

ODYSSEY ORACLE



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We are the Odyssey Class of 2016.

We have lived in Madison, Chicago, Shreveport, St. Paul, Memphis, Tennessee, Newark, Orlando, and Austin; in England, Mexico, Malaysia, Iraq, and Syria; in foster homes, refugee centers, group homes, jails, domestic violence shelters, apartments, and grandparents' houses.



Our ancestors were born in Alabama, Mississippi, Ohio, Kentucky, Arkansas, Florida, Tennessee, Georgia, Laos, Thailand, China, Iraq, Poland, Mexico, Spain, and somewhere in Africa,



Speaking Spanish, English, Arabic, French, Creole, Sign Language, Hmong, Polish, and English,



Calling themselves Baptist, Muslim, Jehovah's Witness, Lutheran, Catholic, Shaman, and spiritual.



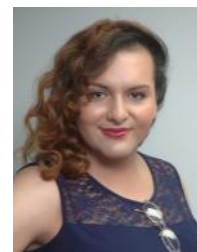
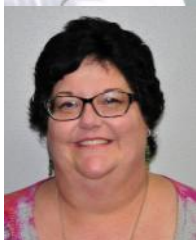
We have worked as a grocery bagger, KFC cashier, bathroom cleaner, CNA, telemarketer, lab tech, vacuum cleaner salesperson, jewelry maker, preschool teacher, dietary clerk, warehouse laborer, pizza oven assembly worker, UW custodian, burrito maker, deli clerk, UPS line sorter, cocktail server, car salesman, math tutor, translator, lawn keeper, and Oscar Mayer meat packer.



We are skinny, brave, nosy, inquisitive, energetic, laid back, awesome, hardworking, hopeful, creative, talented, multi-tasking, happy, on-the-go, persevering, distracted, obnoxious, fashionable, scatter-brained, shy, observant, hilarious, cool, sexy, smart, friendly, short, tall, loyal, kind, busy, scrambled, and beautiful inside and out.



We are the Odyssey Class of 2016.



EIGHT YEARS FROM NOW

I wake up with the sun shining in my window hitting my bed. I'm up going through my closet to find something to wear. I put on my casual pants, a pinkish, purplish shirt, and pink heels.

As I go downstairs to get breakfast ready for me and Aa'laisa, she's jumping down the stairs with her black leggings, flower shirt, and brown boots, with a big smile on her face. We set the table eating eggs, pancakes, sliced oranges, and milk I ask her how the sixth grade is going. She says, "It's going well and I like my English class a lot."

We both leave the house at the same time for work and school, and we say, "I love you, and see you later." I'm driving to work with my window down with a nice breeze blowing through my hair.

As I pull up in my parking spot, I know today is going to be a long day. Once I get to my office, I pull my file cabinet open and take out my files that I will be working on this week. Some families are almost there to get their families back, and some are still struggling a little more with things to get their family back together.

At the end of my day, I just sit in my chair and say to myself, I'm happy that I can help people to get their families together, and I want them to know I'm here to help them, not to break their family up. I'm happy with what I do for them.
(Jalisa Galvin)

Wow! I'm 44 years old, and besides the extra gray hairs in my beard, I still look good. Tyelle is 22, and I could not be more proud of the man he is becoming. I didn't do everything I had planned to do, but the

journey getting here was great. I completed my degree, which was highly important to me. There was no reason in particular for that other than the fact I wanted it for me. I started my own business recently providing aggression therapy and being an uncle to my community. I have been traveling so much between Tyelle playing soccer and people across the country asking me to speak at different events and schools. Most of the Odyssey class of 2016 stayed in contact with one another, and we are planning a huge 10 year reunion. I'm ecstatic and can't wait. **(Tory Latham)**

In the year 2023, I will be thirty-five, graduated from college as a dental hygienist, and married with three children. I will be living in Ashton, WI as a farmer's wife. By this time I hope not to work and to focus on my children, but I will have a degree to support myself if needed.

You know, I've planned and replanned my life so many times I couldn't count. As I get older I've put my faith in God and pray often. This relieves me from my stress because I put my total faith in God to control "my plan." I always argue with the lord on his plan for me. I always think that I am so much smarter than my creator, the only one that

ultimately knows what will make me happy. This is so tough to do—putting all your faith in God to lead you and direct you on the right path. I have a vision of where I see myself in eight years, but I'm sure God will point me in the best direction for my life. So I guess I'm just as curious as anyone to see where I've gone in eight years.
(Ashley Wills)



I am 31, an established black music mogul living in Atlanta, GA, spending my days building my musical brand, giving back to my city in more ways than just money. My son will be the reason I do anything and will keep me guided on the right path. Everything is invested into him. **(Joe Young)**

My name is Kala Angela Rodole, and I'm 33 years old. Four years ago, I got my bachelor's degree in Radiology. I work part time at the UW Hospital. I also work part time at a non-profit clinic. I offer my basic medical expertise there. It's been six years since the love of my life, Eric, and I got married. It was a beautiful fall day when we exchanged our vows and announced our love to the world. We decided to purchase a piece of land outside of Madison. The house is simply beautiful. Everyday I wake up and enjoy the peace and serenity of my garden. I couldn't imagine a more beautiful life for me. **(Kala Taylor)**

I am 61 years old and living with my husband, Stephen, in a small but very comfortable older home just outside Dane County. I love the peaceful quietude of the countryside here. We have vegetable and herb gardens, a big yard, and many animals. I've earned an art degree from UW.* I'm happily working with Spero Publishing as an illustrator. I also co-own Solitary Circle, a spiritual store where I sell my art and take commissions for specialty work. I remain active in creating new art and enthusiastically pursue the exhibition of my art. I may pursue even further education and at some point become an elementary or secondary art teacher.

I manage my own website and enjoy working with my husband to provide art and design elements for websites he creates and maintains. I am working with the Odyssey Project, helping to make the experience as amazing for others as it was for me. I am very youthful in my outlook, and my appearance reflects that. Not young, but in the prime of life, I greet each day with optimism and joy, savoring every challenge as an opportunity to grow.

**Please forgive my ignorance of how long it would*



*take to obtain various levels of college degrees or even what degrees might be necessary to either teach or become an art therapist. I've never explored the subject, having never thought it a possibility for me. That is why I am vague on those points. **(Raven Fabal)***

In 2023, I'll be 30 years old. I will be a lot slimmer and still healthy. I will finally have put my degree to use. I was a Criminal Justice Major, now working as a probation officer, trying to change criminals' lives around. I will finally be married to a great man who loves me and my children unconditionally and accepts me for . . . me. We will have a family of our own--two more children for sure, maybe more if I am blessed.

I am now living in the south somewhere, in a nice house, not rich, but not poor. Now I have enough money to support my family without the need of help from the state government assistance. On a day-to-day basis, I meet with people who are on probation and go to homes to make sure they are doing what they are supposed to be doing and not breaking the rules. **(Tasha Thompson)**

Eight years from now, I'm a 32-year-old woman still working like I'm in my 20s. By that time, I'd have picked up a few pounds. I'd be happily married to my soul mate, and we'd have four beautiful children: three boys and a gorgeous baby girl. We both are following our dreams--he a famous author, and myself running my own daycare. The daycare facility would be on the same acre of land as our four-bedroom house; we are living in a beautiful

gated community where it's safe for our children to go outside and enjoy themselves. I couldn't be happier living a financially stable lifestyle and being actively involved in my community, giving back to those who are less fortunate than myself and my family. **(Jelissa Williams)**

Today is a wonderful day. I wake up full of energy, and I put on my running clothes and shoes, as I usually do. Impatient to appreciate nature, the singing of birds, and the smell of trees, I head to my favorite place, where a rain of tree leaves constructs a welcoming path for me to run. In the early morning I feel the clean breath, as if rose petals penetrate their unequal aroma on me. The air touching my face in a gentle manner makes me unable to stop feeling blessed.

Home sweet home, I prepare pancakes and eggs for my husband and my three beautiful children, Alan, Erick, and Megan. Then I drop my children off at school. Alan is fifteen years old, a sophomore in high school. Erick is twelve years old, attending seventh grade, and Megan started her first year of school.

After I drop my children off at school, I go to the school where I teach young children the alphabet, sounds, and spelling. I observe the effort and awareness of my students learning in English and Spanish. Different cultures and varieties of students' attitudes make me more interested in teaching. Learning from every angle of cultures helps me develop into a well-rounded professional. In addition, I have been able to assist students in improving their knowledge, which brings me great satisfaction, and it teaches me to appreciate my job.

