take a walk and let the snow fall on my face. As soon as it hits my face it melts and it doesn't stick to the ground. This is when I know fall is over.

-Debra Coleman

My Best Memory of Growing Home

I've been here since 3/31/08. It has been a good experience. I like what I do. But the best memory is when we first started and we had to sit in class all day before we even went out in the field. We had a teacher named Katherine, and every day, even if you weren't feeling well or were upset about something, she made you smile and laugh. She's just the sweetest person who always lights up a room once she has entered it. She kept you motivated.

I was always kind of down because of the situation I'm in right now and I was just beginning at Growing Home. She told me everything would be alright and she would touch my shoulder every morning. One day she told us that since we're going to be here for the next six months we might as well get along as a family. Ever since, everyone has been like family.

Working at Growing Home

I think it's very important to do something that you really enjoy, especially when you can get up in the morning and just be excited about going to work. The reason I like working at Growing Home is because it's not that hard once you learn how. I used to see people growing greens in their backyards and it looked like it was hard, but now I see

it's not. It's a good learning experience and a beautiful program. It helps you a lot.

When I go out to Marseilles, Illinois to the big farm, we have all kinds of veggies out there. Some I've never heard of before. Going out there is really boring because everyone's sleeping in the van and by the time we get there then you're really tired. Now you really don't feel like working, unless you're one of those people who can sleep for thirty minutes to an hour and then you're good. It's better to have a farm in the city because it's healthier. You don't have to wait maybe a month to get fresh veggies. I've been to the Farmers' Market once, but I'm going tomorrow morning and I like that you get to interact with the public. It's like working in the grocery store only the veggies are fresher than the store's.

If I Could Change One Thing about Society

If I could change one thing about society it would be the homelessness that's going on. There are too many vacant buildings and houses for there to be that many homeless people in the state of Illinois. The property taxes are so expensive. You can't even get a one-bedroom apartment without six hundred or more dollars. If you get one and live there a while, then taxes go up and they will raise your rent. You barely can pay the rent you were paying and now they want to raise it another \$50 to \$100 a month! I would rehab all the buildings and homes in the city of Chicago and there would be no more homelessness.

-Faith White





TINA DILLARD

A Day at Growing Home

Oh my goodness it's morning all ready! The television is blaring and the sound of the Channel 7 news wakes me completely. I rush over to turn off my television alarm, being careful not to wake my daughter too early.

Although the sun is beginning to peek through the dawning clouds, and regardless of the birds chirping, my body refuses to wake up. I flop heavily back into my bed with the false hope of getting more sleep. After about five minutes or so I realize sleep has completely abandoned me and I jump up to begin the day (Because in reality I've wasted about thirty minutes trying to get started).

I dash around my room attempting to find an outfit for my daughter so I can lay it out. My clothes are usually repeated because my job is so filthy. Now I grab a cigarette, towel, and shower accessories and head for the bathroom. After finishing my toilet meditation and cigarette I immerse myself in a HOT shower for about ten minutes.

After the shower I feel invigorated and now I'm moving with speed. I'm dressed in five minutes. My hair stays in place because it's molded so it's fabulous already. I never really have morning hair.

I dress my daughter while she's sleeping because she bathes the night before. By the time I'm finished dressing her, she's fully awake and ready to brush her own teeth. As soon as she finishes we are out the door. Before work I must drop her at daycare.

This is when my day really begins. I arrive at Growing Home about twenty minutes later, prepared to work hard, but happy when we don't have to. I'm usually dressed in all black cotton material because the color hides dirt and the cotton allows my skin to breathe.

Upon arriving I always look for my favorite person, Margaret, and hope we're near one another so we can talk sh** and get some laughter out of folks. Amazingly, everyone is cool on the field regardless of our tedious tasks. We're all secretly counting down the time for break even though one could not tell by our work performance.

After a few hours of the harvesting process, and bed preparation (cultivation) we are free for lunch. I usually spend lunch away from the job because it gives me a sense of peace. Also, people here beg excessively and you would not enjoy lunch unless you left the job with it.

After lunch on a good day, we would have either a writing class, or computer class which means we get to sit and chill until the day ends. On a regular day it's back to the physical labor: weeding, hauling dirt, etc.

But the best part is the END of the day. Check out time. Put the tools away, clean up, get ya' sh** and let's go! However, I go home knowing that once again I lived up to the obligation I gave myself; and that was to report to work and do whatever is asked of me without hesitation.

