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# ODYSSEY ORACLE

## WOMEN OF COURAGE



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**My Hero**  
**By Ngina Ali**

In my family I have many people that I respect and look up to; however, one person, my Aunt Debra, has always been a hero to me. My Aunt Debra is my Uncle Dion's wife. She is a Registered Professional Nurse who has taken her career to a whole other level. She loves taking care of others. She isn't a hero just to me but also to many people in my life, which includes her family, her patients, and the community. My Aunt Debra is determined, kind-hearted, and open-minded to opportunities.

My Aunt Debra was raised in a single-parent household by her mother. Debra's mother wanted the best for her and instilled in her that education is very important and would take her places she could never dream of. My Aunt Debra's mother was a Registered Nurse. She helped put her daughter through school. My aunt is determined and sets goals for herself. She actually writes her goals down so she can see what she needs to do in order to obtain that goal. She writes her goals in plain print. I have seen this and know this has helped her be successful in achieving her goals. Since I saw my aunt do this, I too write my goals down. I don't stop until I reach my goals.



My Aunt Debra is a very kind person. She will help anyone and won't think twice about giving out of the goodness of her heart. She loves caring for others, and it shows. She is beautiful, quick with her wit, slick with her tongue, among the best in her field, and ready to take on the world. Her smile can brighten up any room. I always tell myself she can light up a dark room just by her smile. For example, when my grandmother was sick and had lost all hope, my Aunt Debra would go to visit my grandmother, let her know she was our shining star, and tell her we needed her to fight and continue to be strong. When my grandmother wanted to give up, she always said she stayed strong because my Aunt Debra cheered her on and told her she could do it. My grandmother could see my aunt smiling and telling her everything was going to be okay.

My Aunt Debra is open-minded to opportunities. She is currently attending school to obtain her Master's degree in Public Health. She is currently a Patient Advocate. She gives 110% to make sure her patients are taken care of and get all the help they need. She has a passion for her patients and strives to do the best for them.

She has been a role model to me since I was younger. I look at my aunt and what she has accomplished. I want to make her proud of me. Whenever I take a risk, whether that included going to college to get my paralegal degree or when I told her I was going to nursing school, she makes me believe I can accomplish anything that I put my mind to. "Why put off for tomorrow what you can do today?" I hope I can continue to grow and provide the same support for someone else that she has provided for me. When I get discouraged and want to give up, I call my aunt and tell her what's going on. She stops me right there in our conversation and gives me a pep talk. When I am done talking with my aunt, I feel like I can take on the world. I tell myself I can accomplish whatever I want.



### **What is Courage?** **By Carissa Love**

On July 27, 2016, my father passed away from natural causes at the age of 55. Although I grew up as his only child, I did not have a close relationship with my father. I did not have a father figure to be around or be there at all because he was too controlling; I was scared and intimidated by my own father. As time went on and I got older, I realized that my father has never been there for me. My mother is my father. My mother is a woman of courage because she has been there always through thick and thin, good and bad. She is my life-long coach.

My mother, LaRita Melvin, is a very independent and courageous woman. She has always been dependent on herself and says not to rely on anyone when you've got yourself. Growing up she was in a bad relationship. She met my father at the age of 16 in high school. They were young, happy high school lovers. When my grandfather found out my mother's boyfriend and new father of her baby was an African American man, my mother had to leave her parents' house. She had gotten pregnant and knew her parents would not approve of her decisions. She has never depended on anyone or on a man for anything because she can do it all by herself. She is a woman who will not give up on her dreams, loved ones, or anything. No matter how big or small things may seem, she can handle it and carry heavy burdens.



Growing up not really having a lot of friends, she was a loner and an outcast. She grew up building a relationship with her father and having a compassion for hunting. Being able to have a connection with something her father liked let them relate together. When she was young and did not have a close relationship or bond with her brothers and sister, she found things in life to pursue happiness. Finding my brother's dad after nine years of hurt, pain, and torment, she thought things would work out and be different. When the tables turned and things got sour,





she thought she was in it for the long haul. Marriage was on the horizon. But then she got cheated on time and time again. She is always a strong believer of "I don't need to marry anyone when I can be independent and do it on my own." She has never relied on or depended on anyone but herself.

My mother has always been a hard worker who obtained and worked three jobs. She worked full time with the county for 29 years, Super Wal-Mart for eight years, and her own private cleaner for the last 17 years. She has always carried her own weight. She has taken on the duty of a mother whose children never needed or wanted for anything. This is so inspiring because she never had any help or a man around to rely on or to pay the bills. She managed a household full time and still worked. She took care of business for so long with no financial help, doing it for her kids, family, and

loved ones. She never had her hand out for anything from anybody. When you hold happiness, love, and kindness in your heart, you sometimes forget about what you are worth and who you are as a person. She smiles to hide the darkness and the pain. She never wants her kids to go without or need anything, and she wants them to grow up and be able and willing to take care of themselves.

My mother has been a single woman raising two kids with no help from our fathers. They were there from time to time, but never consistent or stable. Growing up with just a mother around was hard, and there was no father figure to turn to in a time of need. So all my life she had to fight. She has been my long time role model and achiever: a mother of children with spirits so strong. If that doesn't make you beautiful and magnificent, I don't know what does. There comes a time in life when we don't realize that we've got someone good until they're gone. Cherish every moment. My mother is a woman of courage for all her hard work, dedication, and independence and for being both a mother and a father. She has been a lifelong role model for her kids. I love you, my woman of courage.





### Syrian Woman of Courage By Ahmad Nahas

My mom is a woman of courage because she's taken care of my siblings and me all our lives. She also has been the force that unites our family together. She is a woman of courage to those who have been touched by her in one way or another.

I was a rebellious teenager who would sometimes break the rules, but my mom never gave up on me. She guided me and told me the importance of education. That is why she is a woman of courage. When I was growing up, I broke my legs and arms playing soccer. Although my mom had eight other children to look after, she took the time to pay close attention to me during this time.



One vivid memory I can recount is when I was talking to a girl I really liked. We were sitting on her porch. It was late at night, all the stars were out, and the wind was brisk. I was supposed to have dinner with my family during this time, but the hours passed. As I kept talking to this girl, my parents called and asked me to come home. I remember my mom looked at me when I came home and told me I was the most important person in her life. As the tears started to fall from her face, she continued, "Ahmad, I love you and I'm not angry that you're late. All I want you to know is that I care for you, and I value the precious time when I get to sit around our table and eat with you." My mom is a woman of courage because she's not afraid to tell people how she feels.



My mom is a resilient woman who was able to live through the war in Syria. Although she had to worry about the war, she decided to put me first and worry about my education instead. She helped me fill out the paperwork so I could apply for a visa to come to the United States. That is something that I will always thank her for.

In Syria, women are highly respected and admired, but my mom is the woman I admire the most. She was able to put me first before anyone else. It's extremely difficult for moms to see their children go off into the world, but it's even more difficult to see them leave across the seas. That's what my mom did. She watched me leave for the United States. She knew that this was the best decision for me. Although my mom hasn't seen me in four years, she stays strong.





## The Courage to Give

By Sukai Yarbo

Around 1910-1915 in a village called Ndemban, fire broke out in a house, lulling and killing an entire family except for an infant girl who survived. She had severe burns on the back of her head going down her neck and on some parts of her shoulders. A kind old lady offered to take responsibility for the burned infant since there was no one left to look after her. Being poor and helpless herself, the woman used to collect garments that belonged to dead people to wrap the girl in and would sew some of them into dresses for her to wear. The baby girl turned out okay and healthy under the care of this amazing, nice woman. She grew up to be an ambitious young lady and had a lovely family of her own.



Back in 1996 on a summer afternoon, I sat next to an old lady in her shop at the front of her house where she sold sandwiches, popsicles, candy, and fruit. I was twelve years old. For one hour, about six or more kids stopped by to greet the old lady. She shook their hands, asked how their day was going, and offered them one or two of the things she was selling in her shop. I thought to myself, why is she giving away for free what she is selling? How does she make any profit at all? I will just have to ask her, I thought, so I went ahead and asked.

She smiled and said to me, "My profit is what I give away to these kids that stop by here. Knowing that they are not hungry makes me feel happier than keeping the money as profit." So I asked again, "But why do you choose this kind of business?" Then she told me everything that she ever had was out of kindness and generosity from other people.

She told me the story about being an orphan and losing her whole family when she was an infant in a fire. She showed me her scars. I looked at my grandmother with so much pity and at the same time with a lot of admiration, for I would never have guessed her history right. I felt like she had everything and always had something to give everyone. Her house was filled with different people, and they were all like her family.

I admire her courage for everything she achieved and how she dedicated her lifetime to helping whoever was in need. I wish I had met the courageous woman who raised my grandmother and taught the most important values in life, especially the courage to give.





## Woman with a Big Heart

### By Musab Naji

My mother, Sajida, is the woman of courage in my life. My mother is not only a mother to me but to others as well. She is the description of a great mother and teacher. She loves and treats her students as her daughters and sons. She gives her time to listen to their problems and will not expect to be given anything in return other than equal respect. She has always planned to achieve her dreams and taught her students how to plan to get their goals.

When I was in primary school, my mom was my teacher at school. All the students loved her, and most of them called her "Mama." I called her "Miss Sajida," while orphaned students called her "Mama" because she really treated them as a mother treats her child. My mom was nice but serious at the same time. In school my mom pushed me hard because she knew that would help me to succeed. Her class was always interesting for every student, and all of them had good grades. This led the school district to recognize her as the best teacher.



She always made people around her happy and had a good impact on them. My mom planned for the future and always had a goal. She worked hard to reach her goals. At the same time, she tried to help other people by giving them advice and talking with them about her experiences to set up a better plan.

There are teachers that teach because that's what they want to do and love to do, and my mom is one of those. She retired, but before she did so, she did what she had wished for: teaching children

to be knowledgeable and successful in their future lives.



I was and am still proud of her. She cares about everybody. She becomes happy when she makes people smile. She showed courage in challenging all the difficulties and never giving up. I am proud of her, and I hope to do something that can make her proud of me as a son.





### **My Hero is My Mom** **By Simone Bell-Perdue**

How can a woman of so much faith believe in God after what life has thrown at her many times? “Our God is awesome. He is always there and protects us. Even if we don’t see it or believe it, He’s there. Just pray to Him and He will guide your steps.” Those are my mother’s words to me when I feel like giving up. My mother, Rhonda Johnson Williams (Odyssey ’09), is a compassionate, loving, god-fearing woman who puts others before herself. You could never tell my mom there isn’t a God, and if you did, she would tell you her story. My mother has been courageous all of her life: in her adulthood, in the Odyssey Project, and in her weight loss journey.