I am 43 years old, and my life is fulfilled with many blessings; I am still working hard to give my best as a mom, wife, educator, and human being. I thank God for the opportunity of life, for being so kind with me, for letting me have my wonderful family and for letting me accomplish my goals. **(Guadalupe Tinajero)**

No one knows what the future holds, but my hope would be working a full time job with benefits, in music, cooking, or counseling. I would like to travel to places unseen. I would like to have a home and a family in Madison somewhere on the west side. I would be going to festivals, live music, and concerts of my favorite artists in different cities across the U.S.A. **(Steve Jones)**

In October 2023 I will be 29 years of age. I will have an 11-year-old girl. I will be managing my own modeling career and starting my career. I will be showing and raising my daughter how to continue being independent and confident in any major she would like to pursue. I will have my bachelor's degree in business management so will try to open up a modeling, fashion, and hair salon in Atlanta, Georgia. I will be living in a four-bedroom house with a back yard and garage, all fenced in. Also, I will be traveling a lot to explore the world. That's my lifestyle at the age of 29. **(Katia Robinson)**

In October 2023, I am almost 33. I would suppose that by now I've learned to treat my body like a temple and respected it well with good nutrition and regular exercise. In this exact moment I am walking through a nature trail and the air is crisp and refreshing. I'm absorbing the powers of Earth and soaking in its beauty. In the distance I hear a bird cry. At this point in my life, I would have already been to Vietnam, Mexico, and at least one European country. I would have seen and



experienced poverty in other countries, and that would have given me inspiration to want to help the less advantaged. I'm living a grand but humble lifestyle. I would have built a legacy of human relations all over the world, and that is the most rewarding part of my job. **(Mai Thao)**

I'm freaking out! I'm turning 29 years old the 21st of December. That is so soon. Ever since I turned 19, I have been freaking out about my age. You would think that 10 years is enough torture, but for some reason I insist on torturing myself some more (I know the number of grey hairs I have). It is taking me time to accept my wrinkles and the few grey strands in my hair.

Do not worry: I did not continue the trend of a single life much after my 21st birthday. I have had almost eight years worth of experience in dating jerks.

I am thrilled to tell you that I continued my education. I could not stay away from the conscious minds who wanted to get an education. I also could not stay away because I knew that I needed to get an education so I could help people. I studied psychology, sociology, philosophy, English, music, religion, and so much more.

Can you believe that I had the opportunity to visit the Holy Land and the Coliseum?! After 24 years I was able to visit Mexico with my parents and my siblings. My parents cried, and I felt my heart pounding so fast that it scared me. When we set foot on Mexican land, we looked at each other. Although we did not say a word, we knew that we were free again.

My days consist of counseling people and, in my free time, I give my time to those who need it the most.

I feel like a part of me has been revived because I finally understand my faith, and I understand how God has been guiding me and pushing me to become a better person.

You know what, remember when I told you I would be a superstar one day? Well, I am. I am just as good



as Ed Sheeran and Ricardo Arjona. In my dreams, the late Nina Simone also asked me to sing "Birds Flying High" with her. I only ever had one concert but with huge sales. All the funds were given to girls who need an education.

As you can see, I'm still using self-deprecation to humor myself and because, well, I have stayed awkward throughout the years. **(Karina Herrejon)**

It's October 2023, and I am currently 32 years old now. I don't know where the time has gone. I graduated from the nursing program at UW Madison as a registered nurse just three years ago in 2020. I have found a full time job working as an RN at a clinic. I love my job and the interaction I have with patients everyday. I was never a fanatic of scrub wearing but have come to embrace my scrub outfits and wear them proudly.

I have kept myself busy these last couple years. But now that I am done with school, I have finally been able to settle down and focus my full attention on my son. I now live on my own with my son thanks to the support I had from my family while I was in school. We found the perfect condominium to call home in a nice and friendly neighborhood. We have a large green backyard with plenty of space for us and our beagle to enjoy. So far I am still residing in Madison since all our family lives here and it is the town where I grew up. Nevertheless, I would like to relocate eventually to somewhere nice and sunny.

I spend most of my days at work, and the rest of the time I am usually busy with my son's extracurricular

activities or his homework. We usually cook dinner together, but on occasion we have a mother-son night out to treat ourselves. Weekends consist of soccer games, visiting/spending time with our family, and taking care of our garden. We both enjoy spending time outdoors, even if it is just to take our adorable beagle to play fetch at the park. We have come far and have more to come, but right now we are in a happy place and are moving forward with our lives. That's what counts.

(Marisela Tellez)

It is a picture perfect October 2023. I have hit my mid-fifties seven months prior and have been living my dream of capturing classic moments with my camera. My escapades have led me through countless parts of the U.S. to see treasures that I have only read about in books or seen on the national news. The transition from summer road trips to warm apple cider nights has brought me to the Georgia Mountains. I'm a stone's throw away from the Tennessee border and the yearly Synchronous Fireflies show (more commonly known as lightnin' bugs in these parts) of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

I have earned my Master's in Digital Forensics and am forced to remind myself that the road was paved with many hurdles in order to get to this point. However, through the doubt, tears and speculating on my future, alone, for so long, I am able to muster a half grin and a chuckle for NOT giving up on me. Kelly, you have created internet safety protocols which are now in place with law enforcement agencies across the country; these protocols are used to prosecute offenders of online crimes against children. You have also created two award winning, family friendly programs that teach and inspire people to stay alert and stay safe. Kelly, never stop paying it forward or motivating and mentoring others that are going through similar situations that you



went through regardless of their age or perceived ability because *Give a man a fish, and you can feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.* (unknown author) **(Kelly Dixon)**

I am now 40 years old. It gives me great satisfaction to see my hard work and dedication is now a reality.

I have made my life's mission to serve and empower my community (both local and global) by giving care to new families in their most crucial point of beginning: childbirth.

As a midwife, I have attended about 50 births and caught precious babies. It was a series of doors opened to me that brought me here, and I'm so glad that I grabbed the opportunity rather than let it pass me by.

From Odyssey to completing a full degree, I owe many thanks to the people who encouraged me. Dane County has statistically shown improvements in birth outcomes for women of color. Infant mortality and maternal morbidity are both areas where we can see our efforts have created an impact. We have launched a program to provide birth companions to incarcerated women in labor. The community has benefited from having better births for women who previously had caesarean sections and from initiating breastfeeding in prisons.

We have also made a way to plant positive seeds by having workshops at churches and community centers for young girls (preteens to teens) geared toward self-esteem, self-awareness, and self-love. We teach them about their own power, resilience, fertility, and beauty. We still have much work to do.
(Tamara Thompson Moore)

I'm Karina, and I'm 41 years old. I have a son who is 21 and almost done with the computer career; he designed various computer games, one of his big dreams

when he was a child. Our daughter is finishing high school, and she is not sure what she wants to study yet. When she was 10, she always said she wanted to be a football player; I think things changed a little bit. The youngest is 15 years old. He is a very smart kid but having a hard time with high school; he gives his best to succeed.

I am working in the hospital as a translator; also on weekends I do make-up for parties, mostly brides and quinceañeras. I got my license in the cosmetology field six years ago, and I enjoy working in the salon.

My husband is also doing something he likes; he quit construction a long time ago. It was hard for him; he prefers factories. We no longer live in the city; we moved to a small quiet town close to Madison. We have a house that is not very big but is very comfortable; it has a large back yard and a trampoline. We are planning our next vacations. **(Karina Gómez)**

Now I am 46 years old. I work as a nurse practitioner at the UW Hospital. In my free time I'm doing volunteering in the community center. I live in my own house, and my grandchildren are visiting me every weekend. I am enjoying my new life in the U.S. Now I am a citizen. I feel myself part of an American culture. Sometimes I go to Odyssey class to assist students with their homework. **(Shaimaa Ahmed)**

I am 58 years of age living in New York City. I am working in a computer company called "Ms. Roz Technical Repair," which I own. The wind is crisp, and the air is like ice. I am walking to my Chevy Silverado on my way to my three bedroom condo where my two birds and 50 gallon fish tank awaits me.