Moments of Refuge

The bathroom is my place of refuge. Yes, I know this may sound strange, but the bathroom is the only place I can just BE. My daughter even respects the moments I spend in my bathroom of refuge.

However, before I can seek refuge in such a highly germ infested place, a lot of cleaning takes place. After I've replaced the usual bathroom odor with the fresh scent of Fabuloso and Floral Clorox, I go to retrieve my bathroom items. These items consist of an ice cold Pepsi, cigarettes, and the latest book. I rarely bring a radio because I LOVE the sound of running water – very soothing to my hyper soul.

It is in this room only that I can think, sort out the day's events, space out, and be quiet. Basically, be left alone. Everyone depends on me for every little thing and it becomes overwhelming. Although I may verbally express my frustration, my peace comes from my bathroom of refuge.

Patience

Becoming a mother was my ultimate lesson in learning how to be patient. I believe that lack of patience comes from a person's inability to deal with repetition. See, as a mother I repeat, re-teach, re-learn, re-experience the exact situations every day with my daughter. In the beginning, rationale was unknown to me, so was problem solving. Now, after three years I have learned that even the same problem can be approached in numerous ways, with rationale and repetition.

-Tina Dillard

Making Pickle Brine

Water, plus white vinegar, plus a little honey, plus salt makes pickle brine. I made two batches for many, many cucumbers. People like my cooking, and that makes me feel good. Recently, I made refrigerator dill pickles – with organic, fresh cukes, garlic, and jalapeños and dill seed. I shared them with some coworkers and they loved them. Two people even requested some for home. I charged them ten dollars each, they happily agreed.

So, early this morning I woke up to make the brine because people like my pickles. And also, without the brine, they're just cucumbers.



Mental Gymnastics on a Journey to Marseilles

I wake up in the early
to pay my dues
even though I thought
such dues
were already paid.

My head
on pillow
laid
however I wake- my brain says "f**k...fine...I'm up..."
'cause dues need to be paid

Morning sky: a 4:35 am shade of blue
wish I knew
the point of picking
vittles for
the upcoming Saturday
yuppy stew
but the dues say "pick 'em," pick 'em, pick 'em
the chard, the garlic, the oblong juliets
Yea, not to mention the collards, can't forget the collards
nor to smile bright
"just look at what we grew"
and the game keeps playing, all while paying my dues.

My Best Experience at Growing Home

My best experience at Growing Home was taking frequent Wednesday and Thursday trips to Marseilles, Illinois to work at the Les Brown Memorial Farm. It has been wonderful to get out of the city and drive to the country, looking at the green landscape, breaking into the sweet smelling earth to pick raspberries and vegetables.

The experience has taught me that farming can show you a lot about life, mostly about how to be patient with the process of growth: sowing and repeating. I'm learning there will always be a harvest, eventually.

A Meal I Shared with Someone I Love

One of my best meals was with my grandmother. It was at Victory Memorial Hospital in Waukegan, Illinois, during one of her first serious hospital stays, before she knew she had lung cancer. Maybe she knew how sick she was and didn't let on. I came from college to visit her for the weekend.

It was lunchtime when the nurse came in with her food tray. It was a veggie burger and cottage cheese with pureed peaches- I suggested that she put the puree over the cottage cheese, to make it more dessert-like. So she did and enjoyed it.

What I remember most about the meal was that she was so intent on sharing it with me. She talked about sharing her lunch while she was slicing the veggie burger in half with a plastic fork. Maybe she thought this would be her last meal she shares with me. I must admit that I was thinking the same thing. It tasted good, even the cottage cheese and peach puree. And we talked about life- school, life- you know, like we usually did during my visits.

Suburbia ≠ Hell

My dad lives in suburbia
 I live with him
 for the ump-teenth time
 in my 32 years-
 Old fears
 waning
 there's less complaining
 you see
 dad used to be complicated
 hell- mean
 But now, we plant tomatoes
 and drive past churches
 without guilt
 and take turns buying the milk
 and are granted permission
 to pick our neighbor's pears
 This time around
 Suburbia doesn't suck.
 I feel visible.
 I feel safer
 I feel, truly,
 like my father's daughter
 ...finally

A Lesson Learned

Quit yer bitchin'
 life cuts us bold!
 ...sometimes hot
 ...sometimes cold
 Get to your mission
 Especially on the days
 when you sho' can't see
 what the hell it's 'sposed to be!