My mom was married at 20 years old; my dad was 19. One day my dad just up and left my mom to raise three kids on her own. I was her youngest, and I was only six months old. My dad had his own insecurities and was coping with them at the time by having unhealthy habits. His reason for leaving was he didn’t want to be a husband/father anymore. You would think this would break a person, but it only made my mom stronger. Later on in life as we grew up, we realized it was better for him to leave than to stay. Even with all these challenges, my mother didn’t allow herself to worry or become depressed. She prayed to God every day, asking him for guidance on how to raise us to the best of her ability.

In 2008-2009, my mom was in the Odyssey Project. She took the course because she wanted to improve on her writing and to earn more college credit than she had before. My mom was always writing on her own and in magazines. She wrote to express herself. She loved the Odyssey Project because she met people and her kids could come with her. Every Wednesday night after her class, we would ask, “How was class?” She would get so excited telling us everything she learned about. In my mind at the time, I was wondering how she was doing all of this—working, school, and taking care of a household. Now, being a mom myself, I understand. She got her homework done when we were sleeping. I now call her on the phone often, and she asks me, “How’s school going?” I tell her about what we learned, mostly about Plato’s Allegory of the Cave. She remembers everything about this class until this day.

A few months after Odyssey, she began her weight loss journey. Food was a go-to for my mom. I hadn’t realized it until later on in life that it was comforting to her to eat foods, even if they weren’t good for her, like sugar, pop, etc. She came to realize that she needed to lose weight for us. Once she started losing weight, I would always say, “Wow! Look at you, Mom!” I never looked at her as being bigger—she was just my mom. My mom had us on the



journey with her. We ate healthier, worked out with her, and were more active outside. She could've kept being overweight, but her courage made her press forward for the better.

My mom impacted me so much throughout my life. I look up to her. She drives me not to give up because of having a child. Instead of thinking of having a child as a restriction, it's made it more of a motivation. My mom has been and always will be the person I go to for wisdom and what I want to do with my life. My mom is the glue that keeps me from falling apart. If I didn't have my mom, I don't know where I would be.



### **Defying All Odds** **By Victoria Patterson**

Whenever we start a job, class, or any new journey in life, the question comes into play: how are your parents? Are you going to see your parents for the holidays? She responds with her head held high, "I lost both my parents," and then nosy people ask her how. Jennifer says, "I'm about to blow your mind. It was a homicide suicide." Could you imagine losing your mother one day and your father three days later? Would you be able to carry on at the age of 19 when your whole life is just beginning? This young lady, my best friend Jennifer Weber, is living proof that it can be done. She pushed herself by stepping up and raising her younger sister, getting her bachelor's degree, and becoming a great mother.

While in the grieving process, she hit the ground running, using resources to gain custody of her younger sister. Those resources included a guardian ad litem who advocated for her sister's placement. Jennifer was awarded custody of her little sister and received funds from Kinship Care. Kinship Care is a program that gives you funds for taking care of someone else's child. More





than just financial burdens, she had to handle a “know-it-all” teenager, making sure she went to school every day, did her homework, and was fed and off to bed. She took on a huge responsibility without complaining, saying it was too much, or trying to give it to another family member. She searched, located, and applied for new apartments.

As all of this was happening, she found the time to finish up her last year in her program and received her associate’s. Jennifer didn’t stop there: she transferred to Edgewood. She spent many nights up late studying while having to get up the next morning to work several different part-time jobs. She spent hours upon hours in the library. She graduated with her bachelor’s degree in Psychology with a concentration in the Human Services program. The day of her graduation, I remember being so proud of her. I made a secret poster of her with tons of pictures, and I waved it around and yelled as they called her name. There were lots of tears that day, but tears of joy.

Shortly after graduation, Jennifer landed a nice paying full-time job and was able to let go of her numerous part-time jobs. After accepting the new job, she called me over one day and said she thought she was pregnant. She took the test. We waited the minute and, BINGO, she was. We were both so excited. She took about three more tests because she had to be sure. Then we started googling cute ways to tell her boyfriend the exciting news. I was sworn to secrecy until she told people, which was three long, painful months. Her pregnancy was smooth. She had a few cravings but not too many. I got the call she was in labor. I dropped my kids off and was there in a heartbeat. She was a trooper handling the pain. I didn’t want to

leave as work was coming near. She told me I had to go and hold down the fort since she couldn’t be there. It was hard leaving her, but on March 25<sup>th</sup> my goddaughter was born.



She never feels sorry for herself or uses the situation as an excuse as to why she can’t do something. She is selfless and always willing to help others. She has been one of my biggest supporters. She accomplished some of life’s biggest moments without her two biggest supporters being there physically, but I’m sure they were there spiritually. She amazed me by not pouting or being down during those moments; she enjoyed them on her own. She is a great mother, making sure her daughter has everything she needs and wants. Jennifer took a great tragedy and turned it into fuel to push her to be the best she can be. Jennifer has defied all odds in my eyes. She is truly my woman of courage.



### **The Best Teacher Ever** **By Grisela M. Tapia Claudio**

Isn't it unusual for a 15-year-old child to ask about how to nominate his favorite teacher to be recognized, and for his two younger siblings, one who had and the other who currently has this teacher, to second it? We all four agreed to nominate the same teacher who understands our language and culture and is passionate to teach. Maestra Scott is a leader who goes above and beyond what is expected in a teacher's role. I admire this amazing teacher, Kristen Scott, who cares about each student's feelings, knows how to build a strong relationship between the students and the teacher, and co-headed the parents' training program to teach many parents the tools they need to support their children in the U.S. school system. She is committed not only to her students but also to parents, the school, and her community.

Kristen Scott cares so much for her students' feelings. I remember when my oldest son, Iker, was a shy new student who came into third grade in the middle of the school year at Nuestro Mundo (NM), a dual-language immersion charter school in the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD). She made him feel welcomed in a very special way by featuring him in the school's newsletter. This action made him feel comfortable in his new school and extremely special. After two years of helping Iker with the transition to the new school, she also helped my son Gael. He struggled with math and reading in fifth grade. This teacher involved me in creating an academic plan for my son to succeed with his learning. She also recommended him for reading and math interventions in addition to providing him with extra support and welcoming new participation in class.

We built a very strong relationship between parent, student, and teacher. I learned that engagement is a key component of learning. Without engagement there is little motivation to learn; together, we hooked my sons' curiosity and interest in learning. After months of effort, my son Gael met his academic goals that wouldn't have been possible without her help. Then, three years after this experience and at the beginning of this school year, I hoped she would be my daughter's teacher. When we all learned she







was going to be her teacher, my daughter screamed with joy and was super, super excited! Maestra Scott is my daughter's current fifth grade bilingual teacher at Nuestro Mundo (NM), and Yariane is really improving her math skills already.

Kristen Scott is also committed to her students' parents and community. From 2011 to 2014, Maestra Scott and three other parents (including me) co-headed the creation and development of a parent training program called Parent School Partnerships (PSP). We had a very tight budget for this project to happen. She put her heart into finding funds to cover many of the



expenses, including fieldtrips to colleges, breakfast and lunch for all parents and their children, childcare, transportation, and materials.

The PSP parent training gave me the opportunity to work with her and to know the amazing person, friend, mother, wife, and best teacher I know. I, as a parent, value that she tells my children about the amazing multicultural world that is out there waiting for them. She understands the importance of being bilingual because she grew up in a bilingual home with a grandmother who taught her Spanish and always told her she had the heart of a teacher. There are no words to express my gratitude for the caring she has showed towards my family and for all the priceless memories.



**Weathered in Wisconsin**  
**By Anthony Jefferson**

When I see my mother waiting in the winter cold at the bus stop, I feel a strange mix of sadness and pride. There she is in the freezing morning air dutifully going to work, but after seeing her struggles firsthand I know this isn't quite where she planned to be. Losing her mother suddenly just before Thanksgiving, suffering freak paralysis that six years later still has resounding effects, and enduring the resulting cycles of poverty have created a bevy of obstacles for my mother. Sometimes she shuts down and tearfully wishes for my grandma, but other times she is behind me offering support and guidance despite her own problems.

One week before the Thanksgiving of 2008, my grandmother Margaret passed away suddenly in her nursing home. The loss of her support beam really shook my mom to her core and left her a bit disconnected from things for a while. To this day, many holidays and anniversaries are a mix of emotions from happy memories to that somber realization we can't spend it with her. The experience has helped my mother to mature a bit more and see life through a more independent scope, something she lends to anyone else going through the same situation. Her empathy really makes an impression on me to not give up.

Only a couple years later on Thanksgiving day in 2010, I had to take my mom into the hospital. Over the past few weeks she had gone from experiencing an odd shoulder pain to losing most muscle function below her neck. Seeing her suffer tore at me since I knew she couldn't see the bright side from her position, and it was hard for me to do so after the doctor wrote her slow recovery off to "the way it will be from now on." She didn't give up, though, and without PT or medication got herself back on her feet, eventually getting herself to 80% in only six years. We still have an occasional moment of frustration or doubt, but all in all she has shown tremendous spirit.

Facing a long road to recovery and knowing her mom wouldn't be there to light the path really took a lot for her to overcome. The sadness and lost feeling has made her stray from the right path a few times. With such a traumatic injury, her work history as of late has been spotty. Her secretary work she prided herself on is not realistic anymore given the hand cramping and



inability to stay in a chair all day, leading to temporary agencies and forays into areas of work that are pretty foreign. The fighting spirit shows though in the fact that she has never given up and decided to collect disability, or throw her life away to a bottle of pills that might dull the hurt. She gets up at the crack of dawn and dresses herself for the long bus ride across the city, hoping to make something better of the new day.

In summary my mother has shown me how to crawl out of some deep and dark pits. Her pain has been a lesson in humility and her triumphs a sign that hope is never lost as long as you have willpower. Even though I would like to go back and rewrite history to be a lot less painful to bear, I know that she is able to face tomorrow with more certainty after this. She is a modern hero to me, someone who gives their all no matter how little is left to see someone else benefit, even if only in the form of a smile.





