The lines of communication were always technically open between Hakim Lahman and his son Faessal. For nearly a decade Faessal considered himself a "phone father" as his son lived hundreds of miles away and they kept the cell towers buzzing.

Parental advice was offered. Teenage angst was voiced. Their numerous conversations were get-to-know-you sessions in abstentia.

The two had been separated in 2000: Hakim sought better wages with a move to Colorado; Faessal went to public school and spent a lost year at a Durham, N.C., community college, growing up faster than normal while he, his brother, Alexander, and divorced mother took care of an ill grandmother on disability and confined to her bed.

It was heart-wrenching but dutiful responsibilities for both kids.

But it wasn’t until Faessal followed his brother’s lead to Aurora to join their father that they realized there was additional suffering in their family.

The children were unaware that Hakim’s trucking contract hadn’t been renewed long ago, or that he was struggling month to month to hash together enough moving jobs to survive on meager hourly earnings. Faessal at the time viewed his kids as financial reinforcements coming to his rescue when they arrived in the state. They’d all get jobs; all get on track.

But Alexander soon would leave to pursue his passion in Judo. And Faessal had other ideas, too. He’d work to help out, but his priority was going to school. Too many of the people with whom he grew up had abandoned that possibility and seemed destined to a life of dead-end jobs. He’d steeled himself that it wasn’t going to be him.

Faessal looked at Community College of Aurora as his education destination but it was, at first, deemed financially unfeasible.

“But,” the youngest Lahman son recalled, "I refused to put the idea..."
Life, other lessons learned

From Lahmans / Page 1

Faessal remained steadfast in his arguments, telling his father he couldn’t jeopardize his future. He laid out his case why school made the most sense.

“How can any father deny that?” Hakim responded.

Especially one with his particular life’s tale to tell.

... Dreams, like phone calls, can be at risk when put on hold. Dropped. Forgotten.

For most of 23 years, the hum of the road was the soundtrack for Hakim Lahman, the spinning wheels of his moving truck and sliding of furniture serving as muzak for a restless soul.

Problems and carefully packed boxes many times were stacked equally over more than two decades; his family the saving grace for a life he’d envisioned interrupted.

In high school in Oujda, Morocco, in 1979, Lahman had been something of a prodigy. He was handpicked to be a future pillar of the state’s educational program after showing special abilities in Math and Physics. He’d study those two disciplines a combined 32 hours per week and not much else as one of his country’s elite young minds.

Lahman would move on to attend the prestigious Université Mohammed V in the capital of Rabat, with curriculum steeped in such advanced curriculum steeped in such advanced...
SHARED SACRIFICE
Language barrier, distance doesn’t deter Sudanese couple

Geography can measure the miles that Omima Abdoun and Mahmoud Gendel have traveled from Khartoum, Sudan, to the United States to get an American education.

Or one could look at Mahmoud’s hands, as he clutches Roald Dahl’s 1966 book “The Magic Finger” or listen to Omima confidently voice her dream of returning to her homeland and owning a construction company bigger than the one she left behind to plot just how far the married couple has come.

Hello, hi and bye. That was the sum total each of them could speak the English language outside of their native Arabic when they arrived with a work visa in February 2010.

Yet, here they were, less than three years later, relating their story as Coloradans. Omima currently is ahead of Mahmoud with her language command -- understandable given that Mahmoud’s days in the state were interrupted by a car accident that left his vehicle careening off a mountainside and his leg, stomach, arm and back in shambles, necessitating multiple surgeries.

But even when their English is broken, and while Mahmoud’s body continues to heal, it’s evident their spirits can’t be shattered.

They smile proudly as they talk about their journey to Community College of Aurora and plans for their education before eventually returning to Sudan.

“Here life easy,” Mahmoud said.

“Because,” Omima interjected, “We can study and work at the same time. In my country, it’s hard.”

Mahmoud’s old job literally entailed moving mountains. He met Omima while taking a break from the work he was doing since 1997 for a construction company in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia that used chemical intervention and machinery to clear rocky terrain for building structures and roads.

One month per year, he’d return to his native Sudan. It was on one of those vacations in 2004 that he and Omima met. They married the following year.