A Place of Refuge: Me and the Mic

Lights go low, then lower,
 then off
 spotlight on
 the heart beats fast
 the music's introduction
 I wait till my cue
 When life gets tough
 I sing
 with my voice
 close my eyes
 open my mouth
 in goes the breath
 out goes the hope
 in shades, in tones,
 high and low
 painful drones, prayerful moans
 I close my eyes
 open my mouth
 I sing to see,
 to hope, to flee,
 or just plain be

-Raheal Hanna

Why I Came to Growing Home

At first it was all about some money. Then I realized that it was more than a paycheck. Growing Home has taught me how to be responsible. I come to work on time. I show up every day that I am supposed to. For someone that has a twenty-year history with drugs and alcohol abuse, it was very hard to be responsible about anything. I have gone through many changes. I have been in recovery for over eight months and I am now a full-time college student. My life has done a 360 degree turn around. Instead of drinking and drugging, now my life is all about my recovery and my continuing education.



A Day at Growing Home

Starting my day very early, I drink coffee, and then I shower. I have to be out the door at 4:00 a.m. It's ok to go to work early. I like getting done earlier. I take the Red Line train from Rogers Park to Garfield, then the bus to Ashland. It's about a three block walk from there to the site. Once I get there, I sign in and find out what my duties of the day are. It doesn't seem to take long because it is a great work environment. I feel like we have a great work team, everyone gets their jobs done. It was a great day to work. The sun is shining and it's not too hot. That makes it better to work. I wear my old jeans to work because it's real easy to get dirty. I also keep an old pair of shoes just to work in. At the end of my day, I am not looking forward to the long ride back to the Red Line. It takes me an hour on the train to get home. Once I get home I either just rest, or study, or clean. Sometimes I manage to throw in a cooked meal. I am trying to balance everything and maintain some sense of accomplishment. I will continue to work hard with hope to achieve the goals I have set for myself.

MARGARET PARNOCK

A Lesson I Learned

It was and is a hard lesson learned. You see, I am a recovering alcoholic and an addict. I have a twenty-five year history with drugs and alcoholism. I finally hit my bottom and wound up in a treatment center, Haymarket. I stayed in residential treatment from January 08 to the end of August. I now have over eight months sober. I have my own apartment and I am a full-time college student at Truman College. It's a lot and I'm trying very hard. In the end I would like to help people like me, and I hope to get a degree in addiction studies. I would make a good counselor. Plus, working in the recovery field would help me stay sober. I don't want to mess up the rest of my life. It's time to get busy living. I have already spent many years dying.

-Margaret Parnock

Why I Came to Growing Home

I came to Growing Home because I was let out of prison last year in November. I was really determined to find a job. I knew it was not going to be easy because of my background. I was talking to my aunt one day and she gave me a listing of places that work with ex-offenders. Growing Home was one of the places. I called the number and got in touch with Mr. Orrin Williams. He explained what the program was about and that they were having orientation in March. I went and got in the program because I wanted to work for money the right way instead of getting involved with what sent me to prison time and time again. I really appreciate the program because it got me motivated to work on a job and get a pay check.

A Day at Growing Home

I woke up to the sound of my alarm clock at 5:45 a.m. I woke up this morning feeling rested. I went to bed early the night before at 9:00 pm. This morning after I showered and dressed, I fixed three pieces of French toast, one scrambled egg, and two Bob Evans sausages (the patty kind) and a glass of low cholesterol orange juice. I left at 7:00 a.m., headed for the bus stop two blocks from where I live. It arrived at 7:10 a.m. I arrived here at Wood Street at 8:15 a.m. with fifteen minutes to spare before we started work. We started our work day by getting in a van and driving to another inner-city farm called Su Casa. Once there I was assigned to pick cucumbers with one other co-worker. Yes, I liked my assignment – looking for and then picking different sized cucumbers was fun to me. The weather today was nice and pleasant.

Working on a farm in the city is fascinating as well as educational. I have learned about different produce that I had never even heard of before. To have fresh, organic vegetables right in a city neighborhood I think is a very good thing. Also, working on a farm outside the city was very interesting and fun to me. Learning how to seed and use different tools was a learning experience for me, and to get out of the city for a few hours was also good. I farm with a group of individuals. We work as a team and are from a job placement program called Growing Home, which I think is a very good thing. At the Farmers' Market you see different kinds of people. I like working with the public. Just to see how people like organic produce and how quick the stuff sells excites me. This has been a very good experience for me.