**Synonymous with Courage**  
**By Nathaniel Lake**

*Courage: the ability to do something that frightens one; strength in the face of pain or grief.* Although my sister would never talk about it, she has demonstrated both forms of courage, whether it be having the strength to stand up to an abusive father, to pack up and move to the other side of the planet, or to push past a crippling nerve injury. No matter how you look at it, my sister is a constant display of strength in adversity. The synonym of courage is Ariella Simone Lake.

Ariella was born October 22, 1987. For all of her endearing qualities, you would never know of the personal struggle she has dealt with and is still going through. When Ariella and I were growing up, our father was not the kindest man; albeit, he has grown a significant amount since we were small children. Our early years were our own kind of a special hell. Our father never put his hands on Ariella, but what he did not do physically he made up with verbal abuse and intimidation tactics. Our father had been a Marine during the time of the Vietnam War, and his post in Okinawa as a corporal officer had made him quite knowledgeable in intimidation. By the time my sister was born, he had calmed down in his intensity. Two of our three older brothers had to deal with a much rawer version of our father and, to be honest, I wouldn't wish that on anyone. Growing up in a home like this made my sister very strong. Our father enjoyed throwing insults, swear words, and slurs around to tear down at a person he couldn't touch physically. Age was not a deterrent. For as long as I could remember, my father talked down to us or tried to belittle our existence, but in this my sister found strength. Never letting his words sink in or pierce her mind, she kept her will strong in the face of adversity. Even when my father would threaten her physically, rush into her face screaming and shouting slurs while jabbing his finger into her face, Ariella would never back down. Many times she would welcome him acting in such a way, as it left her with the chance to harm him should he ever lay a hand on her. Growing up in a home like this made Ariella strong enough to stand up to anything that got in her way and gave her the drive to push through any and all obstacle. Especially when it came to believing in herself, she stayed strong no matter what negative images people would try to impose on her.

In the summer of 2014, Ariella got some terrible news. Her godmother had passed. This event would spark Ariella to change her life in a very dramatic way. Ariella reached out to her second oldest brother to tell him of the grave news. He was on the other side of the planet, in China, and had been disconnected from the rest of the family for quite some time. This led them to reconnect and begin talking. Within a few months of the first conversation, Ariella had not only decided to move to China but also to take her family with her, which included my mother and me. On November 20 of 2014, we were China bound on a 30+hr flight to Huai'an, China, where Ariella would live for a year along with Frank Nice and his wife, Huihui. There were a host of challenges to overcome once in China. She was in an entire city of five million plus people who had never seen a black woman before, nor had any idea how to act around one. It was a completely surreal culture shock. People would follow her, take her picture, and make



videos of her. Her students stalked her, breaking all of her personal space. How could you deal with being at a restaurant and a flock of people coming to take your picture through the window? Or when you are teaching at work, people line up to tap the glass window to watch you, as if you are an animal, caged in a zoo? But she dealt with this. For 365 days, Ariella lived with this nonsense. To add to her stress, her supervisor disrespected and stole money from her, almost preventing her from leaving the country, all because she



was a woman with a lack of connections. This unfortunately is somewhat normal for foreign women in China. She dealt with it all, all the while concealing an injury.

In spring 2011, Ariella injured her knee playing basketball. Initially her doctors told her that it was just a sprain and that it would heal in a few weeks. After several months of no progress and very stubborn doctors, Ariella was referred to a sports doctor at UW Health Sports Clinic. During her first appointment she found out she was dealing with a dislocated kneecap. The method in which she found this out was by shifting her kneecap from its normal fixed point to the side of her leg; this would be a visual that would stick with Ariella for the rest of her life. By December of '11, the injury had evolved so much that she was now on crutches, and her doctors were pleading with her to quit her job. That month the doctors wrote her a note saying that she must quit in order for her body to heal. Once her knee healed in January of 2012, she was immediately diagnosed with complex regional pain syndrome; this is a malfunction of the nerves, causing the body to respond as if it were still injured. This would cause her nerves to feel as if they were on fire, make her right leg feel as if there were a million needles stabbing at her, or make it so she could not get out of bed without assistance. This also triggered depression and anxiety. It would take years for her to learn how to live with her condition. Despite all of this, Ariella has relearned how to walk, squat, drive, and use stairs, all without the assistance of a leg brace or crutch. Ariella has continued to persevere in her day-to-day life no matter what the obstacle may be or what form the adversity may take.

Undoubtedly Ariella is courageous and has overcome a myriad of troubles and trials. In the face of such tribulations, she did not falter nor take a step back. Through sheer grit and determination, she found the willpower to overcome all obstacles. It goes without question that Ariella is the living definition of courage. She always stands tall and firm, no matter what is in front of her. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, she is synonymous with the word courage.



**Margarita**  
**By Belem Calixto**

Who is the most important woman in my life? Margarita is her name, and she currently lives in Mexico. I've known her for almost 25 years, and she is my MOTHER. Whenever I think of someone courageous, I think of her because of her different experiences throughout her life: her struggle to get some education despite facing the obstacles that her parents and life brought her; the courage that she had to get out of nowhere to make sure her family had a better future and would be united again at some point; and the right words that she has for me every time I'm overwhelmed or simply have a question.

I'm not really sure, but I do remember my mom telling me how hard she had to work to at least finish elementary school. My mother was born in 1965, so you can imagine how parents were back then, especially in Mexico. You were lucky if you got an education. In my mom's case she told me that she had to wake up at 5 or 6 a.m. every day to be able to finish her chores (wash dishes, make breakfast for her five siblings, make a big bucket of *masa* or corn dough, etc.). She told me that there were times when she only had one pair of shoes, and those shoes were for school only. School wasn't a guaranteed privilege for her: she had to earn it. In 2013 I told her that I had received a scholarship that helped me get my CNA license. She congratulated me and said to me, "*Echale ganas hija; estoy feliz por ti,*" or "I'm happy for you; you can do it." I also remember her face full of happiness when my brother and I walked across the stage at the Kohl Center with our maroon caps and gowns to get our high school diplomas. She has our class picture hanging in her living room. Every time someone comes over to her house and asks her "Who are those?" she proudly says that it's my brother's and my graduation class picture.

In September 2000, my mother made the decision to come to the U.S. to meet with my father and my oldest brother. She told my younger brother and me about her decision. Although it was going to be difficult, my brother and I knew we were going to be ok because we had each other and because we were going to stay with my grandmother (my mom's mom). When my mother left, it was a normal day, or that's what I thought. I was eight years old at that time, and I remember my mom telling me that she was going to the store and that she was coming right back. She got in a car with two of my aunts and left. I remember sitting on a step at the end of my grandma's patio petting my dog, waiting for my mom to come back, to ask her what she brought me from the store. Two or three hours, later I saw a car pulling in. I was waiting for my mom to get out from the car, but of course it didn't happen. That's when I realized she had left, and all I had was my brother and my dog. In my life, I have had to say good bye to my mother four times already. [She now lives in Mexico and I live here.] Every time I have to do it, I have a huge knot in my throat that I can't control, and I just start to cry. Of all the times I had to say goodbye, the surprising thing is that she is always strong and she doesn't cry. All she tells me is that she doesn't cry because one of us has to be strong. I love my mother, and I make sure that every time I talk to her on the phone she knows it.

At this point in my life I can say that I don't have that many close friends, and there is a saying that says that a girl's best friend will always be her mother. Most of the time when I have doubts, questions, need an opinion, or simply need someone to talk to, all I have to do is pick up the phone and call my mom. When I came back from Mexico three months ago, I had doubts about being in this country. I was home in Mexico for five weeks, just enjoying my family, freedom from worries of paying bills or having to go to work the next day. Three days after I came back to Madison, I started to realize that I didn't want the life I was living here anymore. I started to cry in frustration, and I called my mom to tell her how I was feeling. She listened to me, and her words back to me were, "You've done this for six years, and you can do it for a couple more. But if you decide to come back, you already know how hard life is here, so think of what you really want to do, I will support you in whatever you decide." I told her I was going to work hard to go back home in about two or three years. I was still with that decision in my head until now. After the presidential election, I called her, and she told me she had watched the news already and knew how this can affect my brother and me. She told me that we shouldn't worry about anything because we have a house and a family to come back to.

There is no doubt that my mother is the most courageous person I've known. I admire how strong she is and the examples of courage that she gives me every day. She has taught me how to be a good person. There are many things she has showed me that I'm sure I will keep with me for the rest of my life. There isn't anything I wouldn't do for her. I can't imagine my life without her: she is my everything.





**Border of Courage**  
**By Susana Gomez**

How does a woman with five girls and her husband make the difficult decision to move to another country? That's what my mom and dad did in order to prevent us from growing up in a place full of poverty and extreme violence and to give us a better life in the United States.

My mom, Maria Garcia, was born on September 25 in a small town in Durango, Mexico. She's the first born of ten children and helped raise them. Since she was a little girl, my mom always had to give up her dreams. She only finished sixth grade and had to drop out to help her parents bring income into the household. That was until she met my dad and had my sisters. Before I was born, my parents move to Cd. Juarez, Chihuahua, in the late 1980s because of job opportunities. My mom started working for a company that made computer keyboards. She was a supervisor there, but she only made about 400 pesos per week, which is equivalent to 40 dollars. My mom managed to pay bills with that paycheck and still made it through somehow. I wouldn't say that we were poor when we lived in Mexico, but it was a struggle. My older sister was about to graduate from high school, and that's when my mom realized that paying for college was going to be hard, especially when all of us one day might eventually go to college too. My brother, who already lived here in Wisconsin, called my mom one day and told her that she should really think about moving to the United States, where she would be able to make enough money to help raise us in a better environment. The reason why my mom decided to move to Wisconsin was also because she found out that the company she was working for was moving to a different country, so they laid off a lot of the employees, including my mom and dad. My mom then had one reason to move to Wisconsin.



In 1996, Cd. Juarez became one the most dangerous cities in Mexico. Every day about three or four women would end up dead in my neighborhood. The reasons for their deaths were never solved; even to this day, we don't even know who killed them. My mom, knowing that this was happening, could not stay there, especially when the women would end up about four blocks away from our house. It was a terrible time living in this city, feeling scared every cold night you went out for only a gallon of milk at the corner grocery store or feeling hopeless that you couldn't help the families of these women. Crime was rising in this city and fast, and it felt like the police and government really didn't care about what was going on in this side of the city. My mom knew that with five girls she could not stay here and wait for a tragedy. This was the main reason that my mom decided to move to Wisconsin: all the crime happening in our





neighborhood. She mustered the courage and moved all her family to Madison, Wisconsin in April 1999.