She would end up moving with him to Saudi Arabia to begin a family, putting aside her job running an engineering company with about 10 employees. She had studied engineering and construction for three years at Sudan University, and while it wasn’t completely unusual for her to be the boss as a woman in the male-dominated construction business, it did raise eyebrows in her country that she was so young, too.

Now, she would be headed to a city in Saudi Arabia where, by contrast, she couldn’t walk by herself or shop without her husband present.

“In my country I work about 20 hours all the time,” Omima said, when asked if she minded that lack of freedom. “When I went to Saudi Arabia, I just relaxed and raised my daughters.”

That respite ended with the move to the United States, which was a difficult decision, though easy in some ways, too. “I have ability to study, work and improve myself here,” she added.

The pair began the transition to English for about five months at another Denver institution before Mahmoud’s accident. Omima at that point inquired at the University of Colorado about potential next steps and was sent to CCA, where she took the English placement exam and enrolled in the College ESL program in the summer of 2011.

Mahmoud first came to CCA’s non-credit community ESL program at Lowry and transitioned into the college’s academic ESL program in January, after going through his 18-month recovery.

In Sudan, Mahmoud said he didn’t like school – “nothing interesting,” is the way he put it. He studied welding for three years after his intermediate school education.

But at CCA he uses words like “interesting” and “different” to describe the experience.

Mahmoud will have to finish advanced level English classes over the next couple semesters before beginning core classes toward a degree. His plan is then taking engineering courses and “finish baccalaureate.”

Omima has one advanced-level English class remaining and currently is taking Math 121 and Keyboarding. She wants to take some Engineering classes along with Art before heading to CU to complete her education.

Both of them are Xcel Scholarship winners, which pays for one of their academic ESL classes. Each also is a 2012 Student Success Awards recipient.

“All the people here are friendly and easy to communicate to each other,” Omima said. “The teachers are friendly and they talk with me easy and can understand me, although my language is not good. And they’ve helped me improve and continue to learn.”

Bond strengthens
From Lahmans / Page 2

for a little while. But you don’t have that. So I just came out and said, ‘This is it. This is my hole, and I better enjoy it.’

“But they took me out of the hole.”

Hakim not only rediscovered his love of math but of service to others. He’d already made sure to keep his mind sharp by spending countless hours trying to educate himself.

“Barnes and Noble was my truck stop,” he related.

But if his son and his friends didn’t need help with their test, he would have been smarter but no happier.

“You will never be complete until you fulfill the things that keep you going,” Hakim said. “Mine was a thirst for knowledge.”

The week after helping with the Trigonometry, he talked to a CCA advisor and joined Faessal as a student at the college with a whole new plan to get a math degree and teach it to a younger generation of high school and community college students.

Hakim knew the subject matter well but if he was to serve American students, he needed to know what and how they studied. He did so not only by taking classes at CCA but by becoming a math tutor at Lowry on top of his coursework.

“Being 51 years old and the economy the way it is, I’ve seen a lot of people that are very gifted and talented but need a little help. We have a lot of work to do, and I want to be part of that enterprise,” he said.

Hakim has 47 credits so far, with a plan to accumulate a total of 80 before a potential transfer to the University of Northern Colorado or University of Colorado-Denver.

All those miles, and trials may potentially lead to contentment, far removed from his Morocco and Canada experiences.

“You got on this train and you’re really happy to get on the train, but then the train suddenly stops and you have to get out,” Hakim said of his journey. “The train leaves and you’re stuck there in limbo, not knowing everybody and you only want for that train to come back.

“The train’s come back. I got back onto the train and back into my comfort zone.”

Faessal’s doing exceptionally well fulfilling his college dream, too, with 63 credits while moving toward a computer science degree. He’s rediscovered his father in the flesh and blood, not long distance. They live side by side; attend school floor by floor together.

Their timelines are such that the possibility may even exist that the pair graduates one after another on CCA’s commencement stage.

“Oh, my God, that would be a milestone for me,” Hakim said with a shake of his head.

“But you have a higher GPA than I do,” Faessal interjected sheepishly.

“I’m not sorry for that,” Hakim answered.