As I enter my home, it is warm and inviting. I greet my animals and flop down on the couch to relax to the music that is playing from the speakers

mounted in the wall. My mate should be coming soon and I should prepare dinner, yet it is a takeout mood I am thinking. **(Rosalyn Richmond)**

I am 28 years old. I have been in America for nine years. I am working at the UW-Health Clinic, helping people. I got my Master's from UW. I love my job a lot, and my family is proud of me. Last summer I wrote a book about my family's life in Iraq. Last year I got married to a wonderful man, and I got a cute baby from him. Her name is Laila. She made my life very happy. My mom is feeling happy for being a grandmother. **(Umaima Mohammed Saed)**

Eight years from now I will be 38 years old. I will be a business owner as well as an advocate for juveniles and adults. I love my home in Wisconsin. I will be living in a house, not an apartment owned by someone else. They say home is where the heart is, and my family is my heart. They mostly live in Wisconsin, so this is where I'll reside.

I will have one child and be free from endometriosis. I will be dedicated to my child first, then my business and advocacy.

I will be more knowledgeable and more mature than I already am. Eight years from now I will be greater than I am in 2015. I am great, but more knowledge will make me greater. **(Shayba Pierce)**

It's beautiful outside, and the leaves are a fire-red falling slowly to the land. It's October 2023, my favorite season. As I stretch out in my queen-size waterbed in this beautiful California weather, I'm preparing myself for this big day. My daughter is graduating from Cali Girls High School. I'm also scheduled to deliver two babies today, one in a whirlpool and the other a home delivery. The story of my life revolves around my family and helping to bring babies into this amazing world. **(Betty Emmanuel)**

I'm 26 years old now, living in Madison, WI. I just got engaged last week to a beautiful Iraqi girl. I just got back from my job, working all day with teeth. I'm going to brush my teeth wirelessly; it's easier and better. I suggest you get one. Let me tell you who came to my clinic last month. Yes, he is famous, and you are close--"Ronaldo." I didn't charge him much because I like him as a player. On the next visit, I will charge him double, but don't tell him. **(Mustafa Mohammed Saed)**

This mother of a nine year old and eleven year old will be lying in bed underneath my husband's warm arms reminiscing about the past. I am grateful to be a beautiful, bold, and educated 30-year-old woman working hard every day and getting up every morning to a job I love and worked hard to achieve. I am living year-round with no coats and barely a snowfall and expecting my last bundle of joy to complete my family package. Life is beautiful--not perfect, but it's worth living. It's amazing to have the support in my life and all my community involved as much as I am.

My children are advanced. They love reading and love expressing themselves. I feel at ease and finally like I made it. I know I am the person that I once thought I would never be. This is what 30 looks like. Take a look. I finally feel love with a husband that supports me and uplifts and pushes me to strive for more. I feel like the luckiest girl in the world. My day consists of me waking up early in the morning, preparing breakfast for my children, taking them off to school, and then coming back home and getting ready for work. I am sitting in my bathroom staring at walls thinking about changing my walls a different color or revamping it a bit. Life is great and feels like a Hallmark movie. **(Jayvonna Flemming)**

In 2023 I will be 51 years old. I will be a CNA, community organizer, or better. I will either be living in Atlanta, GA, or Madison, WI—or both. When I'm living in Atlanta, I will be going to work and working for myself. Once I return home, I will sit in my fenced-in private backyard to play music while watching someone's children play and be



happy. My friends will come visit and party with me while baking bread.

Overall, I will be happy if I'm exercising daily to keep my mind and body healthy and serving a purpose or two daily. My most important detail of my life is my daughter, who will be 25 years old and about to start her life as a mature college graduate. Life is good! **(Nickitia Cooper)**

I am waking up in a nice soft king size bed, in a decent room set, and have a 45-inch flat screen and a spacious closet. There is beautiful lighting coming from the outside from this beautiful big window. Looking next to me I turn and get kissed by a big handsome masculine face. He looks at me and smiles, "Hola hermosa, I'm the most lucky man to be awakened right next to such a beautiful woman." I look at him, with a confused face. He looks worried at me and says, "What did I say?" I giggle nervously and say "nothing?!?" I get up to run to the bathroom, where it's all decorated by sea artifacts and mermaid sculptures. I look into a big full body mirror; I suddenly stop in front of it to look. I just can't believe that is me. I smile and look so fully overcome. I smile and say to myself, "Yes, Luna, this is not a dream!".

I'm all ready then go downstairs to this cute and small modern kitchen. I see my boyfriend, who has made breakfast for both of us. I run to him and kiss and thank him for making me breakfast. Then we

are done eating and walk to the door to head out, and I kiss him goodbye.

I look back at my cute, small house near downtown, and then I get in my cute little car and drive to school to start my day and get ready for my students. "Nice job guys, now let's go through that again but more loudly and happier. Don't forget the dance steps." I get to be a part time teacher for music, coordinator and a spokes-woman for LGBTQ young adults. I have also published a book about being a poor immigrant Latina woman who overcame not just herself but how the world pursued her.

After that I go back home, where I can see that my boyfriend's car is parked in the small driveway. I smile and walk inside to find out the whole house has candles lit up. I speak excitedly and walk towards the dining room. "Oh, my God, what are we celebrating? What did you cook...it smells delicious!"

"Surprise!!!" I jump from the adrenaline rush that I was definitely not prepared for. Looking around I see my friends, brothers and my mom welcoming me with huge grins and applause accompanied with great piano music. My facial expression is frozen of mixed feelings like confusion and shock. Then I venture to look for my boyfriend. I get a pair of muscular arms behind me, and there he is. I open my mouth and say "What is all this for?" He answers smiling, pointing to a banner that I didn't even notice. I then read it: HAPPY 32ND BIRTHDAY, LUNA! I smile and join the party, thinking how happy I am right now in life. (**Luna Santos**)

Well, whoever I am, I pray that I am not as deep, deep "waydowndeep" tired as I am today. I no longer desire big things. I don't care to have a big fancy house or a car that is expensive. No, I just want a small, safe and sunny place that I can call my own. It will have one key that fits into the one door that opens into a space that is filled with all

the little things that make me happy. My walls will be decorated with pictures of my beautiful babies. The décor will be colorful and eclectic; filled with pretty things that I have found and fallen in love with along the way.

There will be an entire wall that is a bookshelf. No home is ever complete without books. My bedroom is cozy and safe, but there is one very special room in my little house that has one key that fits its one door. . . To call this room a "library" would somehow diminish all that it means to me. This room is my "inner sanctum." I spend much of my time in here. I look out of the large windows that overlook my garden of wildflowers. I think in here. I talk to God and I *listen* for His responses in here. I cry (a lot) in here. And I go into this room to have my special time to commune with *The Writing*.

I have never been one to allow myself the luxury of fantasy often. Why? In the life that I am living, fantasy many times only serves to create *angst* in me. I am too busy trying to shush "those folks" in my head, feeding my child and keeping her housed and clothed. I go into a job everyday that has absolutely no idea who I am on the inside... but if I were to give myself a moment to let my mind float to the secret places that make me smile when I envision them in my mind's eye, well...it would be in a classroom(s). One of the classrooms would be for me. I can't imagine ever not feeding my insatiable need to just know more. But in the other classroom...that would be the one where I am the instructor. I see myself so excited and passionate as I attempt to share a concept with a group of people who are hungry to *know*. I could be talking about any number of things: God, Love, surviving being female, addiction, recovery, redemption, leadership, Writing, Freedom, or just being...

Writing will still be so much a part of who I am. I will be published-several times! And I will have made a mark on this world. It may be teeny tiny

and almost invisible. But it will be there. I don't want to spend the rest of my life worrying about the *attention* of the masses. Instead, my *intention* as I created, shared, loved, taught, prayed... whatever it is that I have done in my life will be what will carry it to all the places that it needs to go. **(Lisa Partee)**

On October 1, 2023 I made 40 years old. Wow, I am really getting up in age. My 40 years on this earth did not start off well. I've had many challenges and obstacles in life that have greatly contributed to who I am now. As I reflect on my life I have done great things and am successful in life and career. I have a wonderful husband, J'alonie Mason Sr., who is a doctor of epidemiology for the Department of Injection and Disease in Baltimore, MD. I have two kids. Zaria is almost 14, and J'alonie Jr. is six and just started second grade. They both are very intelligent. Both are on the honor roll in school and play sports.

I am working as a full time wound-care specialist teacher at John Hopkins University in Baltimore, MD. I am a registered nurse with my Bachelor's in Nursing, certified in wound care. I also work part time as a medical examiner for the state of MD. I am seeking to continue my education to get my PhD in Infectious Disease and Microbiology.