One week after we arrived here, my mom started working for a carpet cleaning place. She was making the minimum, but at least she was making more than the 40 dollars per week. It wasn't the best of jobs, but she always says, "Work is work," and she is right. After working in the carpet cleaning company, she went on to work on a dairy farm with my dad and other family members. My mom worked six days a week, eight hour shifts, in order to raise us in a better environment than what we had in Mexico. My mom was able to send us to school every morning knowing that we were safe. I don't think I have ever seen my mom without a job. She has taken some really strange jobs just to make ends meet. She once had a job making sample books for curtains and selling make-up and jewelry.

She went out to nearby cities to sell food in factories' parking lots, cleaned houses, made dolls, and worked at a chocolate factory (I have asked her if she ever met Willy Wonka!). My mom is a strong and courageous woman who does not give up easily. She found any job in order to give us the life she was not able to give us back in Mexico. It was not perfect all the time, but my mom tried, and I think she did a good job with all of us.

Now my mom lives in Ohio with one of my sisters, and she couldn't be happier. Although she also kind of wishes we were all together in Wisconsin, we at least can see each other through FaceTime. She is at a moment in her life where she can finally just sit back and relax and not really have to worry about us. We are all married and have families of our own. Now it's time for my sisters and me to follow the example of my mom. When life seems too impossible, just have the courage to make it possible, to make it better for your family even when you are unsure about the outcome. Just trust in yourself and have courage, just like my mom did.





### **My Superwoman** **By Kendra Atkinson**

The definition of a superwoman should be “a woman with exceptional strength, especially one who successfully manages a home, raises her children while being a single parent, and has a full-time job.” If anyone were to ask me, I would say the definition of courage fits Darcy Lalimo. She is very warm-hearted, overcomes every obstacle that tries to break her, comes out stronger than before, and continues to strive.

There are various reasons why my mother is warm-hearted. Ever since I was young, my mother has given her everything to make sure everybody was secure. I remember my mother taking in our friends because their parents couldn’t afford to raise them or give them a secure home. We weren’t rich, but my mother always found a way to make it seem like we were. One time my mother saved the neighbors from a fire. She had to break the window to get in, and that led to her having to get stitches. Later, she went back to the doctor because she was having a lot of pain. They took X-rays, and she was told that the doctor accidentally stitched glass into her hand. She then had to have surgery and take a couple more weeks off from work. Her job wasn’t coping with her absence, so they let her go. Not once did my mother panic, complain, or regret her decision to help the neighbors. My mother is always giving, and she never expects anything back except to pass the blessing forward.

My mother has been through so many obstacles in her lifetime that made her the strong woman she is today. Darcy grew up the youngest out of five children. She was a daddy’s girl. That would soon be her first heartbreaker when she learned that her father was not the man he presented himself to be. She was too young to understand the problems he and my



grandma were going through. My mother had her first child at age 18. She was a single mother because my father spent most of my sister's life and my life in prison. When my dad got out, we still weren't his priority, nor was my mother. Years later, my mother was trapped in abusive relationships that she showed no signs of to others. My mother concealed all of the evidence of this abuse from my sister and me. During those



times, she laughed with us, took us on fun vacations, tucked us in at night, and played dress up with us, when deep down she was nothing but bruised under the clothing she had on and scared from her inner soul. She was the woman who defines courage. We slowly but surely learned about all of this once we got old enough to understand and strong enough to hear about it. She never once showed her pain; she never once showed us her struggle. All along, we thought life was a piece of cake.

My mother hasn't stopped striving. She is currently a mother of five children, has been married to a good man for eight years, still works full time, and recently achieved her desired goal of being a bilingual Spanish interpreter. She is now enrolled in college to get her bachelor's in Behavioral Health with an emphasis on becoming a counselor of family dynamics

involving marriage and family issues. Because we know she is doing this all for her family, we all try our hardest to support her as much as we can. It motivates her more and makes her feel like she has the support system she needs. She gave us a good life, and she is only trying to give us a better life.



A mother's love is unconditional. She understands us when we can't understand ourselves. She gets under my skin at times, but I wouldn't change her for the world. She is the most warm-hearted, strong, and hard-working women I have ever met. The fact that I am blessed to have her as my mother makes everything ten times better. I love my mother, and I thank her for all that she has done. My superwoman is what I call her, and she will forever remain that.



## **My Woman of Courage: Hilda Amor D'andrade Bally**

### **By Joy Bally**

Who is the most inspiring person in my life? When I ask myself that question, the answer quickly comes to mind: my grandmother Hilda Amor D'andrade Bally. To me, she is an example of courage, strength, compassion, and determination. She survived childhood without the support of her biological parents. She was both mother and father to her three children because her husband left her for a prostitute. She was able to earn a living and be successful even though she did not go to college.

Hilda Amor D'andrade Bally was one of four children given away by her mother after her husband became sick and she left him to be remarried. Her new husband did not want my great-grandmother's children to be part of his family except for the youngest, who was five years old. At the age of 16, my grandmother got a job at a hardware store. She worked there until the age of 78. While she was working at the hardware store, she met my grandfather, who was a taxi driver. They got married and had three children. After five years of marriage, my grandfather left my grandmother for a prostitute. My grandfather never looked back or helped my grandmother or his children with anything.

My grandmother started her new life alone. She never remarried. She lived in poverty, and then my father and siblings did not have enough to eat. There were times when my grandmother got home late at night after work. She would wake her children up to eat bread and milk.



When my aunt was five years old and my father was four years old, their youngest brother died at the age of two and a half out of neglect. According to my father and aunt, it was the most devastating thing for my grandmother, as she blamed herself for his death. At the age of 41, my terminally ill grandfather came back to my grandmother. She took him in without any malice and cared for him until he died. She also did the same for her mother. Hilda Amor D'Andrade Bally was eventually able to buy a house and give my dad and aunt a comfortable life and home.

Courage, strength, compassion, and determination: my grandmother set for me the example that I can be strong, independent, and complete without getting married or having a man in my life. My grandmother is also the rock and example of compassion who inspires me today. She is the only one who showed me what unconditional love is. For all of this, I will always be grateful to her.





### **A Mother's Work By Spencer Gamble**

The most courageous woman I know is my mother, Denise Mikulak.

She has been through it all and possesses a strength and vigor that cannot easily be measured. She has graciously overcome adversity. She has endured a dysfunctional nuclear family, combatted the ruins of a rebellious teenager, and survived a host of turbulent marriages, all of which she did with true class and strong faith.

Denise was born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1956. She was raised by her mother and stepfather. She had a solid relationship with her mother. However, her stepfather was a jealous, ignorant, abusive tyrant. He caused the family a great deal of pain and discomfort. She had to be the “rock” for her mother, siblings, and step-siblings that dropped in from time to time. Upon getting pregnant with me at age 18, she realized that wasn't a suitable environment for raising a child. She moved out on her own with only the clothes on her back. She had to work two jobs. She didn't get much help from my father. He was selfish and entitled. She was better off without him.



Denise had me at such a young age. A mere child herself, she did the best she could, given the circumstances. This was a task I didn't make easy. I blamed her for my many insecurities and shortcomings. I was a very shy and reserved child. She pushed me to be social and more assertive. This inevitably made me deeply vengeful. I began a destructive pattern. I lied, stole, and even went so far as to run away from home at age 11. It was not because I was mistreated but rather because I didn't want to accept my punishment for slacking off at school. On the coldest day of winter, I walked 15 miles, got third degree frost bite, and my fingernails fell off. Lesson learned.



Denise loved me despite all of my teenage angst, disrespectful tone, and inability to accept accountability. We both had a stubborn streak that would many times end in us not talking for a time. But as I get older, I understand what she had been trying to convey—life's hard lessons.

Denise knew best. She had been married three times. Her first husband, Crawford, was "a great

stepfather but a terrible husband." She licked her wounds and tried again. She married Duane, yet he was "insecure" and felt as if he had to compete with my younger brother, Cameron. He, too, had to go. She finally met her soul-mate, Paul, who won her over after becoming friends first. They proceeded into the relationship slowly. Both had been through divorces, with children, yet they developed an irrefutable bond that lasted until he took his last breath in 2016. Paul was a good man and good to my mother.

My mother lives her life to a standard I can respect, admire, and aspire to. She is professional, kind, and forgiving. Most importantly, she helped mold me into the man I've become. It may have taken many disagreements to realize her worth and get it right. I think back to all the sacrifices she made. She's a woman phenomenally, "phenomenal woman" indeed. At this point of her life she has found peace. She enjoys being with her grandchildren, chatting with old friends, and finally living life for herself.





## **I Never Knew a Woman Could Be So Brave!**

**By Felica Thomas**

Imagine yourself as a mother who had raised her kids all on her own and with no help. Imagine yourself forced to take in five grandkids and raise them all on your own due to their mothers being addicted to drugs. My grandmother Fannie was a very strong woman and is still remarkable at 74 years old. She still cares for children: her nieces, nephews, and occasionally neighborhood children. My grandmother overcame poverty and an absent father, survived having a husband walk out on her, and raised not just her kids but her grandkids to be independent citizens who could take care of themselves. Not only is she my woman of courage, but she is my hero, too.

My grandmother Fannie Harris was the second of 15 kids born to Tom and Lorenzo Robinson on Feb 27, 1942, the first of her sisters and definitely not the last of the kids. My grandmother was forced to learn to be a provider at an early age. She was responsible not just for herself but for her 13 siblings that came behind her. When her oldest brother left, all the responsibility fell on her. Soon after, her father abandoned the family. He went and created another family in Florida. She was left to fend for her siblings and my great-grandmother. They all lived in a three-bedroom home. Among the girls and the boys, my grandmother had to drop out of school to help my great granny provide for her sisters and brothers. It was hard and tough for her to maintain, as she had to drop out of school to help them. She had little education, and in Mississippi back in 1959 or so, racism and segregation were still much a part of society. The pay was low, and you were expected to work for a little of nothing.



My grandmother left home and married her sweetheart at 18. Soon after, he walked out on her at 21 with three children, my mom being the oldest. It took strength to provide not just for her kids but several of her sisters and brothers as they came to live with her. My grandmother was a helper. She always put her family first. Despite how tough it was for her, she made things work with what she had. My grandmother, in my opinion, has always worn an iron heart. I think that's due to having to grow up before her time and help raise her family. Every year for the holidays, all her siblings and church family knew exactly where the meal would be hosted without asking.