The pair broke into laughter, happily challenged.
Ask the experts: National Day on Writing

The National Day of Writing was celebrated Oct. 18 at the Fine Arts Forum with a full day of speakers representing an eclectic mix of styles and formats. Given the occasion, many of the authors were presented the same question about writing in the 21st century. There's arguably more words floating about, with Twitter, Facebook, texting and e-mails. But what, really, is the place of writing as we sit here today? Is it as relevant and powerful as it's ever been?

Wayne Gilbert: Poet

“Spoken word poetry is going strong. And the whole scene is filled with young people, so I think there's a hunger for the written word that Twitter, texting and Facebook don't fill. So I think the future's bright. … I still think there's a hunger to express the heart and I think that can be done on Facebook, in e-mail, and on blogs. Sometimes it's just a matter of form. But the written form hasn't always been quality. There are some memos that Presidents have written that they'd rather have not left behind, for instance (laughs). But I think as long as human beings use language the written word will survive and thrive.”

Bob Kunzinger: Essayist

“I think writing itself will always be necessary. I think the medium in which its presented to us will be different. And honestly there's kind of been a return to form. One of the things about performance poetry is that it's found its home as an educational tool for youth and how it's growing within that scene. I do find it very interesting that children are returning to our oldest art form, which is storytelling. Poetry is an oral tradition more so than a literary one. Real poetry exists when you're in a room communicating and people are telling stories, such as going to church or other places people gather. But I think that when young folks find themselves in a position where they communicate more through Twitter, cellphones and computers, I think they're returning to this very traditional form of communication and storytelling. I think it's very interesting and going to continue to develop.”

Ken Arkind: Spoken Word Poet

“I think if people would think long run they would realize it's more important than ever to record what's going on. Twitter, e-mail, everything students are doing is great but also is immediate. I mean, letter writing is gone as far as putting the letters in a box in the attic. It sort of doesn't exist anymore. So writing for people who actually write and publish has become infinitely more important because people aren't recording anything. In the old days, you could at least find a box of letters your grandmother wrote or your father wrote to your mother during the war, but now nobody's doing that. We send e-mails and then delete them. So the people that actually are writing it's become more important because it's the only way we're getting things down as far as the human condition.”

Suzy Q. Smith: Spoken Word Poet

“I think writing is more important now than it's ever been because it's the primary way we communicate with each other. People talk to people online more than they do in person, so it's really important to communicate effectively. We've all probably had arguments, disagreements, misunderstandings based on text messages, e-mails, or tweets, etc. because we misread tone. So it teaches us how important it is to write clearly and effectively so your tone doesn't come through wrong. … I think you have to be wildly intentional in the way you navigate in those spaces, the way you communicate and who you communicate with. I enjoy Twitter the most because you get in and get out without getting bogged down with a whole lot of other things. I can just say this one thing or five things. And to be considerate of every single word, every single letter and character, as a poet, that's a great challenge. … I think every voice is valuable so I like that everybody is being challenged to be a writer and effectively communicate. Not everyone's necessarily going to write for other people or publish books, and I don't think that's what people are intending to do, so I think there's a distinction in the purpose and intent that you have when you're writing and what you're reading. But I think the more effectively we can communicate with each other and embrace that creativity and really sharing that, I think that makes us all better as writers.”

Avi: Children's, Young Adult Author

“Much of the social network writing is terribly self-reflective and its emotive in the fundamental sense of ‘I’m telling you I’m happy,’ but I’m shaping that experience in such a way or articulated in a way where you might be enriched by my expression. … Let's put it this way, my definition of how you become a professional writer is a little odd. It's writing for strangers. In other words, it's not reflecting on me the person, it's simply taking what you can out of the words I write. So a lot of this other stuff is fun and engaging. There's a place for it, for sure. But it's not writing as I think of writing. … If you think of writing as art, it's the only art that's universally taught. We teach everyone to write -- not necessarily well -- but we don't teach everyone music, painting or dance. And yet it doesn't seem to go that far anymore.”
Government aid helping CCA vets

Program designed to give unemployed skills

The hard life has always been just life for Ed Rummel, even before chasing Russian submarines under the polar icecaps as part of the Navy in the early 1970s.

