

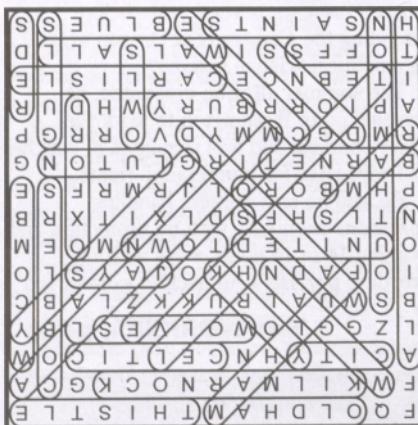
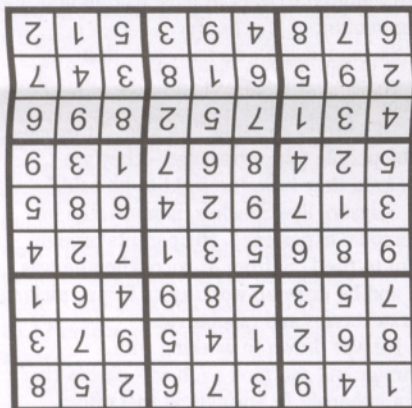
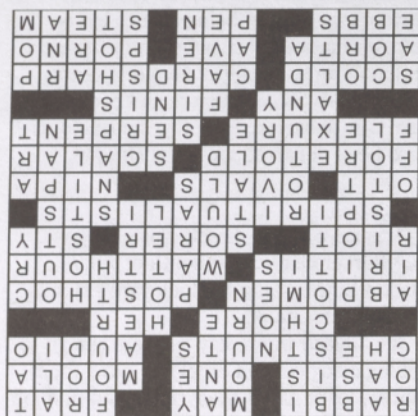
Life

By Eileen Vizenor

Life
Is
For
Everyone

Choose it.

Answers to puzzles on page 15



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VENDOR PROFILE
Elijah Michel

BY LEONORA KO
STAFF WRITER

Elijah Michel has a drive for hard work and happiness, and it's paying off in Portland.

"I work in a survey place," Elijah said with a big smile. "After about two weeks of (working as a temp), the boss just offered me a job. She was like, 'I love your attitude. I like your presentation. You want to work here?' and I said, 'Yeah, absolutely. I love this place.'"

Elijah was born and raised in a small beach town in the Florida panhandle.

"I grew up with a pretty rough childhood, and I've had a lot of crappy stuff happen to me," he said. "I was pretty much raised by my dad. He wasn't around much when I was a kid. ... It basically was me and my brother fending for ourselves as children.

"But one of the things my dad did teach me was: Whatever situation you're in, do what makes you happy to the biggest extent that you can."

In Florida, Elijah worked in customer service jobs, including one as a general manager at Domino's Pizza.

"That was a blast," Elijah said. "I was 19 years old, and I was the youngest general manager in central Florida. I pretty much

got thrown into the position while we were waiting for a guy from corporate, but I ended up running the store for almost a year. I did a great job, got some of the best numbers."

But his childhood experiences caught up with him, and he went through a period of severe depression and drinking.

"I taught myself at a very young age to sort of turn emotions off. But after a while, that stopped working for me because you can only turn off what you're feeling for so long.

"I took a step back to look at my life and at the things that were making me depressed. (I asked myself) how can I either remove what's making me feel that way or change how I feel about

what's making me feel that way?"

This September, Elijah came to Portland. At first, Elijah was overwhelmed, but he drew once more on his inner resources.

"I don't

have the time in my life to sit around and feel bad about the things that have happened to me," he said. "All I've got time to do is move forward and make the best out of every situation that I can."

He estimates he walked 4 or 5 miles a day looking for a shelter and a job when he arrived. Elijah found both, along with scheduling conflicts.

"The first job I got here I wasn't able to keep because I didn't get back to the shelter until almost 1 in the morning every night. And we have to wake up at 6 a.m. So getting about five hours of sleep a night was not good for me."

Elijah persevered, and upon finding the survey job and Street Roots, he was relieved.

"It feels like I've opened a new door for myself that wasn't there for me before," he said.

Elijah sells Street Roots at Lovejoy Bakers on Northwest 10th Avenue and Lovejoy Street. He used his first paper earnings to take care of himself: "I bought a new sketch book and got some shampoo, face scrub and body wash. I took a shower, and it felt amazing. I was like, 'Oh my God, I feel clean. I'm not itchy. I feel so good right now.'"

With his first paycheck, he bought lunch for his homeless friends.

"It felt good because I had absolutely nothing when I came here," he said. "And I was helped out by so many other people who also had next to nothing."

His next step is to find permanent housing, and he has a promising lead. He said seeing other Street Roots vendors get housing has inspired him.

"I'm very determined," Elijah said. "Street Roots has helped me access that determination and just push it even farther.

"I'm trying for a happy ending, and I'm getting closer and closer to that goal."



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