When I was two years old, my mother took me from Detroit, Michigan, and dropped me off at my grandmother's down in Mississippi. When I moved in with my grandmother, she was

raising two of my cousins at the time. My grandmother treated us all equally; she loved me as my mother should have. She provided me with the things that I needed to go to school, and she bought me clothes and shoes. Most importantly, my grandmother cared about me and my well-being. I can recall times that I would have to go with my cousins because she was working a late shift to make sure that she had enough money to provide for me. By this time, it was my grandmother and I in the house by ourselves. My grandmother was strict and loving to me. Although she never told me that she loved me, her actions showed me that. They showed me that she'd be here for me forever. A few years later, my aunt had a son and became addicted to drugs, so my grandmother took him in. A few years later, there was another addition. By 1995 there were six of us in a two-bedroom house, not to mention my mother and aunt, who'd occasionally come and stay. My grandmother alone provided for us all on her single income. She worked for Irvin Automotive making Ford car parts. She was at this job sometimes from 6 am to 6 pm in order to make sure that we had what we needed for school and even to replace some of the things my mom and aunt stole from us if they came over.

Sometimes a person doesn't have to be mom to call them mom. My grandmother is my best friend. We talk every single day. Thanks to her, I am a good mother, never used drugs, and have a good paying career. She taught me and my cousins to learn to sustain and maintain on our own. My grandmother throughout her life has also battled cancer. When I offered to come back home to care for her as she did me, she declined. She told me to stay here and take care of my kids. I had worked hard to get to where I was. I declined and told her I was on my way home to her. My grandmother told me if I came home she wasn't going to let me in. It isn't every day that you meet a grandmother that would take in her grandkids and raise them. She didn't raise one kid: she raised six!







## **Courage Depends on Your Point of View**

### **By Johnnie Walton**

My grandmother, Mary Easter, was a woman whom I wished death on more times than I can count. I didn't know what death would bring, but it sure felt good to say it behind her back. It took a lot of thought and imagination to write this, but I've finally figured it out. Looking back on the 12 years Mary raised me, I've found her to be determined, resourceful, and fearless.

In the midst of hardship and sorrow, Mary insisted on her right to joy. She smoked cigarettes, drank coffee, and talked on the phone all day and night. Despite being born African American in Mississippi in the early 1920s, she raised eight children without a spouse. After she failed at raising six of her eight children, her daughter (my mother) died and left behind eight more. Mary took on the task of caring for all of us; she was in her late sixties. She could have said no. She had every day to give up, but she didn't, not until I was 12. Then she put me out. To me it felt irresponsible. I ended up in the Department of Corrections with adults.

Mary's resourcefulness was astounding. Her only source of income was government assistance. She didn't receive any for my two uncles, who kept moving in, off and on. A five-bedroom house in Chicago on government assistance: how did she do it? She made the boys grow a garden with every vegetable you can imagine because food stamps for eight kids only go so far. She would tell us to only spend 50 cents on every food stamp dollar so that she could get cash back to play the lottery and buy cigarettes. Another resource of hers was the people on our block. She would send us to them with a letter asking for money, sugar, or bread. She



She didn't care that it made people look down on us. She was unaware that she was the cause of our being suspended from school for fighting because kids picked on us, partly because of how poorly we dressed and because she begged.

It's hard to picture Mary as being fearful of anything. We would sometimes use the alleys for shortcuts as kids. Alleys are very dangerous on the south side of Chicago. Nevertheless, Mary would take the same shortcuts and alleys to get to her destinations. I have an uncle who is six feet tall, over 200 pounds, and addicted to drugs. One night he took a butcher knife from the kitchen and went into her room to rob her. She grabbed the knife by the blade and cut her

hand open. Because she took shortcuts, I thought she might want something to happen to her. From that night on, I realized this old lady was fearless; she had courage.

I don't really know what motivated Mary to try and care for us. She could have truly cared for our wellbeing. She could have been trying to save face because of what people might say if she didn't take us in. She could have just wanted a second chance at raising children, believing that she might get it right. It could have been that her resourcefulness and fearlessness were all about her and never about us. In physics, a photon can be a particle or a wave or both. It depends on your point of view. Was Mary Easter courageous or self-centered or both? It depends on whether you see her from the inside, the outside, or my own heart. I'll let you decide.



### **Standing on Her Own Two Feet** **By Asha Green**

"I'm tough, ambitious, and I know what I want." I was finally going to get to meet Mrs. Reed in person for the first time—this woman I had heard oh so much about. Now we had always had conversations on the phone here and there, but this was going to be it. I was about 16 years old when I met her. I remember it like it was yesterday. I had just gotten off work at Walgreen's during the summer. She came from Chicago for the weekend to spend some time with her son and daughter. So as we pull into my boyfriend's sister's driveway, my heart starts beating, and my palms are getting sweaty. What is this woman actually going to think of me? I'm 16 years old, and I already have a baby. I begin to question myself. Am I good enough to date her only son? Well, here goes nothing. It's too late to turn back now. As I walk into his sister's home, I am instantly hit with this amazing aroma of good old southern cooking. Angie greets me with a big, bright beautiful smile and the best hug I have ever received! I had psyched myself out, but this great woman passes no judgment on me. "Everyone has a past," she says. She accepts me not only as her daughter but also accepted my daughter as her own grandchild!

In resisting temptation and peer pressure, Angie became her own woman, standing on her own two feet. Growing up in the rough and ragged streets of Chicago's south side in the late sixties and seventies, she was faced with many different challenges. The cocaine epidemic was at an all-time high. She saw all five of her brothers and sisters fall victim to addiction, either to the fast money selling drugs or becoming their best customer. She managed to stay away from the drug and party scene. She kept busy in her school studies and church.

It's not how we make mistakes but how we correct them that defines us. I'm not saying she's a



saint. Nobody's perfect, and we learn from our mistakes. She gave birth to her first child with a man that we call a "street nigga." He was always in and out of jail, getting high off his own supply kinda guy. Needless to say, he didn't last too long. Angie met her husband Phil, and they had two more children. By the age of 29, she and her husband purchased their first home. At the age of 32, she made the decision to go back to school to further her education in child development. She earned her degrees in early childhood education.

She is known as the backbone and can take care of business at the same time. She has been able to achieve her personal goals that she has set for herself, including owning and operating her in-home child care facility since 1986. This woman has many talents and titles. Not only does she have her child care facility, but she also has been catering her delicious food to families and the Chicago school boards for many years. Angie now has a handful of clients that she cooks for on a regular basis, from their holiday meals to weekly meals. You name it, she'll cook it. Around six years ago, Grandma

Vera got sick and was not able to care for herself any longer. Without any doubt, Angie moved in with Grandma Vera. She cared for the woman who had showed her how to be the strong woman she is today. Grandma Vera passed away about a year and a half later. Imagine that you have lost the one person that has shaped you into the woman you are today. It's a hard pill to swallow. Angie remained strong and made some of Grandma Vera's best dishes to bring the family closer together.

Angie has impacted my life because she has showed me how to look past my own insecurities and see the true beauty within myself. She has taught me how to be a great woman, mother, and potential wife. No matter what your past looks like, your future is always so much brighter.



### **The Life of a Devoted Woman** **By Jessica Tucker**

Have you ever met someone at a young age and think to yourself, “I want to be just like them when I grow up”? For me, that was always my mother. I know it may sound clichéd for a child to want to be like one of their parents or to have the same career when they grow up. The reason I’ve always wanted to be like my mother was because of her personality and the courage that it’s taken her to get her where she is today. Even from a young age, I remember her always being very strong, adaptable, and hard working.

My mother, regardless of the circumstances, is the type of person that even in the worst of situations will find that one positive thing and use it to push her through any obstacle that may come her way. My mother didn’t finish college, which is why still to this day she pushes me to finish, but she was a very active CNA. My mother has been through two heart-breaking divorces. The good that came from the divorces were her two children: myself, who she had when she was 21, and my little brother, who is now 12. The reason I think she is so strong is even though she had been through two divorces, leaving her with two children to care for, it never stopped her from being an amazing parent.

Now that I am older, I realize how adaptable my mother has always been. She has moved six times in her life now. She was born in the Philippines and moved here to the USA at a young age. She was able to adapt quickly. When she had me, we lived in Bryan, Ohio, in 1989. Shortly after that, we moved to a suburb of Chicago, where she became a live-in caregiver; my father and I were able to move in with her as well. After they had passed away, we moved to Kenosha to be closer to my father’s family. When my parents divorced one another, she moved herself and me to Franklin, Wisconsin, where an aunt of hers was living. She quickly found a school for me, a job at a hospital, and an apartment of our own to move into. She shortly after that met the man of her second marriage, and we then moved here to



Madison. Everywhere that we have lived, she has always been able to adapt to the new environment, obtaining employment and housing very quickly.

Last but not least, she has always been a hard worker. As I said before, she was an active CNA. She always had jobs in the healthcare field, which I think fits her personality perfectly. She always went above and beyond for any employer that hired her into their establishment. When we lived in Kenosha, she was working at a nursing home. They loved her so much that they always let me come in and volunteer for BINGO day. I would come in and help wheel some of the residents in and assist them with food and passing out the cards. I also remember when we lived in Franklin, she would work long days at the hospital and sometimes not get home until way after I would get home from school.

I feel as though the way she was so strong, adaptable, and hard-working makes her the most courageous woman in my life. Even though my mother was struggling raising me on her own, she never let it show. She always made sure that I had everything I needed, regardless of whether that meant she had to go without. I hope as I grow older every day that I am at least half the mother or as inspiring of a mother as she has been to me my entire life.



**Woman of Courage: My Mother, Gloria**  
**By Maria Cardenas**

Ever since I was little, I knew that there was a person that I could always count on. Being raised with morals from halfway across the world and the reality of this big nation led my family through many rabbit holes. One way or another, my mother has always driven us to the top. She puts her family first at all times.

Gloria is a person of courage because she has worked since she was a child and knows the value of being a hardworking woman, she decided to go back to school, continue to learn English, and still be responsible with her life, and she even has had to be the sole independent provider for her whole family.

When my mother was younger, she had one responsibility and that was to take care of her siblings and cousins. She was the youngest of ten children and was always picked on. My grandmother raised her ten children without the help of any man or government assistance, which at the time and even today still doesn't exist in Colombia. She had a magazine stand in the middle of the city in Bucaramanga where she sold just about everything that she could fit in there, like cigarettes, soda beverages, gum, and assorted candies. That stand became very popular. Once my mother was old enough, she would go by and trade shifts. When she wasn't





in the magazine stand working, she was at home helping out with all of the chores, making food for everyone with the help of the older siblings, as well as going to school. They didn't have much, but what they did have was each other. To them, that was all that really mattered.