Finally his balky back no longer could bear the weight.

Nearly four decades working in the concrete industry, augmented the last couple years by periodic 36-hour shifts driving a snowplow, proved too stressful. Addictions to drug and alcohol, rehabilitations and relapses that also spanned much of his adult life added to the heavy load.

But he'd managed to remain clean for over seven years when another fresh start beckoned – ready or not.

Unemployed and 59 years old, he followed his son's lead to Community College of Aurora three semesters ago. Rummel had run out of educational benefits stemming from his military service eons back but took the initiative to register for a few classes He liked his first teacher, which kept him from bailing. So did his own vague notion about wanting to counsel addicts.

Rummel, even while back in a classroom, was unsure just how he could possibly get a degree as a counselor and one day achieve his dream of opening a halfway house.

Then, through a meeting with a CCA advisor, he found out about the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program. The overarching goal of the initiative, part of the VOW to Hire Heroes Act, is to pay for up to a year's education in order to train out-of-work vets in marketable skills.

"Basically what the program's looking at is getting them trained as quickly as possible to get them into the workforce as quickly as possible, " said Judy Steele, who serves as the campus's Director of Advising, said.

"I've had more time off when I worked for a living," Rummel explained. "I'm doing this seven days a week just to keep up," he said, rattling off his trips to the library, efforts at learning Microsoft Word and doing research as some of the obstacles he's faced.

"It's been tough," he added. But so far I've gotten all 'As' except for one 'B,' and the reason I got the 'B' was she couldn't read my handwriting. I busted my hand all up in the Navy and it doesn't work too well. I can write about two sentences, then I can't read it."

CCA has helped Rummel in that regard by providing a student aide through Accessibility Services to help him take class notes as he studies Psychology.

Some of the other disciplines in which veterans have enrolled at the college include Office Administration, Real Estate, Programming, Engineering, Business, Web Tools, and Criminal Justice. Steele said among them the 16 in the program at CCA, the number seeking a certificate vs. an associate's degree is evenly split.

January, if accepted by the program – which does have several qualifications that need to be met, including age (35-60), joblessness and ineligibility for any other Veterans Administration education program.

"It's made a difference between whether I'm going to go to school or not, period," Rummel said. "What I'm going to do in eight months, I leave that up to God."

Rummel before attending CCA previously had met with a department head in the Psychology Department at Metro State, planting the seed that in about a year he could transfer there and obtain his Certified Addiction Counselor 3 license.

"My passion is absolute," he said. But first things first, like homework and getting re-acclimated to a full course load for the first time since seventh grade, when he dropped out of school.

Rummel said that while VRAP was his opportunity to come to college full time, it hasn't been without challenges.

"I've been on the frontline for years but without the letters after my name. … I wish I wouldn't have waited until I was 60 years old. But I know exactly where I want to go. And I believe I've been called to do this."

Rummel currently has 29 credits remaining before obtaining his associate's degree. He was able to transfer some classes he'd taken after his separation from the military, moving him closer to his goal of obtaining his associate's. He admitted he was "really intimidated" when he first started at CCA but that the experience already has helped him become more open-minded to other cultures and individuals.

"This is a big amount of money here. Thousands," Rene Simard, the college's Director of Advising, said. "And there's veterans that may not know about this. So if we can get the word out to the campus and the community that there's a program available, it's nothing but a positive."
Middle school kids see the ‘attainable’

Math, science and computer information meshed with life lessons as 64 local middle-school students attended Day of the Girl festivities at Community College of Aurora on Oct. 11.

College instructors – and a CCA student -- used identifiable societal aspects to impart knowledge for the event, which is a United Nations offshoot intended to celebrate, discuss and advance girls lives worldwide.

CCA Math faculty Laura Stone taught the kids about factorials in determining the remote odds of winning a lottery. Adjunct Frank Vianzon, an ethical hacker in his full-time line of work, apprised them of the intrinsic security risks of downloading and social media before the children took apart a desktop computer.

Faculty Tom Weidner discussed the wide-ranging options in Computer Science for women before leading the kids through the process of building a web page.