My Neighborhood

My neighborhood is on the southeast side of Chicago, very close to Indiana. I live near the border line. There are Hispanics and blacks that live in that area, but it's mostly Hispanic. Every year they have a parade and festival for the community. The area is called South Chicago. I have lived there since I was about eleven years old in different places. It looks like a nice community, but there is a lot of gang violence, though it's not as bad as most Chicago neighborhoods. I do like where I live. There is a grade school, Arnold Mireles Academy, and a high school walking distance from where I live. I went to both and graduated from both.

One positive thing I could say is there's a CeaseFire Committee in the community. I think that's a good thing. Some people now view the neighborhood as bad because of the gangs. I would like to see no more killing and for people to stop being enemies and become friends. I have been getting involved with CeaseFire, which brings communities together to stop violence.

What made me get involved was that last month gang bangers were shooting at each other and my friend's ten-year old daughter got shot and died. This happened on Labor Day, the day before school she was about to start. She was walking with her little sister and came into crossfire. She died right there on the sidewalk. This is where she took her last breath. I'm glad that they caught the guys – they have the shooter and three other guys all charged with 1st degree murder and attempted murder because her sister was right there beside her when she got shot. I feel enough is enough. Maybe if I can get one gang banger to change because they see that I changed, we can get more and more gang bangers to stop living violently. Please "cease fire." Stop the killing.

A Place of Refuge

A place of refuge for me is church. There I feel comfortable, safe, and all my worries are forgotten. When I'm there I feel so uplifted. Prayer is a very important thing for me. Since I have been getting spiritual, I feel so much joy and happiness not like before, when I was feeling so down and upset with myself for the mistakes I have made in life. Today, thanks to God, I know I have a purpose in life. I feel if I keep striving to live a good life blessings will keep coming to me.

-Louis Moore



Why I Came to Growing Home

I came to Growing Home to experience something I have never done. I have taken the time and patience to learn as much as I could about the program. I have learned that the baddest people can be changed with a little nurturing. And Growing Home gives you that! They teach you from how to plant a seed to harvesting, they teach you to respect one another, they also teach you to love what you do and do what you love.

When I first started at Growing Home I didn't know anything about farming. With the help of Mr. Williams, Avram, Tyra, and Parris I have begun to like farming. I plant, cultivate, harvest and prep beds. I would like to continue on in this field because it is something I want to do...even go into marketing for myself and have my own little gardens. I have been given the tools to do so and one day I will. I will have to thank Growing Home for giving me that experience to grow in a field of what I like doing.

A Day at Growing Home

A day for me at Growing Home is very important because it is my job. My day starts out with me getting up at 7 am in the morning and getting ready for work. I feel good in the morning because I like going to work and I like what I do. At 8:15 I'm out the door walking to work which is only about four blocks from my home. At 8:25 I'm at the site ready for my work assignment from either supervisors, Avram or Tyra. As they give out the assignment I begin my day's work. It could be seeding, planting, cultivating, harvesting, or watering the vegetables. There is so much to be done you must have the time and patience. I love what I do so I have no complaints when I'm asked to do something.

As far as the weather, some days it's hot and I feel all sweaty and sticky, but I make it through the day. When it's cool or rainy it's fine, but most times if it is raining we watch different movies based on the work we do and to learn more about agriculture. I enjoy being at the farm in Marseilles. I get to learn about other vegetables which we don't have here. I have Chrissy, Joe, Tracy, and Larry to work with at the big farm and they are very nice to work with and talk to. Being at the Farmers' Market is a great marketing experience. You get to meet all kinds of people and talk to them. While I'm at the Farmers' Market I talk to people and tell them about Growing Home and what it has to offer. I talk about vegetables and explain why they are healthy for them. I explain to them what organic means and also give them different recipes for how the vegetables can be prepared. The Farmers' Market is very important because it gives you a chance to sell your produce. At the end of the day I'm still feeling good and I try not to let anyone break my spirits. I walk home to go take a bath, lie down, and relax by watching a movie or even just sitting on the front porch and conversating.

A Lesson I've Learned

A lesson I've learned is how to treat others. When you treat someone bad or wrong it hurts them and it sometimes causes them to have low self esteem. That is not a good feeling. I have learned to treat others the way I want to be treated and that is with respect. I have had people treat me bad and my feelings were hurt. One time I had low self esteem

continued on next page



about myself and as I began to treat people with respect, I began to gain respect. The lesson was taught to me by the people I mistreated. It is important to respect one another no matter who or what they are. You can go a long way in life showing respect. It shows you have pride, dignity, and you also care for others and their feelings. It changed my life and made me a better person. Instead of mistreating a person, I try to help them. If they're sad I try and make them laugh. If a person is going through something I will give my shoulder for them to lean on. If there is something someone doesn't know and I do, I will teach them. I am now a more giving person. Today I care.