In 2002 we moved to the United States. It was a really difficult decision that both of my parents had to make, but most of all it was hard for my mother to leave all of her family behind. Coming to this country, we knew that there would be a lot of changes, but the language and culture change was the most difficult of all. We lived in South Florida, where more than half of the population spoke Spanish, but most of the jobs required you to know English. For the first couple of months, my mom didn't work. She took care of us, helped with homework, and took us to the pool. After a year went by, she finally decided to enroll herself into English classes at Broward Community College. She was very shy and introverted, but as time went by she began to open up. Learning the basics allowed her to defend herself out in public if she needed to and eventually led to finding a job at a school cleaning up classrooms at night.

Moving to Wisconsin I think was definitely the toughest decision of all for my parents to make. We didn't have anyone or anything here, and we didn't understand why this was happening. After being in Florida for five years and establishing a somewhat nomadic life, it all came to a quick change. My dad had lost his job, and the little money that they had saved up wasn't going to be enough to sustain us all. My mom had a stable job, but she knew that it was for the best to pick up and go. Once we made it up here, it was just in time for the last month of summer break. Right away both of my parents went job hunting, and my mom luckily landed a job with the hospital. She became the main provider for us until my dad was able to, and I'm sure that was really hard for her to do. We were old enough where we didn't need to be watched, but I'm sure she would have liked to have that extra time with us. In conclusion, my mother Gloria is a woman of courage because of the way she was raised with knowing the value of being a hardworking person ever since she was a child. Even though she was the youngest one from her big family, she was given a big job, which meant that she was always included. She took responsibility for her life and decided to learn English not only for her future but also for her children's lives. It must've been tough since the older you get the harder it is to learn something, but with practice and perseverance anything can be achieved. Lastly she even had to become the sole provider for a period of time for her family. When the economy was hard and there weren't enough jobs, she went out of her way and put herself out there to land something that would be everlasting. When life got tough, she was there to support everyone, just the way that she was taught when she was younger.





**Brave and Risky**  
**By José Mendoza**

My mom is a woman of courage because she is brave and risky. She never let any obstacle stop her. My mom only went up to second grade in school, but that was enough for her to succeed in her own small business. She worked hard on legal jobs, she took the risk of doing illegal jobs to provide money for her family, and she raised her children with a good education.

My mom used to go to Guatemala to buy clothes, shoes, and jewelry for resale. She had to ride in a bus for about four hours. She was very brave because there were a lot of car accidents in the road, and those bus drivers run fast and furious. Of course, the city is dangerous, and there were many crimes. For a long period of time, my mom had to walk around to neighbors' houses to sell her products. She didn't care how hot it was outside. Sometimes she came back home late at night. Most of the times in her business, the clients asked her for credit. She had to go back the next week for the money, so she had to walk twice in the same direction. I could see in her face how tired she was, but she never gave up.

My mom was a risky person because sometimes she sold illegal items such as parrots, iguanas, and turtle eggs. She used to buy baby parrots. She would feed them for a couple of weeks. When the parrots were old enough, she sold them. In addition, many customers came to our house to buy the turtle eggs and the iguanas. A lot of times she had to drive more than an hour to deliver her products. She could have been put in jail if the police found out that she was doing illegal jobs, but she took the risk because by doing those jobs she made more money.



My mom raised her three children with little help from my dad. She always told us that education is a priority in people's lives. I didn't have the opportunity to go to college, but now my mom is proud of me because I told her I went back to school again. My mom did a wonderful job educating her kids. She has two hardworking sons and a daughter with a psychology degree. She would love to see me as a professional with a better future.

My mom is a woman of courage because she is a very hard-working woman, even though she had many obstacles in her life. She took risks by selling illegal products, and she raised her children with little help. Now she is having some health problems, but she never gives up. I want to hug my mom and tell her how much I admire her and miss her. I hope GOD will keep my mom stronger and let me see her again after 15 years. I love you, MAMÁ!



### **A Pearl Living Inside an Oyster** **By D'onna Atkinson**

One thing June Ann, my grandmother, taught me was to stay strong and be aware. My grandma has been through many tribulations that were frightening, but she's stood strong, moved on, and never sorrowed upon her worry.

Although she was set out to be on her own with a child at a young age, was abused by her children's father, and had the love of her life pass away, she still stood strong; this is why courage defines her.

My grandmother grew up in a small family of six children, including two of them with a disability and a father who was an alcoholic. June, my grandmother, was kicked out of the house when she was 16 years old and pregnant. Now living on her own with a child to raise, she managed to never give up hope, and she graduated from high school. She attended college for her desired interest in nursing. She then had three more children, so she moved to her home. As of today, she has been there for 34 years. During those times she ended up in an abusive relationship. She put up with it for a while because the man was her children's father. He was more than just abusive and had many more problems; this is why she kicked him out and never looked back. She stood strong for her children and has remained that today for her grandchildren.

Years later when her youngest child was four years old, she found the love of her life, Conley. Conley took her children in and helped raise them as his own. I was born in the arms of this man and grew up knowing that he was my grandfather. He sheltered my grandmother with love, comfort, and promises. He kept his word, and he held my broken grandmother in his arms. GOD repaired my grandma at that moment, but she remained the forceful woman she



was born to be. During 2012, my Grandpa Conley passed away from a heart attack, which impacted my grandma so much. She was now broken again, more broken than ever before. She was lost, lonely, and confused as to why her, but she never showed anyone nor broke down to anyone about her true feelings. She still doesn't. I look at her all the time and know deep down that she is forever scarred because he is gone. We were able to finally show her we are here for her by giving her the love and company she needs. She is no longer alone. My sister and I make sure we get her out of the house, take her out to eat, spend nights with her, go on vacations with her, and, last but not least, create the lost laughter that she has now regained.

Once her youngest child turned 18 years old, she was blessed with her first grandchild, me. My mother, Darcy, was a sensitive, strong woman who raised me, and then two years later my sister, on her own due to my father

being in prison most of our childhood life. Being a single parent led her to struggle and strive for us to maintain a living. During those times, we had to live with my grandma. Our family's superhero then would step in, our grandmother, June Ann. My grandma helped our mother raise us during the times my mom had to work. She would watch us, take us shopping, and take us to the Dells. When we needed courage, she was the person we would run to because she wasn't afraid to speak her mind, whether you wanted to hear it or not. My grandma is someone who my family can depend on. When someone in the family needs something, we go to my grandma because we know she will get it done the right way. There's nothing my grandma can't do. June Ann is always there. I give my grandmother credit for being the strong woman I am today. I am who my grandmother is as of today, and for that I thank her.



One thing is for certain: my grandmother taught me everything . . . except how to live without her. She is a thoughtful lady who will always be my best friend. She will always listen with an open heart, and she has been here for me, right from the start. She will forever love me dearly, for which I will always tell her I love her sincerely. No matter what age she has recently turned, for my well-being she's forever concerned. My grandma is one of the strongest, most generous and dependable woman I have met. I don't know where I would be without her. I am going to continue thanking God the rest of my life for blessing me with the beautiful, rose-hearted grandmother I have. This is why COURAGE defines her.



**She Who is Brave!**  
**By Kyisha Williams**

What is a woman of courage? A woman of courage is someone who doesn't allow obstacles to stand in her way. A woman of courage doesn't allow fear to stop her from making life-changing decisions. A woman of courage is someone who is loving and caring and wants everyone to succeed. Victoria Patterson is a woman of courage because she is bravely battling Crohn's disease, is selfless and encouraging, and is supportive/caring.

I've witnessed Victoria Patterson show strength in so many ways. She had to drink three gallons of disgusting fluid to light up her intestines, followed by a gallon of water every 15 minutes. She managed to keep it down because a pill-size camera got stuck, which was causing her excruciating pain. She had to make the decision to have surgery without second-guessing the choice she had made. Victoria Patterson went into surgery with her fist held high, yelling, "F\*#k Trump" instead of the typical "5,4,3,2,1" as the anesthesia took effect because

she did not want those to be her last words before surgery. She came to class four days later, although she should've been resting. Being able to find humor during a time most people are beyond stressed and over-analyzing their situation, Victoria Patterson showed love and was at peace. Following surgery, she was anxious to get back to her daily routine parenting her children and going back to work sooner than the doctors expected. Every time they set a goal for her to be back to normal, such as if you do this you'll be able to do that, she would push herself to be better.

Victoria Patterson is a strong black woman. She makes scary situations seem normal. One night I was driving home terrified because it was dark and thunder-storming. I was so scared because I have a hard time seeing at night, and I hate driving under wet weather conditions. Victoria called, and I was telling her I was so scared. She said, "You haven't made it home yet?" I'm like, "Girl, no, I'm driving so slow." She then said, "Okay, let's pray." I'm like, "Right now?" She laughed like "yeah" as she began praying that I made it home safely. I tried hanging up the phone, but she was determined to stay on the phone until I made it home. So we started talking about other things, which put me at ease. I was no longer scared.

Victoria Patterson is supportive and caring. She goes above and beyond to make sure that no one in Odyssey is left behind. She voluntarily got everyone's phone number and sends out good morning text messages with a quote for the day, just a little positivity as we start our days. If someone does not make it to class, she will reach out to them to make sure they're okay. I admire her for this because not everyone has a family or anyone checking on them at all. I remember the day we took our first field trip to get our UW ID cards, some of the students did not ride the bus back with us; they stayed on campus. Victoria made sure they made it home safe as well, and at that point she had only met them twice or no more than three times.

A quote that defines Victoria is "You never know how strong you are until being strong is the only choice you have!" Everything about Victoria makes her courageous to me, such as the drive and motivation she has to keep reaching for the top. She knows that giving up is not an option because she has people depending on her, fighting with her, and cheering her on so that she reaches her goals. She has overcome every obstacle she has been faced with, teaching her children to be strong and never lose faith. She is living proof that things may not always be easy, but it is possible. Victoria Patterson is more than a friend; she is my sister.







## **Haste Makes Waste**

**By Alyanna Cooper**

From a young child to a woman, my mother always told me, “Haste Makes Waste.” I never understood exactly what she meant until now, at 31 years old. I believe she meant slow down and take your time or things can become hasty.