“Everything we did has been part of their experience … and it’s all equally important,” said Xiomara Ortiz, a counselor at Aurora West College Prep. “I think when you ask kids what they’d like to do when you grow up they just think about doctor, lawyer, but there’s so many jobs in between there – in the medical field, in science, in technology – and they’re not really aware of all the things you can do. So coming in and meeting people and hearing about their experiences is what’s really going to open up their eyes to the possibilities.

Julie Sutton, part of a large group of Raytheon employees learning high-level cybersecurity through an employer-college partnership, completed the activities by giving the West Prep and South Middle School students a motivational speech on tools to success they can use moving forward when facing obstacles.

“The physical presence of bringing them all to a college campus and meeting some of the professors and faculty members and giving them exposure to careers and different ways to think about math and science is beneficial, for one,” said Malcolm Laster, a pre-collegiate advisor for Colorado GEAR UP, a federally funded grant program whose mission in Colorado is, in part, to bridge the achievement gap relating to college admissions and graduation.

“And I think the majority of career fields are underexposed,” added Laster, who works with South and Aurora Central middle schools. “It’s hard for a student to imagine a particular career field if they’ve never seen it. These students are getting to think about, feel, see and hear about a lot of different careers.

“It makes it a little more attainable.”

Adjunct faculty Frank Vianzon shows Aurora West College Prep students the inner workings of a computer by taking it apart and putting it back together.

Put your hands in the air

Bailee Bannon, administrative assistant for the TRiO program, leads the crowd in the ‘wave’ during the annual CentreTech-Lowry softball game Oct. 4. The CentreTech campus team prevailed, bringing the annual trophy back to display at the Administration Building. Non-players were treated to a barbeque, courtesy of the Celebrations Committee.

Plaudits and accomplishments

Margaret Ann Uchner, Legal Studies Program Coordinator for Paralegal and Criminal Justice, was elected to a three-year term representing the Pacific Region of the American Association for Paralegal Education at the National Conference in Savannah, Ga. It is the largest group of its kind in the country.

The Science Department won the first annual CCA Fitness Fun Challenge. More than 30 people participated at the Lowry gym.

Top performing individuals in their departments were: Tara Croom-Sanchez (Science); Beth Lattone (EMS); Aldo Parra (CHOICES); John Cunningham (AcE), Veronica Russell (Business); Megan Kinney (Library Services) and Christina Cecil (Human Resources).

College Communications was awarded two gold medals and a bronze at the National Council for Marketing and Public Relations Medallion Awards ceremony held in Little Rock, Ark. CCA competed in District 4, which encompasses Arkansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas and Wyoming. The gold medals were for feature writing and electronic view book; the bronze for faculty and staff blog.

Three new staff members have been hired in the Student Affairs Division. Dan Severino will serve as a Financial Aid counselor. He comes to CCA after working at the University of Arkansas. Severino will be joined on the Financial Aid staff by Marsha Anderson, who most recently worked as a scholarship program assistant at the University of Colorado in Boulder. Steven Zeeh takes Carla Hoskins’ vacated spot in Accessibility Services.

It was announced that two CCA students received Regis University Community Scholarships: Patricia Combs (Bachelor of Arts) and Justin Rojas (Accounting).
LEARNING JOURNEY: A creative streak has always been a part of Evelyn Richardson's colorful existence

There have been some difficult physical and mental challenges in Evelyn Richardson's life: picking cotton from sun-up to sundown in the hot Texas sun as a young girl; stitching together garments as a seamstress for decades; getting licensed as a certified nursing assistant after opting to switch careers.

But, man, if this Algebra thing's doesn't have her looking skyward for help.

"That's my biggest nemesis," she said with a smile.

Richardson can be forgiven for such struggles. At 75 years old, she's in the midst of taking her best shot at college life nearly six decades removed from her high school years.

One of 10 children growing up, it wasn't even a question that her education would continue after her prep years. It just wasn't in the family budget.

She long ago took advantage of professional opportunities by taking individual classes as a teacher's aide. But mainly Richardson has been self-taught, until first enrolling at Lackeyview College in San Antonio last year and then Community College of Aurora last spring after moving in with her oldest son and his wife in the Denver area.