A Place of Refuge

A place of refuge is in my bedroom. That's where I find peace. I go in there and meditate sometimes when I feel depressed, stressed, or just want to be alone. When I meditate it's like being in my own world of peace. I feel safe and protected in this world of mine. I have no worries. I focus on good thoughts and good things happen. I feel so relaxed. When you meditate in your mind you can go anywhere you want to and be whoever you want to. That's my refuge, in a state of meditation in my room.

I was taught how to meditate by Mr. Williams at Growing Home. I start out by getting in a relaxed position. I sit and try to erase everything from my mind and then I breathe. There's a rhythm in breathing. I inhale and then slowly I exhale. I've just begun to meditate. I know how to focus on something positive like the sound of the rain, the sound of the ocean, whatever relaxes me at the time. After I meditate I come out in a totally different state of mind.

-Glenda Davenport

A Turning Point in Life

There have been so many turning points in my life. You know, I've been up at times when I thought I didn't need anyone. Then there have been times when I've been down, when I thought nobody needed me. The real turning point in my life was this last time I went to prison. You see, it took a toll on my mother. Now that I'm out I must, I repeat, I must, do whatever I have to do to stay on the right side of the law.

A Day at Growing Home

Well, this is a very good topic that you chose today, Ms. Alison. Reason being, each day at Growing Home is not like a job, it's like a journey. Just getting up every morning is a life changing moment. For instance, each day that we work at the farm in Marseilles...

My day starts at 3:45 a.m. My feet hit the floor. I go straight to my sister's fireplace (when we're not acting like the Hatfields and the McCoys) and take my meditations to help me get through the day. Then I go take a shower if I have time (see I never go to bed without first taking a shower), and I get dressed. I eat breakfast and I'm on the Central and North Ave. bus by 7 a.m., or if it is a farm day, by 5:30 a.m. I arrive at Wood Street or at Wabash and Roosevelt. I get to work, do what I'm told, and if it's the Lord's will, pray that he lets me see the next day. It doesn't matter about the weather, what task I'm asked to do, or who I'm working with. My motto is there are no problems, there are only solutions. My superior calls it and "Ike Ike" will haul it. I like to think that I can adjust to any surrounding and come out on top. Quitting time varies but I do be ready to go! Especially when I am looking forward to seeing my grandkids.

My Neighborhood

The neighborhood that I'm presently living in I'm not familiar with, so I'll write a little bit about the neighborhood I grew up in when I was younger. That period of my life was fantastic. The people that I played with in school were the same people that I grew up with. Everything was in order and everything was simple. The money you did have went a long way. I even met my ex-wife in that neighborhood. You know, you never miss something so good until you start reminiscing.



A Lesson I've Learned

The most important lesson I've learned lately is that I'm not living my life on my own. I have people that are looking to me to be their hero. Imagine that! So when I speak now I have to think about the effect that it will have on others. When I do something I have to analyze what I'm doing to do before I do it. All in all it's kind of neat.

-Isaac Wright Jr.

A Lesson I've Learned

I've learned how to be self-sufficient, responsible, and independent by growing up as a mature adult. I've learned how to take care of myself by working a real job, and an honest job. I've learned how not to mix negative work with positive work. I've learned how to live like a normal person. I've learned not to take my life and time for granted, and know that each and every day is precious. I had to learn the hard way, which wasn't a pretty sight. Sometimes God has to get your attention, the way that he knows will work for you. I had a moment of clarity and the fog was lifted from my eyes.



My Neighborhood

The neighborhood I live in is mixed. I reside in the Mexican neighborhood. I've only been there about six months. There are several African Americans compared to many Mexicans. Frankly, I like my hood, and I feel the opposite races should learn how to live together. I don't feel threatened, by any means, and I feel safe. Now I'm more concerned about my only 24-year-old son because I know parts of the neighborhood are gang affiliated, and sometimes he just pops up. I think he's in a gang too, so I am concerned about him when he comes by. I asked him to give me a telephone call so I will be alert when he comes.