Think things through or they may turn into waste. A hasty event or situation will change into wastefulness. I would also get upset, and then things would turn into a waste. For example, I would get mad about cleaning my room, so I would then be hasty; I would make a bigger mess, which then would make my time and situation a waste. I get it now, and her story in life truly fits that saying.

At a young age, my mother, Sharon, had to fight through the grief and pain from the many challenges she was born into. With all the trials and tribulations she experienced, she stayed positive and remained unbroken. Her passion for life inspires me because no matter what she has gone through or goes through, she keeps her compassion alive.

My mom went from a broken home to raising her siblings, suffered abuse, and had her father die of cancer at a young age. She went through homelessness and her mother not being a mother, yet she still managed to survive. She made a friend in high school named Shelia. Her family took my mother in at 16 years old and guided her to a better life. They helped her finish high school, get a job, and then put her into UW Madison. She graduated with honors, including her degree in business.



During her time in college she had me, her first-born daughter. Shelia and my mother moved out of the dorms and got an apartment. Taking care of me, working, and going to school was, I am sure, a struggle. They managed and worked as a team to make sure I was taken care of. My father, of course, was nowhere around. That’s why my mother and Shelia did what it took to take care of me. They both started their careers and still managed to keep strength in raising me, which was a hassle with all they went through. My mother to this day says life is short.

I know what my mother meant now when she says haste makes waste. She said this because if you hasten through life, you create more of a mess for yourself; then time spent in what you are doing becomes a waste. If you take your time and believe in who and what you are, things will not be a waste and haste will not be needed. God broke the mold when he made her. She is one of the most amazing women I know. Her love, growth, and compassion for life is like nothing I have ever seen in my 31 years as her daughter. After all of the obstacles she overcame, she started a family. I have a younger sister, and now my mother has three awesome grandsons that are her life.

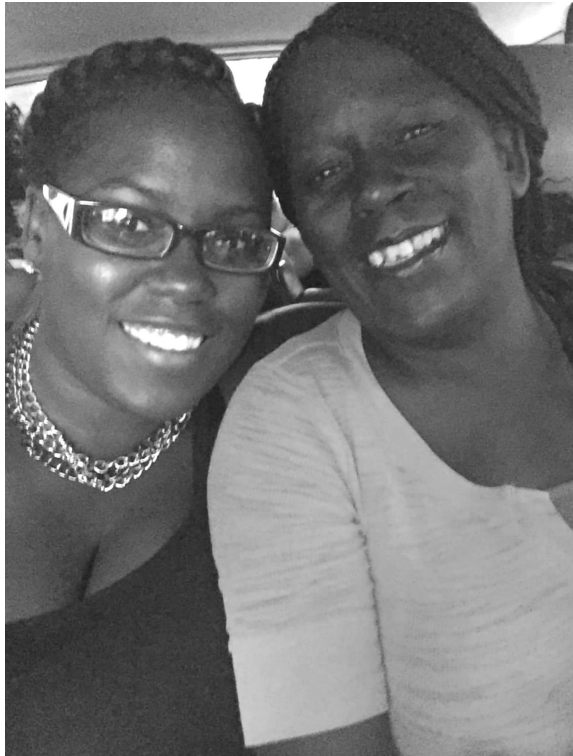


**The Spirit of a Phoenix**  
**By Cherri Sorrells**

People say that only the strong can survive. Well, if that is true, then I believe my mother has the strength to move mountains. I consider my mother to be the epitome of courage. My mother is defined as courageous because she overcame tremendous adversities in life, has exhibited selflessness more times than I can count, and has used her experiences to become the wise woman that I know today.

Pamela Moore was born and raised in the heart of Chicago, Illinois. The oldest of four children, she was often responsible for caring for her younger siblings due to her mother working three jobs to provide the sole support for her children. Over time my mother succumbed to the cycle and soon became the head of her own single home. She birthed three children and primarily cared for them on her own. I believe my mother has the spirit of a phoenix. She has been torched tirelessly, but somehow she is always able to rise from the ashes and rebirth a new start. I often have vivid flashbacks of the abuse my father subjected my mother to. In particular, there is a memory that stands out to this day. I was five years old on Christmas Eve and awoke to the sounds of slurred drunken swear words, the loud crashing of household fixtures, and chaotic shouting from the remaining household members. My father was drunk yet again and determined to ruin another holiday. At one point he pushed my mother into a metal closet door, and when she was able to pick herself up the metal door was dented from the blow. My father was arrested in front of my brothers and me. My mother sobbed beside the twinkling Christmas tree and vowed he would never return to our home. And he never did. My mother watched us grow in the blink of an eye and had big plans for our futures. All of my mother's children attempted college at one point. To this day, none of her children have graduated from a degree program. Her middle son, Sean, chose to enroll in a small university in West Virginia. In the winter of 2007, a few weeks before her wedding day to my stepfather, Darryl, Sean chose to end his own life on Thanksgiving night while visiting home from college. Late that evening, she received the telephone call that would forever alter her life. She instantly collapsed into her fiancé's waiting arms, as she had no more strength to display in that moment. Despite the traumatic experiences described here, my mother has somehow risen from said ashes.





Selflessness is defined as having little or no concern for oneself. Allow me to demonstrate why my mother fits the bill perfectly. My mother birthed and raised all three of her children in Madison, Wisconsin. Before having children, my mother lived in several U.S. states. She decided to settle in Madison for the sake of raising her children. I am her youngest child, and when I graduated high school I was shocked to find out that my mother had wanted to leave Wisconsin for some time. She calmly explained that she wanted to wait for her all of her children to finish high school before finally feeling ready to spread her wings. And spread her wings she did. Shortly after relocating to Philadelphia, my mother enrolled in an accelerated medical assistant program at Lincoln College. Well into her late 40s she was the by far the oldest student in all of her courses. Amazingly, she obtained a 3.8 GPA throughout her tenure at Lincoln. She was the first person in

several generations of our family to become a college graduate. Using her extensive medical knowledge, she cares for her husband by day. He recently had hip replacement surgery and is fully incapacitated. By night, she works a laborious full-time job at the Denver International Airport. Most people who overcome adversity tend to become selfish and focus on themselves more than ever. My mother did not, which is a remarkable feat in itself. She never complains about the cards that she is dealt. She shuffles her hand and continues to play the game of life.

So many variations of life experiences have molded my mother into the wise woman she is today. She is more than just a mother to me. She is a therapist, a teacher, a confidante, a healer, and a listener, among many other roles. I can always rely on parenting advice for my young daughters (whether I ask for it or not). Although all children are not created equal, she has participated in raising enough children to know the difference. She consistently reminds me that there are very few trails in life I walk that she has not yet already walked herself. Because my mother obtained a college degree, she knows how to push me to my potential. If she can reach new limits at almost 50 years old, then why can't I? She has loved and lost time and time again, yet she still has an open and non-judgmental ear that is open to all of my worries, big or small.

Growing up I never felt extremely close to my mom. Frequently I envied friends who had open relationships with their mother. As a young mother of my own, I kept a lot of heartache to myself for fear that I would be judged or looked down upon. I never envisioned that my mother would become my hero over and over again, simply by following her heart and doing the right thing.



### **Daughter with Courage** **By Avé Thorpe**

Growing up in the city of Chicago and living as an only child with a mother who was poor and rarely home, I didn't have many role models in my life or opportunities to come into contact with people that could influence my life in a positive way. This assignment to write about a woman of courage is the most frustrating assignment that I've ever had to complete. This is the first time that an assignment literally has me in tears. I didn't live a normal life. No one came to save me, no one gave me words of encouragement that could help me throughout life, and no one ever paid that much attention to me to even know that I was someone who needed to hear about the things that they may have gone through so that I could gain the faith needed to help me defeat the obstacles in life. I'm not sure others who haven't had to endure the same hardships in life as I have would really understand this, but I've been on my own for an extremely long period of time. Because of the way my life is structured, it's hard for me to even meet others, let alone have them be a part of my life. So the woman of courage that I chose to write about is a bit outside of the norm of what the assignment calls for. Although this person is a younger woman and hasn't even begun to encourage others at the capacity she will in the future, I chose to write about my oldest daughter, Fu-Fu (or Javé).

I gave birth to her at an early age and really didn't have much to offer her as far as a role model is concerned. Because of her, I knew that my life needed to change. I needed to start making the necessary changes in order to influence her life in a positive way so that she wouldn't have to stumble through life blindly, the way that I had. I'm a guarded person who keeps to myself, so once I had her she became my best friend. I knew that I wanted more for her life, so I moved here to Madison. Although it was hard being here without family or friends, she was also the source from which I gained the strength to endure.

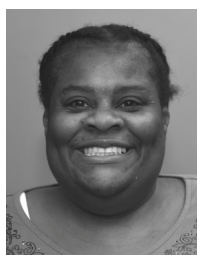
Although the time has gone by way too fast and she's now turning 17 soon, I look at her and realize that the courage she had to get out here and take what the world has to offer is far greater than the courage I've ever had. She's smart, she's brave, she's responsible, she's strong, and she's hardworking. She took everything that she saw me go through and everything that she's heard me preach, and she took heed, applying it to her own life so that she wouldn't make the same mistakes.



She doesn't complain about the fact that at times we don't have everything that she wants or needs, but instead she chose to get her first job at 15. Since then, she has since worked her way up to being the youngest assistant manager at the Lids Hat Store in East Towne Mall. She has keys to the store, opens, closes, picks up hours, and even takes her homework to work with her so that she can study when the store isn't busy. She even paints faces at birthday parties, and does make-up, eyebrows, hair, and lashes for money on the side. On top of all of that, she helps out around the house as much as she can with chores, helps to look after her younger sisters, and helps to cook for them and comb their hair when I'm exhausted from working two jobs and coming to class myself.



Javé is a leader and role model in our home, in her school, in our church, and in the community. Although life hasn't presented us with the best of circumstances, I've seen her maneuver through it being resourceful while experiencing the criticism of her peers for not having the material things that most teens at her school have and for not being able to hang out like most of her peers do, due to lack of money and time from having so many tasks to complete. There are times when I'm amazed at how she continues to go through life daily even when she doesn't feel her best, and even when others with so much pressure on them would break and give up; but because of her tenacity I know that she will one day change the world. Although I'm saddened as the time draws nearer for her to venture off on her own to start her odyssey through life as she goes off to college, I do know in my heart that she has the heart it takes to venture off into unmarked territory, try new things, and succeed no matter what life throws her way. This is why I chose to tell the world about my YOUNG woman of courage, J'avé Sanders, also known as Fu-Fu. Look out world: here she comes!