It may seem I work a lot, but when you obtain a career as I have, I work less but make the big bucks lol. With my income and my husband's, we are very well off financially. We own a home, two cars, and a minivan, but I am no soccer mom. Outside of work it's all about family and my weekly visits to the sauna with a drink to relax. I am home everyday to fix dinner and help the kids with their homework. The husband and I rotate the kids' activities, but we always make the first game and championships. We vacation three times a year--two small ones, maybe just for the weekend, and one that is always out of the country.



My life is not easy or always on point, but it's mine, and I love every bit of it. I give all praises to God, who is the head of my life, family and household. **(Brandice Hatcher)**

October 2023, I will be 45 years old. I will still be married to Mr. Stanley Sallay and stable, own my own home with three out of my four kids at home. My baby girl will be ten, and it's only eight more years till she's out. I will have graduated from UW with my Bachelor's and Master's in a Community and Non-Profit Leadership degree. I will be living in the Dane County area and successfully operating my non-profit organization, New Wings. I say successfully because my team would have reunited broken families, assisted in effective parenting techniques and skills, and provided needed resources in order to maintain healthy parent/child relationships. I will spend my days enjoying my family, barbecuing, swimming, and playing games. I will also spend my days passionately helping others in any way I'm able. **(Arkeshia Sallay)**

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose

By any other name would smell as sweet."—Juliet in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*



Arkeshia Sallay

My name Arkeshia says a lot about me. It tells two tales, one of the younger and immature me, and the other of the older, mature, professional me.

My name descended from a ghetto background. My mom tried to class it up or do something different, so she added the "Ar" in front of Keshia and added an "i" at the end in order to give it its own uniqueness. I think that was her way of saying despite our surroundings, I was going to be special and unique.

Growing up in the ghetto, or the projects, Keshia was a very popular and common name. Case in point, many rap songs will mention the name Keshia relative to a pretty down, ghetto chick. This name actually fitted me well, being I grew up in the ghetto and was quite a rambunctious soul. I was always breaking the rules, getting into some type of mischief, whether it be fighting, stealing, or just partying all the time.

As I grew older, though, and started maturing, leaving all my childish and irresponsible ways behind me, I, too, left behind the name Keshia.

Arkeshia was reborn. I left the streets behind to pursue a more responsible life style and respect. With no more hard-core partying, I wanted to be something and make something of my life. Arkeshia worked a steady job, attended college, spoke with confidence and respect, and demanded the same from others. When some addressed me as Arkeshia, I knew it was someone of authority, respect. and professionalism, and I would acknowledge them and that part of myself back to them.

I love my name Arkeshia and my nickname that descended from it, Keshia. There are lots of bad and good memories I've endured, but as a whole those experiences and memories help to shape me into the strong, smart, motivated, and dream-seeking young lady that I am today.



Ashley Wills

My name is Ashley, and I was born in 1987. Back in the day, there was a popular show on at the time called "The Young and the Restless." My mom liked the main character, "Ashley," so she named

me that.

My last name was Bartz but formerly was Chmielewski. During World War II my great-great grandfather changed it to avoid discrimination toward his family for being Polish and looking Jewish. To change it he decided to open a phone book and run his finger down the page, and the name he stopped on was Bartz. From then on our last name was Bartz.

My married last and legal name was Wills and the same last name for my children. I kept this name because it's easier and I share it with my children. I got married when I was 19 because I got pregnant and it seemed like the right thing to do, plus I wanted what was best for my new baby. When we got divorced in 2012, I kept his last name so that I would share it with my children.

I couldn't imagine having any other name than Ashley Bartz. When I was a kid I just hated my name and would sit in the mirror and picture myself with other names. I just wouldn't be me if I was a Beverly or Bertha. I look like an Ashley.



Bettye Renee Emmanuel

My name is Bettye Renee Johnson. I'm the second born child of a 16-year-old child. Roselind Renee Johnson is my mother. Like I stated, she got pregnant at 15 years old and had me at 16 years old. Roselind still

lived at home with her mom. When my mom had me, my grandma said, "I will not take care of her if you don't name her after me." I then became Bettye Renee Johnson.

My Grandma was from Mecca, Georgia. She had four sisters and two brothers. When my mom, who was a twin, was ten years old, they moved to Chicago, Illinois. After my mom had me, my Grandma moved to Markham, Illinois, which is a suburb. My Grandma raised us. She was very strict, disciplined, and set in her ways. We couldn't have sugar. For cereal we ate bananas in our cereal as a sugar substitute. Dinner was done by 3 pm. We were in bed by 7 pm and up by 5 am. We couldn't sleep late because that was for "lazy people who don't have a care in the world," my Grandma would say. My Grandma was the best. She said "Proper Preparation Prevents Poor Performance, the five P's." We had a nice green grass backyard and a beautiful four- bedroom house. Everything stayed spotless. She would put a capsule of bleach in our bath water. She wanted the best for everyone.

My mom grew some hatred toward my Grandma and moved us to the projects in Chicago. We were right in the middle of the ghetto, 4525 S. Federal, with dirty hallways that smelled like piss everywhere. The elevators never worked. We stayed in 1403, so we would have to walk up all 14 flights of stairs. Huh. By then my mom had two more kids.



Brandice LaDonna Hatcher

My Aunt Mary named me Brandice, and I'm not sure where she got it from. I did not know Brandice was my name until third grade. All my life until then in school and around the family, I was always Brandi. I

never had a reason to question the spelling, as it was spelled Brandice. When I started third grade, my teacher said we were to use the name on our records, and that is when I became Bran-dice. I went on for years pronouncing my name wrong. Even my mother called me Bran-dice; she is from down south.

One day in eighth grade my second oldest sister on my biological mother's side heard someone call me Bran-dice and she said, "That's not your name, your name is pronounced Bran-dis." That changed my life because it changed how I was laughed at for having a name like Bran-dice. I was no longer the butt of the jokes. I became unique and special because no one had that name or even heard of it.

Even today people are surprised at the name. I have met a few ladies named Brandis but not spelled the same as mine. After eighth grade I went back to using Brandi because that's who everyone knew me as. Teachers in high school asked what I wanted to be called, and I said Brandi. That is who I was until I turned 30 years old and I felt more mature. I was a woman, mother, friend, woman of color, so I became Brandice.



I have many names I am addressed by depending on the relationship. Brandi was my nickname, and she is the calm, playful and loveable girl.

Bam-Bam is the name my oldest sister gave me after Bam-Bam on the Flintstones. I walked around with a plastic yellow bat and hit people and things with it. Bam-Bam is the fighter, the rough side, attitude and the nonchalant side.

Big B, my nephew calls me, is the visionary dreamer and because I was on the heavy side.

Queen B is the rapper, artist, writer and poet.

LaDonna is my middle name. I was given this name after my big cousin Donna. I found out she wanted to name me Karmen instead of Brandice but lost, so she gave me my middle name.

Hatcher is my mother's married name. She and Mr. Hatcher separated before she had kids, but she kept his name. We have his name but have no relationship with him or his family. Because Hatcher is on my mother's obituary, I will carry it the rest of my life.

As I matured in life, I felt that I should be addressed only by the name I was given. I am proud of who I am, and that includes my name.



Guadalupe Tinajero

I always ask myself why, when there are a million names in this world, did my mom choose this name for me? Also, why are there so many people with the same name, including boys and girls? It wasn't until I reached

my teenage years when I found an answer to all my questions. Guadalupe is my name. It is a religious name, and it is very common in Mexico.

Guadalupe is a Spanish place name, the site of a famous convent. It means "river of the wolf" and is a very common name in Mexico. Females as well as

males are given the name. Guadalupe comes from religious history. According to the traditional account, the name of Guadalupe was chosen by the Virgin herself when she appeared on the hill outside Mexico City in 1531, ten years after the Conquest. To be called Guadalupe is not always easy in places where almost every family has one. It has been said that if you have a Guadalupe in your family, this helps to protect and alleviate sadness and sorrows. One might think that the custom would end because it is an antiquated tradition. Wrong: the tradition continues through each generation and seems not to ever end.

When I was little, I used to be called Lupita, which I liked. Maybe that was because it helped me to feel loved or maybe because "ita" is the diminutive of the name and made me feel little, I guess. However, when the transition from child to teenager started, everything changed. Then, I realized that many people had the same name. That made me regret my name and wish for a different name. As a teenager I wanted to be more unique.