Another thing I like about my neighborhood is that the people are very friendly, especially the children. The children are friendly probably

because their parents brought them up to be kind and considerate to others and not to judge others. I don't see a lot of hanging out and drug transactions. That's really great. I've always lived in a drug affected neighborhood, since as long as I can remember. It feels good not to have to walk out your front door and have the drug sellers asking if you are straight. I used to get really angry when they would say that to me. I'm happy I don't have to be bothered with that crap any more.

Someone Who Is Dear to Me

The person who is dearest to me is my baby daughter Amanda. She is dearest to me because she has been with me through all of my ups and downs, my good times as well as my bad times. Regardless of what I've taken my children through, she is still standing in my corner. I've become very overprotective of her. Sometimes I am overbearing with her because she deserves the best out of life. She is my backbone. She helps me strive to be the best that I can be. She motivates me to become a better mom. She doesn't have any children right now, and I'm so blessed that she doesn't since she is only twenty years old. I ask God to continue helping me to go forward, not backward.

Valencia

Nice, free hearted, caring, and talkative

Daughter of Maxine

Sister of Darris, Darrel, Mentrell, Mendell,

Kevin, Waymond, Will, Katrina,
and Jacqueline

Who feels things are a little tough,

but will get better with God's guidance

Who likes to be at peace, and to keep peace with others

Who needs to stay strong

Who lives in my own place

Hodrick

-Valencia Hodrick



DEMETRIUS BURLEY

A Lesson I've Learned that's Shaped Who I Am

Honestly, I can't say specifically one lesson I've learned that had much significance towards me becoming who I am today, but there is an entire subject. That subject is science. I say this because now that I've learned a lot of science, theories, and formulas/equations, I now see not just the world in a different perspective, but everything, the entire universe and beyond galaxies.

In fact, it is because of science that I know that there's actually a universe and beyond. Science has changed my life in various ways from looking with a quick glance and just judging something, to now observing and analyzing things as best as possible. Learning that it's quantity that's greater than quality, but now knowing that it's quality that makes quantity significant. Exciting facts about how much nitrogen is way up in the air, but how the plants down in the earth's soil make their own type of nitrogen, which makes me arrive at a hypothesis stating that just maybe it's the plants that cause all of the nitrogen to accumulate in the earth's atmosphere, just maybe.

See, it's these almost unlimited facts about science that not only give me an abundance of information, but sets off an inevitable chain reaction of on going hypotheses causing me to seek more knowledge. You know how you just get a taste for some double-stuffed Oreo cookies, but you don't realize how great your hunger is or even if it's a hunger to begin with, but anyways, you finally get a hold of the cookies and you consume one, and its taste is outstanding, then another, and another, and on and on. Then before you know, you've eaten an entire deluxe pack and your brain is overflowing with dopamine, which is why

the cookies taste so good. But beside the point you realize that your mouth is dry and you are extremely thirsty for some milk, which hits the spot. Well, that's my analogy for my thirst of knowledge for science, and once I read about a lot of information, I just consume it all like a pack of Oreos, and once everything is crammed in, I let it all go down and organize it like Oreos with a glass of milk.

This is pretty much what I want to do: get more people to get into science. I have a theory that if I could get at least 75% of a school of 2,500 into science, by the time they graduate from high school and college, they can produce a building the size of the Empire State Building running completely off of 100% non pollutant energy, produce all types of inventions and make all types of medical breakthroughs such as a cure for herpes or 100% cellular regeneration for individuals who've lost a limb. Even though this is hypothesis, just imagine if instead it could be 75% of a town, city, state, or coast. There's no telling what we, as a whole, can achieve.

A Place of Refuge

My place of refuge is in my head. Why? Because no one can find me, no one can harm me, no one knows me, because there I don't know myself. All I know is that my potential is limitless. There, it's like a refuge, endless tour, exploration, and vacation all in one. Discovering the depths of my unconscious through dreams and nightmares, both helping me discover my hidden fears, inhibitions, guilty pleasures, answers to incomplete parts of life, and inspiration to thrive in significant areas of life. Illuminating the dark corners of my unconscious, tapping into my past life, true self, and inner genius. Like diving into an ocean, descending as the areas darken. There I am the composer, king, maestro, professor, and student all in one. There I make the rules, find the concepts, and bend them and watch as more territory of my mind is unlocked and slowly conquered.

-Demetrius Burley



Literacy Works
www.litworks.org

©Literacy Works 2008



“Digging Deep” is a result of Writers’ Circle, an 8-week writing workshop created by Literacy Works in partnership with Growing Home.



Literacy Works
www.litworks.org

©Literacy Works 2008