### **She Never Gave Up** **By Lawana Diagne**

Over 60 cars followed the hearse as they rode down the streets of Chicago to say their final goodbyes to Peggy. Why? Because she was one of a kind. She in fact gained her wings on earth, and if she could help the world, she would. She could never turn anyone away. Therefore, her legacy of courage will never go unheard or be forgotten. Her dying wish came from a song by Cleveland James: "Give me my flowers while I yet live so that I can see the beauty that they bring. Friends and loved ones may give me flowers when I'm sick or on my sick bed, but I'd rather have just one tulip right now than a truck load of roses when I'm dead." She taught me that, although you will face many obstacles in this life, with a mustard seed of faith, you'll have the courage to endure. Peggy was a woman of courage to me because she left her home at a young age,



In the heart of the rolling delta state of Mississippi, the six eldest of 16 kids was born to sharecropping parents. Her name was Peggy Dorsey. She was a hard-working, smart young girl that had to do her chores around the house, work the farm, and keep up with her lessons at school. Because opportunities were scarce for an African American in the Jim Crow South, after high school she moved to the North to seek a better life for herself. She wanted her independence from both her parents and from picking cotton. She took different jobs to support herself. She was a waitress and also worked at an industrial factory making lamps. The Civil Rights movement was in full effect.

Although she didn't attend college due to funding and Jim Crow, during which many individuals of color were afraid to seek higher education, she never gave up. After she moved to Chicago, she started working at a restaurant where she met her first love. She married him, but later, after having two beautiful girls, she realized he was abusive. This first husband was a wolf in sheep's clothing, so she left him and continued to strive harder to be successful. She also started working at the lamp factory, and the work was tough, but she continued to strive harder to be successful. She never gave up on love either, and she then met her true love and stayed with my dad for 30 years. She was the backbone of our family, and although my father didn't have more than a sixth-grade education, they bought a house and became a power couple in the neighborhood.



As the years went on, they bought several properties together, owned a few businesses, and with the love and guidance of each other raised five children, none of whom have ever been incarcerated. All graduated from high school and all have college degrees, ranging from Associate's to Master's. My mother was respected by the neighbors and their kids. When she became ill, she never allowed any one to feel sorry or sad for her. She showed much strength every day until she was called to be with the Lord. Her courageous acts will always remain in my heart and the hearts of the individuals she touched. She never gave up on her faith in God, and to this day the roots of faith she instilled deep inside me are still strong.

The impact of my mother's courage, upbringing, and her putting her kids before herself has made me a strong woman of courage today. She taught me how to never forget that the lessons in your life will one day be a blessing. Never take anything in life for granted. Just a small amount of faith can make a difference in life. The courage my mother instilled in me helped me to continue to strive. She never gave up, so why should I? We often take what we learn from our environment and parents and use those tools as a map to avoid making the same mistakes. She would always encourage me to keep moving forward; no matter what obstacles may get in my way, I will never give up.



## Amy's Dedication Led to Shanon's Motivation! By Shanon Holmes

Being homeless feels like a secret. Did you know that in 2013 Wisconsin had more than 18,000 children and youth identified as homeless? That's roughly the equivalent to the total student population at Stanford University. Think about it this way: that's enough children to fill every seat at the basketball game at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Kohl Center. Amy Noble is someone I know who really cares. She is brave to make my own personal problems hers, she is brave for the work she does helping homeless families, and she is a great advocate for others.



She is always willing to listen to me no matter how big or small the problem is. She knows just from the tone of my voice how I am feeling. If I am not willing to talk over the phone, she will come and find me. She reminds me how much I am loved by her, even if it's only a listening ear she has to offer.

I met Amy about five years ago. We clicked like two magnets. I highly value the work she does, and I look up to her. One time I saw her go up and beyond to help a family's living situation get better. It really inspired me to do the work she does: social work. She has become a mentor to me. For her, it's not just white privilege. After hearing her stories, I can tell she wasn't just given this life. She made it and didn't stop, which motivates me to become a social worker.

We worked together on a small short film, building awareness around homeless youth in Madison, Wisconsin. After hearing one of my poems, she thought I was a perfect fit for the film. She also gives talks around Madison, building awareness about the things homeless families go through.

Amy knows just what to say and do when you have given up and lost all hope. After four years in college, she went back and completed two more years to earn her Master's degree. She has been a licensed clinical social worker for over 15 years. She is a huge support for me. She is brave to make my own personal problems hers, she is brave for the work she does, and she is a great advocate for others. The world needs more Amy Nobles!

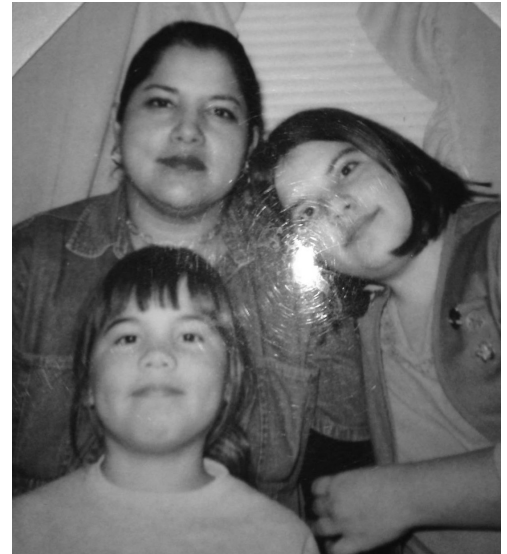


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### **Her Unforgettable Sacrifices** **By Maria Teresa Dary**

I was raised by women. Between my mother, my aunt, and my grandma, the amount of feminine influence in my life had always been apparent. So when I was asked to choose between them, I found the decision almost impossible. But after much deliberation, I decided to go to the beginning of the story of how the Tellez-Girón women came to Madison, Wisconsin. It all began with my mother, Teresa Tellez-Girón (Odyssey '04).



Growing up, my mom was one of three children. Being the middle child, she had to do the most to stand out, which is probably why she was the wildest and funniest of them all. One of my favorite stories that they tell us is when they claim my mother coaxed my uncle and aunt to skip school. Somehow the story ends with the three of them splashing around in a fountain filled with nasty duck poop in the middle of Mexico City. My aunt and uncle like to joke that all the bad ideas always came from my mother, which I have no trouble believing.

After a while, my aunt and uncle moved into their careers. My mother made the bravest and biggest step in her life. She decided to move to the United States and study in Atlanta, Georgia. While working in a hotel restaurant in Atlanta, she met my father, a dorky chef from Madison. After some casual flirting, my dad used to pull on her pony tail to get her attention. He convinced her to date him, and eventually the two got married. After their wedding, my dad took my mom to meet the rest of his family. My mother can remember the exact moment she decided she was moving to Madison. Driving down the Beltline, my father turned onto the off ramp onto John Nolen Dr. The instant my mother saw the view of the capitol reflecting off Lake Monona while driving over that bridge, it hit her that she wanted to raise her children here. Thus began stage two of the Tellez-Girón women in Madison.

After a few years and having two children, my sister and me, my parents' relationship had ended. My father decided to move to San Diego to continue his chef career. My mother, my sister, and I lived in our childhood duplex, which happened to be connected to my grandma's house where she and my aunt lived. My mother maintained three jobs, which of course made it difficult to spend a lot of time with my sister and me, but I never have a memory where she chose anything over us. We always came first in her eyes, even if it meant lack of sleep or a personal life for her. She always found a way to read me to sleep at night, even if it meant driving to work right after that to the hospital where she was an interpreter. Although I would consider my grandma and my aunt my other mothers, nothing will ever top the sacrifices my mother made for us. Leaving school, working three jobs, she never faltered, and we never went without.

My mother, Teresa Tellez, will always be the best woman I have ever had a pleasure to call my mom. Between her wild child childhood, her major steps to move away from her family and friends into another country, and her sacrifices as a mother, she is always going to be number one in my book. I will never stop thanking and praising her because it will never be enough.



### **Every Cloud Has a Silver Lining** **By Marisol Gonzalez**

My mother was born in November 1965. She was the second child, but the first one to live, of five more to come. Her mother was an illiterate, orphaned and very young woman when she married. Her father was 15 years older than her mother and suffered from the disease of alcoholism. At only eight years of age, my mother was fully responsible for her five siblings. The youngest one was only three months old. My mother is a woman of courage because even with the circumstances of her birth, she is achieving her education. She also overcame alcoholism, and she is a very caring person.

The desire for education is deep in my mother. She saw how her mother suffered from being illiterate. Her mother worked all day as a maid while the alcoholism of her father was getting worse. My mother had to stop her education in third grade to help her mother. She is currently studying to finish high school. She believes that it is never too late to achieve your dreams, and she always says, "As long as there is life, there is opportunity." Now she is trying to decide whetherto study to become a lawyer or possibly a pastor. This is her dilemma: her lawyer friend recognizes her talent for law, and her church friend sees her spiritual abilities and gifts. She must decide which way to go.



Today my mother has enjoyed 21 years of sobriety. After seeing her father die from the



disease of alcoholism, she fell into it. In one part of her life, the vicious circle was repeated. When my younger sister was born, alcoholism was grabbing my mother so she made me fully responsible for my baby sister. She drank when she was happy or depressed, when she was stressed or relaxed, and when it was hot or cold. She was drunk all the time. Her sobriety changed our lives in many ways. Now we know she is there when we need her. She treats us with love and

respect, and by her example teaches us that everything can be possible if you work hard.

She has a good heart and a caring personality. She remembers her childhood like a dream because she really did not have one. She grew up loving her siblings, always finding the best ways to help them, and giving them the best of her. The best memories of that time were when she visited her grandmother, who always had bread and fruit to share with them. My mother is so committed to helping others that she donated her mobile home, her first owned home, to create a space for people to recover from alcoholism. My mother lived ten years in Madison and enjoyed a different lifestyle. She worked for the UW while caring for her husband and children. The day came when her loving and caring heart took her back to Mexico to take care of her old and sick mother and father-in-law.

My mother's persistence towards education, her sobriety, and her caring personality help me to work hard to achieve my dreams. Because of her, I don't see problems as obstacles but as challenges. Also, I aim not to be selfish but instead to be an instrument of God sharing with others His love by helping and caring for others. I'm very grateful to have her as a mother, friend, and mentor because her example of courage helps me to be the best I can be. She has found her silver lining in life.