Lupe is the nickname or short name for Guadalupe. When you are Lupe it is like living in a different stage in your life. You are no longer the young Lupita. Even though my name is beautiful, many changes in different stages of life can make a shadow over that beauty.

Males are called Guadalupe, too. Many times they have Jose before Guadalupe. The male shortened name is Lupillo. The disadvantage of having a name that is so common between men and women is most obvious when you are in public places such as school. Whenever someone called this name, there was always more than one response. Another aspect of having that name is that you can tell when someone is angry because they will call you Guadalupe. A good thing of having moved to the United States is that nobody knows the traditions associated with the name. With time I got used to being called Guadalupe after all



Jalisa Galvin

My name came from the TV show "A Different World." I thought I was the only Jalisa, but when I got to middle school I met another Jalisa. It was cool to meet someone with the same name at first. But then

deep down inside I felt like, "Oh no, she has my name." It was important because I wanted to stand out from everyone else. I wanted people to say, "I haven't heard that name before. Where did your mother get that name from?" I wouldn't be able to tell them my mother came up with my name.

It was not a common name, though. Everyone is unique in their own way, and just because you have the same name as someone else does not mean you are the same.

When I was having my daughter I wanted to be sure her name was unique and different from everyone else. I just wanted her to be the only Aa'laisa so she would stand out more. It's not a common name that you hear every day.

What's unique about me is that I'm so easy to get along with, a friendly person, and fun to be around.

I'm happy that people love to be around me. I can just be me around my family, friends, and co-workers. I would not be me if I was not silly, loud, and playful. I love who I am.



Jayvonna Flemming

Jayvonna is my name. The meaning is brief; it comes from my twin brother's name Jayvon with a "na" added to the end. I wish it was that simple; I wish that was all that is behind the meaning of Jayvonna.

My mom has a best friend named Sheena, her best friend since she was a child. Sheena was pregnant with a boy she named Jayvon. Sheena delivered



Jayvon months before his due date. Due to her water bag rupturing, Jayvon only lived for 14 hours. A year later, my mom got pregnant and named us after her best friend's baby.

I hate talking about the meaning of my name. I always wished I had a more upbeat way to describe my name. For instance, I was named after my great grandfather, who was a veteran in the army. I always wished I had a heroic meaning to my name. My name is simple: my brother's name with the "na" at the end. That is the story I tell all, but the meaning behind my name is much more.

As a child (since age two) I was in and out of foster care in different states, different cities, with different couples. I had no stability in my life. My twin was the only one I knew who would always be there. Even though I'm from a family of six, my twin and I were the closest. We were inseparable. He was the only one who understood me, the only one who could read me and tell if something was going on. He was my rock, and losing him would be me losing a part of myself.

I remember the day like it was yesterday when they sentenced my brother to five years in prison. I was devastated. I was lost. I could not understand why, as it was his first charge as an adult. The moment this feeling was with me for the first time, I felt emptied. It was the first time I felt lost. Who am I without him? Is life worth living? This feeling was dark. This feeling was the start of my depression. It was my brother's son who was just

five months old that kept me sane. I felt a piece of my brother when I was around his son. Although it helped a little, the darkness overpowered all. I still felt lost. I used to just sit in my room and cry for days and ask myself why? What is wrong with this system? Why did my brother deserve this unfair judgment? That connection, that feeling of being a twin being entwined, was slowly fading away. I was right: I was losing a part of myself, better yet, all of myself.

Even though my heart was filled with great depression and hatred toward the justice system, I got back up. I climbed back on the horse and tried to find my way. Well, at least *try*. I enrolled at MATC in the Liberal Arts program. I was going to transfer over to UW and seek my Bachelor's in Social Work. That was my plan. I asked myself one day how I was going to succeed when I had so much hatred in my heart and felt lost because a part of me is behind bars. I pushed through and didn't get far. After a couple of months of school I found out I was pregnant. I felt terrible yet I smiled on the outside. I severely suffered deep-down inside. How could I bring a child into a world like this? I questioned myself constantly but I knew one thing: I was not going to get rid of my baby or even think of letting someone else care for my precious little one.

The moment I held my daughter in my arms, I not only broke down crying tears of joy but also that wall of depression, that wall of feeling lost and not receiving love, crumbled. This beautiful creation that God placed in my life gave me hope and made me eager to strive for more, not just for myself but to teach her and educate her and provide love and nurturing that will be a part of her life forever. I was loved.

My simple name, Jayvonna, which is my twin brother's name with a "na," had another meaning: a mother who loves unconditionally and whose heart is filled with so much light. My daughter was that piece that I was missing; she is my light in the

darkness. Looking at her beautiful smile gives me the drive and determination to conquer all things.



Jelissa Williams

Hmmm, Jelissa Shanté Williams... I've never really thought about my name or its significance. I always loved my name and never really wished to be called by anything different. Every time I told

someone my name or corrected them about its pronunciation, they said, "Wow, that's pretty," "I never heard that name before," or, "Whoa, that's unique. How do you spell it?"

I liked my name not only because it was unique, but for the simple fact that it was different. "Different" described me. That's exactly what I was: different. Too many people try to be "down" and "get in where they fit in." I'll admit, when I was younger, elementary/middle school age, I wanted to be a part of the "in" crowd. The older I got, the more I actually liked standing out. Some folks don't realize the benefits of being who you are. My perception of life in general was different than everyone else's.

At the age of 18/19 I had been through some traumatic things. My relationship had gotten the best of me. Many individuals at that age thought it



was the right thing to do, endure those relationships that brought them more negativity than anything else just to say they have someone. I knew that a relationship, a healthy one, adds to, not takes away from, your life. Not many knew how to determine what a “toxic” relationship consisted of. I did. No one in your current life should put you in a position where you are revisiting your past. I have had moments where I’ve dealt with some unnecessary relationships because I saw potential in the individual, but I knew that it was ridiculous to reread the same chapter in my life, knowing how the story would end. It was pointless. It was time to turn the page and continue forward. You never know what the future holds if you’re always looking in your rearview mirror.

I am a strong believer in that saying, “Everything that happens, happens for a reason.” A perfect example is motherhood. Everyone believes that entering into that aspect of your life destroys your dreams. Regardless of the age, motherhood to me is a beautiful thing. I felt like I became a mother for a reason. Motherhood taught me about sacrifice, how to be selfless, how to make something out of nothing, and how to love someone other than myself.

Religion is another topic that also causes a great amount of controversy. You are told that you are only allowed to worship one God only. I feel like no one has a right to tell you who you are “supposed” to worship. At the end of the day, we all only answer to one person. I personally believe in Christianity, but who am I to impose my beliefs on the next individual? I’m far from perfect. I find a lot of people to be hypocritical, either way it goes. It’s hard to find a safe place to practice my belief without feeling judgment from those same people.

Needless to say, I enjoy being different. There’s only one me, so why not embrace it?



Joseph Young

To start, my first name was given to me in light of my mom’s favorite uncle, Uncle Joe. He always was the one who would come just in time to save my mom and the rest of her siblings from the troubles they

would get themselves into. Sometimes I feel as though that name is/was a constant reminder of where my mom grew up but also a reminder of how hard times were. The move to Wisconsin from Illinois was a life turnaround point, to have something better for her family.

Since the day I asked, my mom has always told me that my middle name is one of the greats: Jordan, Michael Jordan. With Chicago being her birthplace and me being born the same year Michael Jordan won one of his six rings, it had to have been a memorable year and name.

Unlike first names, last names to me make you unique. I think my first name is too common and plain. But my last name holds a lot of meaning to me. I’m a guy who has always looked young and I forever will. Forever Young is a slogan I’ve given myself and have used in my music. I like to think that I can live my life forever young. A strong, everlasting type of name helps people remember who you are even after you’re long gone. I think my name has that chance. I believe.



Kala Taylor

Honestly, when I hear my name I simply get annoyed. People tend to spell and pronounce my name wrong all the time. I don’t care about my name. To me it’s nothing but an identity for the world around

me. People who don’t know me or just met me call me Kala. The people who are close to me have developed names for me. I can easily respond to these names. These names I hold dear to my heart.

She comes from a huge family of six sisters and three brothers. Of all the sisters, she is the second youngest, so, the sisters call her lil sis. Lil sis is silent and observant. Lil sis likes to give advice to her siblings. She tends to give feedback when it is requested. Lil sis can be distant from the family, but she is there for her family when they need her. Lil sis is a handy person who enjoys doing home improvement projects for the family. Out of all her sisters, Semajer calls her lil sis the most. She feels she has a deeper relationship with her than any of her other sisters. When she calls her lil sis, she instantly feels unconditional love and happiness.



comes to loving another person. Boo brings a lot of joy into Eric's life, and he does the same for her. When she thinks of the future ahead, she thinks of his dreams of being a teacher fulfilled. She thinks of her dreams of being a radiologist as well.