"I read everything," she said. "And everybody always thought I went to college because everything you want to do you can find it in books. So I was always learning things and trying to figure stuff out. And I worked my way up in jobs. … I would always just find a way."

If Richardson in her life has, as she says worn many hats, she surely had the talent to make each and every one.

She first started sewing at age 6 with her mother, making many of her own outfits; then, while still a teenager, became a professional seamstress by trade in Dallas and Portland, Ore. She lovingly stitched wedding gowns, formal wear, bridesmaid outfits and flower girl dresses.

She once created a gown for a Naomi Marcus executive's wife and as her sort out the tapestry of her life. Richardson married and continued to work in the sportswear industry after moving to Oregon until mass production techniques and farming of manufacturing overseas led to a string of career changes. She did clerical work at an insurance company. She worked in the front office of a doctor's office and became a certified nursing assistant after seeing an advertisement that the assisted nursing facility would provide training.

"I'm retired from a lot of things," she said.

"But her mind always remained inquisitive. And when the opportunity to return to school via government financial help became available, she jumped at the chance. This wasn't about skills training but deeply personal."

The likelihood of me going out and hunting for a job at 80 isn't very good, though I'll never not work. But I'll be working on something that I want to do – like my writing."

Being a seamstress, in some ways, fed Richardson's creative side. But with a degenerative disc condition in her neck, her days of being able to hunch over a sewing machine for long hours are dissipating. Writing helps her sort out the tapestry of her life.

She already published a book about her family experience in Linden, Texas, entitled "And Then There Were Ten."

One of the reasons she decided to go to college was so that she could learn to edit her own material for future planned publications.

She's aiming for a Creative Writing degree at CCA but still has a ways to go with 17 accumulated credits.

"It's small and very personal. It feels homey to me," she said of her college experience on the CentreTech campus. "And I don't feel like anybody here is inaccessible. And I like that." Algebra, not so much.

Richardson took Computers and Keyboarding in the spring and currently is taking that course along with English and Theater. She will have a prominent part in the November play, "Glimpses" after auditioning in September. In addition to her other stops in life, Richardson has done several print advertisements and appeared as an extra in multiple productions, including the TV show, "Friday Night Lights."

"I'm not an aspiring actress," she said.

But she still aspires. Richardson admits being around younger students "engergizes" her, but she wishes once in a while they'd look up from their phones and take off their ear buds and carry on real conversations every once in a while.

If they did, they would might hear some amazing stories, like being dragged around as a grade-schooler on those sacks full of picked cotton; or about her brother named Quit, who was so named because her mother was thought to have had enough children. Richardson would have four more siblings after that. They didn't quit.

Neither does this 75-year-old CCA student just trying to get through math class.

"I've always just wanted to make everyone's life better," she said.
Members of the CCA community are invited to take a mosque tour Nov. 3, hosted by the Colorado Muslim Society.

The event, sponsored by the Global Initiatives Committee, will take place from 12:30-1:30 p.m. at the Abu Bakr Mosque (2071 S Parker Rd., Denver).

There also will be an optional lunch at Damascus Grill following the tour. Individuals must pay their own food tabs. For more information, contact Meredith Folley on her college e-mail or at 303-340-7509.

Janet Brandau, Associate Vice President for Instruction, requested in an e-mail Oct. 17 that department chairs provide her with the names of adjuncts eligible to move up a pay level starting with the spring semester.

Associate Dean of Online Learning JoAnn Burkhardt announced that the D2L system will be undergoing an upgrade in December, which primarily tweaks the look of the user interface and fosters better consistency between tools.

Burkhardt also asked those with questions regarding D2L submit those inquiries to onlinelearning@ccaurora.edu, which will help expedite the answering process.

Orientation sessions will continue in the spring semester for both full- and part-time students attending college for the first time, Vice President of Student Affairs Betsy Oudenhoven announced.

New students can either attend an in-person express orientation or complete an online version, each taking approximately 90 minutes. Sessions will begin the week of Nov. 5 and run through Jan. 18 and run on both campuses.

Dickies Chili Cook Off at the CentreTech

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