I met Kaitlin ten years ago in middle school and I've never regretted it. Our friendship has been through some tough and rocky times. But, no matter what, Kaitlin has remained my friend. Every time she calls me Dollface I am reminded that I'm friends with one of the sweetest people I know. When I was 18, I was living with my mother in Georgia. She decided to kick me out and I was homeless. I moved up to Wisconsin because Kaitlin and her father, Michael, took me in. I remember Michael handing me the key and saying "No boys allowed." I remained there till we got our own place. When I think of Dollface, she is giggly, goofy, warm, and loving. She is Kaitlin's laughing and crying shoulder. Dollface loves the adventures that she and Kaitlin go on. No matter what, she will always be there for her.

I am happy that he is in my presence every day. No matter how many times I upset him or test his patience with me, he still loves me for the girl I am. He is my man, my love, and his name is Eric. He calls me Boo. Boo is romantic, loving and caring. She is open-minded and thoughtful. Boo does what she needs to do to make sure Eric knows that he is loved and supported. The relationship isn't easy all the time, but Boo makes it work; she gives him her time. She feels that is most important when it

I feel my nicknames are more important than my actual name. These names make me happy and bring out the best in me. I hold these names dearly in my heart. I am thankful for the people in my life that have impacted me such a powerful and positive way. Even though I couldn't care less about my [given] name, I care about these names.



Karina Gómez

My name: Karina Elizabeth Gómez Garcia. Karina (which means "purity") was chosen by my mom, thanks to a singer of her generation that she liked very much. She liked the sound of the name and the originality on it. Elizabeth (the one who loves God) was given to me because my mom likes the sound of the name next to Karina. There is no special history behind my middle name. Gómez, the last name, is from my dad's side and is one of the first and oldest names originating in Spain. My great-grandparents were from Spain and from there comes the last name. Garcia is also one of the oldest last names.

I must start by saying that as a child I did not like my name, I didn't know anyone else with that name, and I didn't like to feel different. Besides, I

did not like to pronounce it because I felt that it was a strong sound and when I pronounced it my voice sounded like a boy's voice.

When I turned 15, the pastor of my church in the special service for my birthday told me for the first time that my name meant "purity." I never thought my name meant something—something good.

When I started high school, I decided that I would use my middle name. I liked it and it was more common; it was different and weird at first because no one before called me Elizabeth, but I liked how it sounded. I felt like it was more my personality.

When I became an adult and came to America, I had to use my first name. Here I go: I was going to be Karina again.

It was rare to find more people with my same first name. I like it. I decided that after all I had a name that characterizes me. Karina is a special and different name, a perfect name for me.



Karina Herrejon

Karina: my mom came to the decision that this would be the name of her daughter after my dad had told her that he wanted to name me Veronica. My mom refused because there was a

"muchacha" named Veronica living in her small town who had died. She also made it clear that it was not okay with her to name their daughter after his dead sister.

A woman called out "Karina" in a melodious voice when my mom was visiting a city near her "pueblo." She immediately thought that this would be her daughter's name. My dad, of course, did not have much of a choice as he had seen throughout the years that any decisions concerning their children were ultimately made by her. My mom always had the last word.

When I was in elementary school, during class my teacher had each of the kids look up the significance of their name. I was really excited to find out what my name meant. Karina, I thought, would no longer be Karina after some Google searches. I was wrong. My name stayed the same. The meanings of Karina according to many sources are precious flower, pure, and pretty. All these words seemed beautiful, but my name was not really beautiful until my great grandfather said it. I never met my great grandfather, but he did meet me. My mom told me that he was able to meet me before he died. Our introduction was brief because before my mom knew it his hand was on my face. My mom told me that my grandfather slowly went blind after he grew old. She told him that my name was Karina. As he was feeling my face, he replied with "Karita," which means little face. My mom thought it was perfect because my face was small and round. When she told me the story, I thought that even though I was only a few weeks old and I never knew who he was at the time, I know now that he was a sweet old blind Mexican man who gave my name some meaning.

I immigrated to the U.S. when I was three months old. When I was five, I went back to Mexico for three short months. In Mexico I was free. I could roam wherever I wanted without the supervision of an adult and I could eat all the "tortas" I wanted. A torta is a huge Mexican sandwich. From what I remember, these tortas were filled with tomatoes so red you could paint a hundred walls from the tomato juice. As you can imagine, I was a kid who was a bit heavy everywhere. The small round face now had rosy red tomato cheeks and a watermelon tummy. My aunts and my grandmother would come looking for me when the sun was gone, asking me to come home, but I was a rebel—a small rebellious child who was finally free. I would tell my aunts and even my grandma that I was old enough to make my own decisions, go wherever I wanted when I wanted, and that "no se metieran en mis problemas y en mi vida," which means "do not get into my problems" and

“don’t mess with my life.” I guess you could say that I thought I was an adult, but I can recall memories and I thought I was free. Of course no one took me seriously, but I did have a reputation as a bad-mouthed, chubby rebel.

In all the years that I’ve belonged to this name, I have only known one other person who belonged to the name Karina, and now I know one more person [Karina Gómez]. Although it is not as common as other names, this name existed before I came into existence. I believe the name is slowly becoming mine as I grow into it. As you become who you are and as you grow, people start associating your name with you. My name is Karina, and tomorrow that name might not mean the same thing it meant today.

In Mexico it is the social norm for women to keep their maiden name, and it is also seen as a norm to use your mother’s name when using your full name. When I started school the teachers said it would be too complicated to use all my names, so they shortened my full name: Karina Concepcion Herrejon Tinajero to Karina Herrejon. I never saw anything wrong with this; I always believed that teachers and the society here in the U.S. were just helping my name be less complicated. The idea that the school was trying to help me by shortening my name was reinforced when kids would hear my full name. My classmates would ask, “Why do you have four names?” or “Why is your name long?” When I got older I realized that the white American dominated society was ripping away some of my identity. Tinajero, my mother’s maiden name, was not just a last name. This name had a history of many people, including my mother’s, and now I would be part of that history. Even though I lost Tinajero along the way, I can always use it because that is my name. Herrejon is



my dad’s last name; both his last name and my mother’s are very rare. I have never actually met anyone else with Herrejon as their last name. As I was growing up I remember that I disliked the way people pronounced it because they made it sound American. The H is silent

and the double R’s have to be rolled. Eventually I gave up on trying to help people pronounce it correctly. My first name was Americanized and so was my last name, yet I would never leave any of my names to be forgotten.

As a Mexican who has lived in the United States her whole life, I found it difficult to identify both with white people and Mexican people. I never understood jokes in Spanish, and I could never understand the dominating white culture. I felt lost and split in half most of the time when I was in school. When I took my first semester that entailed two courses, I decided that the only way I would succeed would be if I stopped caring what people thought of me. Our name is just a title but our identity is everything and I stopped caring what boxes people thought I belonged to. You are free once you decide who you are and what your identity is.

I’m still working on my identities as a Latina living in the United States. A good way to help through this is letting people know about how different people are and how those differences form our perspective and understanding of the world. I believe my acceptance of others has come from my perspective of living in the U.S. as a Mexican and all my other identities. As a person with the right to a name and all it entails and all the responsibilities that come with being a person, I understand I have to understand differences.


Katia Marina Marie Robinson

My full name means family, and each name has a meaning.

I've always loved my first name, Katia, because I don't know any other Katia's in Madison. Even more importantly, my name came from my aunt on my dad's side of the family. The year I was born she caught a disease called Moya Moya, which is caused by blocked arteries at the base of the brain. My aunt is currently still alive and dealing with this problem. She cannot speak, but she can give you "yes" and "no" in sign language. She is also dealing with getting fed through a tube that is placed in her stomach. Also, I feel like she is not able to do as much as she used to when she was younger. I just feel that is why I was born and named after her so I can represent her and also be myself. There is no OTHER US in this world.

Marina: this name came from my Uncle Martin. The day I was born, July 31st, 1994, is the exact same day he was born and also another family member (cousin). Also, all three of us are exactly nine years apart from one another. The day my mom went into labor, I was his gift for his birthday, so he decided to name my first middle name after his. The reason why I represent him is because my uncle has Sickle Cell, so most of his life he has been in and out of the hospital dealing with this pain alone. By me being the only girl born on our day, I represent him, his Sickle Cell, and his pain so that he will not have to feel like he is going through this by himself.

Marie means strong and independent. I say this because the majority of the women in my family have Marie as a middle name. Also, my women have been through big struggles in their lives, to where they didn't know if they were

going to get out of them. For example, my mom has Lupus and four children, and she has been raising all of us by herself. Now she has two adult children that are doing well, and she is still raising two more. This woman and all of the other women in my family show the true meaning of strength.

I take on a lot of responsibility being the oldest and only daughter among my mother's children. My last name, which is Robinson, comes from my mom. She has always been a role model to her siblings, so I took on her genes to be one as well to my siblings. Yes, I know it's a struggle to be the best I can as a role model because I know there is a lot of pain out there. When I look at my family, I bear any pain I come across, move forward, and always remember to keep my head held high NO MATTER WHAT!


Kelly Dixon

She was young, bullheaded and would not take no for an answer. She followed a college friend from the oppressive South, all the way north to "Yankee Country." She worked hard every

day and told her children to do the same. But then it came, the notice that no one wants: cancer. I asked my mother many questions while she had the strength and I had the nerve. "Why did you name me Kelly?" "It was easy to remember," she said, "and I liked it."

I was shy and not as outgoing as my peers. My mother's friends would always tell her, "That child of yours will grow to be a patient person," and I am to a fault. My full given name is very common, but it is my father's last name that makes me who I am. I am a patient listener from my mother and an explorer from my father.



Lisa Renae Partee

In 1966, my parents named me Lisa Renae. I have always secretly resented them for giving me a name so common and

nondescript. They were a

young, interracial couple, thrust together by circumstances that had grown beyond their control. My African American father, on the surface, presented from a fine Baptist family. My grandfather was the pastor of a large congregation, and my dad attended college on a football scholarship. My mom was a young, pretty Caucasian woman who hadn't quite finished high school. Her entire life had been spent in a family that was extremely abusive. But regardless of backgrounds that differed, they were right in the middle of a decade of discovery. I don't understand why no one thought to give me a name that had meaning or historical significance, a name that could have facilitated the beginnings of two families learning tolerance and eventually love as they clumsily came together time and time again at awkward family gatherings.

But to further widen the *disconnect* between my family and our history, my parents made the decision to join a "church" where the teachings made it dangerous to have personalities and sinful to be individuals. The "church" literally, spiritually, and psychologically choked off any possibility of us developing meaningful ties to family or friends outside of its exclusive four walls and away from the ever watchful eyes of the "saints."

Now, as if my existence could have been made any more precarious than it already was, I possessed a very rich *inner life* that was alive and active and whispered stories to me about people and places and deeper meanings of things. Sometimes when I was all alone, it told me that I



didn't belong where I was and that one day I would be leaving to join the life I was meant to be living all the time. Growing up, I was often accused of being "aloof" or "stuck up" when, actually, that was not the case at all. As a result of many years of being taught *not* to be, I had become so skilled at keeping my face very, very still and unreadable. But

as I got older, it became more and more difficult to keep the Light in my eyes hidden. Whenever someone even *thought* they caught a glimmer of an awareness that I was not to be in possession of, the wrath of "God" and the leader would be sure to rain down on me.

That place was my entire life from the time I was about six years old until I turned 19. I would say that "thankfully" we were finally able to extract ourselves out of that experience but, mostly, it was not that at all. I was a young adult entering into a marriage and motherhood with the social skills of a refugee; I was a prisoner of war still reacting to the entire world as though a war were raging.

I chose my children's names with great care and deliberation. Each of my children has five names apiece. I had decided that "great names would predestinate great people." But as I reflect back on that line of thinking so long ago, I now understand that I was instinctively trying to put together names that would become like a magical incantation that would impart the qualities and attributes needed for my babies to become everything that I knew I was not: connected, acknowledged, strong, beautiful, respected, and,

most of all, Free. But even the magical and melodic names of...

Nigel Colby David Newhouse Partee...and

Lydia Paige Lillian Newhouse Partee...and

Olivia Grace Carolyn Newhouse Partee...

were not strong enough spells that would make the “great” people that I had daydreamed about coming into this world being strong and confident enough so that maybe they would save me too...

As disconnected as I was from my maiden name and its history, by the time I was accepting my new husband’s name, I was so completely detached from the essence of *me*, my God (having never been properly introduced anyway), and the world around me that doctor’s visits began that ended with diagnosis codes that meant depression and anxiety and then depression with periods of *dissociation* and then one, two, and three manic episodes ending in thundering crashes that ended with suicide attempts until I was finally dually diagnosed as being an addict and also being treated as a mentally ill, indigent patient. I was treated for all of this in the same mental health care facility that I had once sat in a corner office looking over Main Street as I developed and implemented programming.... Names...what are names really, anyway? I was finally reduced to the names of my “illnesses” and then the names of medications and finally I was just known to be a very sick addict.

I wonder how my life would have been had someone been more concerned about the significance of my name all the way back there in 1966.



Luna Santos

I was not given my name or allowed to choose it; my name chose me. It means magical, mythical, mystical, and much more. The name is not just a name but a thing; it is an actual place, the Moon. The moon is

a huge part of our lives that most people take for granted since it’s always just been there. The moon

awakens so many different feelings, such as love, serenity, and even horror for some of us.

The moon was seen as such a powerful thing that many people from the past and present have seen the moon as a goddess. Artemis was a widely venerated ancient Greek goddess of the moon. She protected the wilderness, childbirth, animals, and young women until their marriage.

I have two last names. The first one was my dad’s, Marroquin, which for me sounded so harsh, cold, and super masculine. When I get the chance to change my first and last names legally, I will renounce my dad’s last name since he abandoned my family and me. My second last name is Santos and is from my mom; the sound of it is more formal, classy, and clean. I might adopt my grandma’s last name, Garcia, because she means so much to me.

I believe that my name chose me long before I decided to be called by it. I have always felt a bond between the moon and me since I was a child. Even to this day I always look up in search of the moon. When there is a new moon, I feel worried since my symbol, my protector, is nowhere to be seen. I feel weak and in danger. During my freshman year in high school, I decided to rise from the dark and start the process of becoming who I was meant to be. I was doing my research on names, but none of them got to me as the one who chose me. I even asked my friends if they ever imagined me with another name. I listed some of the names, which were Dianna, Serena, and Jessica. All said, “No! The one you have is all you and it just sticks to you.” The sound of my name is so feminine, elegant, sophisticated, and popular, but it is uncommon to meet someone with it.

This name isn’t just a name for me but an identity. When I hear someone pronounce my name, it gives me the chills and such joy. Every time I hear it, I become more and more the person I am meant to be. So with no further waiting my name is . . . Luna Santos.



Mai Neng Thao

In Hmong, Mai means daughter. It is one of the most common Hmong girl names. When given the name, Mai usually doesn't stand alone because it is very bland. To add flavor, Mai usually comes with a second part such as Mai Yer, Mai Xee, Mai Ka, Mai Der, Mai Choua. When the elders address us, they tend to only call us Mai, but at birth, most of us will have also have an additional part added; that is not our middle name. It's one full name, just maybe spaced. The second part of my name is Neng. I spell it two different ways. Sometimes it's Maineng, and sometimes it's Mai Neng.

Growing up I hated my name. Well, if you haven't caught it by now, it sounds like "my name." I grew up on the South Side of Madison and used to love coming to the South Madison Library before it got renovated. As a little girl I loved reading Laura Ingalls Wilder books and watching movies. Sometimes I would call the library in advance to put a book or movie on hold and the librarian would ask for my name, "May I please have your name?"

"Yes, it's Maineng."

"Yes, your name please."

"Maineng."

"Yes, your name."

"No, my name is Maineng."

Imagine having to repeat that conversation over and over again for the rest of your life. Having encountered many occasions like that, I didn't find any joy in telling people my full name and just went by Mai.

Every culture had many different last names. However, in the Hmong society, we only have 18 last names. We call them clans. I am from the Thao clan. This is very important because certain clans have certain beliefs. For example, the Yang clan is forbidden to eat any hearts--chicken hearts, pig

hearts, cow hearts. There is a legend that they have been cursed by the Lord and should they ingest hearts, they will fall sick. When you die, it's your clan that will host your funeral. If you are a woman and marry out of the clan, then your husband's clan is responsible for your burial. Last names are also used to determine incest. It is absolutely forbidden and a great taboo to date someone of the same last name. The traditional Hmong belief is that if you commit that crime, then you will be punished by the Lord and produce abnormal babies. Even if there is absolutely no blood relation between you and another person of the same last name, it is still forbidden and you will be shamed. HOWEVER, if my direct uncle or a cousin from my mom's side of the family has an interest in me, then that is completely acceptable because we do not have the same last names.

My name has given me lots of trouble with the pronunciation and spelling, but I actually don't mind it anymore. When I think back, it's funny that I can joke about my name with the library story. I was born in the year of the horse, and for fun my friends call me Mo Neng. Mo means massive and Neng can also mean horse. I used to make plans to change my name when I got older, but now that I think about it, it would be so awkward and weird to be called something else.



Marisela Tellez Giron

Marisela is the name I was given at the moment of my birth. Being that I was the first child, it was only right that I be named after my mother. I look at carrying the same name as her as something positive.

It will be a piece of her that I will carry with me forever. I feel such an honor to share the same name as my mother; it has titled me as her daughter. Since the moment I began my journey into motherhood, we have built a closer bond than ever before. She became my guide on this journey that I was so fearful to begin alone. She was always there to offer the best advice she could, yet, at the

same time, she let me learn on my own. Throughout this new chapter in my life, she gave me her full support and was constantly assuring me that everything would be okay. I needed this not only as her daughter but also as a new single mom. We have grown into a relationship that is more than just a mother and daughter. She has become one of my closest friends.

You could say I was very rebellious during my teen years, but all I wanted was the freedom the rest of my friends had that I didn't. I spent about half the time grounded while I was a teenager because of sneaking out, going to parties, taking my parents' car out for a drive when they weren't home, etc. My friend's parents were not as strict as mine and were very open with their children. My parents were the type to require all the five W's (who, what, where, when, and why). Probably another reason why I was grounded was because I wouldn't give them the true information all the time. They were always paying close attention to the friendships I had developed and every move I made. Being the oldest among my siblings was hard, especially when I would get in trouble and be reminded that I had to set a good example for them or they would end up following in my footsteps. Throughout my teenage years my relationship with my mom was kind of distant. She was quick to judge and would not even let me finish explaining anything. We defiantly butted heads a lot when I was younger. Both my parents were strict, but my dad was much easier to talk to and work things out with than my mom.

Even though my mother and I share the same name, I still have my own identity through a nickname. Marisita was the nickname given to me by my family. Only my close relatives call me by this name. As much as I wasn't a big fan of this nickname, it still belonged to me and only me. I get so embarrassed when they call me by my nickname in front of strangers. However, when I hear my grandma say "Marisita," it brings me a sense of my childhood. It has always been more

than just a nickname: it is a term of endearment.



Mustafa Mohammed Saed

My name means the chosen one. At first, my dad wanted to name me Ahmed, but my mom disagreed. She chose Mustafa because it was more unique and more powerful. Everyone agreed with her. They were sad because they were told that I might be born with a disability, and they didn't let my mom know. Surprisingly, I was born with no disability. Nobody believed that would happen because they were too hopeless. I grew up but I was sick for a few years; then when I turned three I became more active, just like other Mustafa's.

When I was in school, I made friends whose names were Mustafa, too. They were cool—not only them, but me too, of course. All Mustafa's are cool. A few years later, I left Iraq and all Mustafa's back there and went to Malaysia, due to the war in Iraq. Malaysia's multicultural people were all communicating in English, but I wasn't. My English was zero. I used hand signs and made up a language that was non-existent.

Mustafa is now in the U.S., in a totally different country and different culture, and it's difficult to make friends. I'm the type of person who wants to make a friend that will stay for long. This country is providing everything. Mustafa can be, from a zero to a hero



Nickitia Cooper

Hi, my name is Nickitia "Nicki" Cooper. Nickitia is derived from the Greek origin meaning "people of victory." My name Nickitia was created by my mom, who wanted me to have the nickname "Nicki"

but didn't want my name to be Nicole after a girlfriend of hers.



In school and business places I was often referred to as Nickitia. When I was home or in more relaxed environments, most people referred to me as Nicki. Nickitia went to Catholic schools most of her life. She was more order bound and tried to be on the straight and narrow, whereas the girl Nicki was far more careless, lazy, and less sacrificial.

Fast forward to the woman Nickitia “Nicki” Cooper. She is simply Nicki Cooper. Most people know of me as Nicki, yet more people know of me as Cooper these days. Cooper is the name I inherited from my father. Ironically he and I had a very distant relationship during my childhood. My dad is referred to as “Cooper” and has been for years now. He grew up and still resides in Illinois. I started being referred to as Cooper out of respect for my character. There have been times when my younger associates would tell stories of others named Nicki. They didn’t want me being confused with the association of these other girls who had the same name, so they began to call me by my last name – Cooper – to protect my character.

Initially, I disliked being referred to by my last name; it seemed a bit rugged. Now I’m all right with it because it displays the level of respect others feel I’ve earned and that they are willing to give me. It also causes me to acknowledge my position in society and the fact that we as adults are being observed and either appreciated or depreciated. Overall, people calling me by these different names

along with this assignment has caused me to evaluate some of my relationships and the different characteristics of my personality. All in all, I’m pretty proud to be called Nickitia “Nicki” Cooper. Besides, she is the only lady she knows how to be.



Raven Fabal

My name is Raven Fabal. It is not the name I was born with, but it is who I am.

I was born Patricia Elizabeth Patterson. As an overweight, abused child, I hated my name. I hated how I was treated at home and at school, but I was mute to object simply because I had never imagined that I *could* object. Patti Patterson got beaten. She was fondled and hurt and even almost killed by her own mother. But she did not complain. What she *did* was simple. She worked from an early age to support the very ones who used and hurt her. That was just what was expected. So the name Patterson in general, and Patti Patterson in specific, did not mean good things to me.

Even into adulthood, I detested what my name stood for. The adult Patti Patterson seemed to stumble from one abusive and eventually failed relationship to another. At age 40 I found myself in an unhappy, abusive relationship. I was afraid to leave, yet I yearned for more in my life than just work and pain. So I began to go out and seek the companionship of others. This filled a bit of the void in my life, but never for long. Just when I had pretty much resigned myself to this kind of half-life I had been living, I met my love, Stephen.

In the private club where I met Stephen, it was customary to take a name other than one’s own for anonymity’s sake. When pondering what name to use, I remembered my beloved Cherokee grandmother, who had always treated me with kindness, telling me that when seeking a new name, a Cherokee couldn’t do better than the Raven. Strong spirit birds, she said, they represented

freedom and divinity. So Raven it was, and my new love came to know me as Raven. It turned out that we were perfectly compatible, shared many of the same interests, and, yes, it really had been love at first sight.

As soon as I had the courage, I moved in with Stephen, leaving my home, business, and my friends and family behind. From that day forward until now, over 11 years later, I have been Raven. Raven is strong. Raven the brave had the strength and courage to break the cycle of abuse. Leaving the bad feelings and fear behind, I became Raven of the strong spirit, just as my grandmother had said I could. I married my love, Stephen, and took his last name, Fabal. Fabal is a Spanish name, and it represents “family” to me in a whole new way. These people don’t hurt, use, or abuse each other. They are nice, good people who love being around family and who have reunions each year to renew those family ties. I love my new family and all that the name represents to me.

My name is Raven Fabal. I still have problems, I still cry sometimes, but at long last, to me, my name means someone who is strong, happy, and free.



Rosalyn “Pookie” Richmond

My name is Pookie. I was given this name because my Uncle William said I looked like a “Pookie.” Now for all my life I have been trying to figure out what a “Pookie” looks like. Down the years I have met and seen

people and things named Pookie. From dogs to dope fiends, I have seen them all. So you can imagine my confusion as to what I look like. I have taken this to mean it was okay to be different.

Google meaning: The Pookie was a small one-person vehicle named after the bush baby and fitted with large Formula One tires bought second hand after the South African Grand Prix. The wide tires prevented the detonation of buried mines by exerting less ground pressure than a human

footprint and spanning the mines’ circumference.

You are a law unto itself. Your tendency is to finish whatever you start. You are tolerant and like to help humanity. You are very active. You are generally warmhearted and give freely of yourself.



Shaimaa Ahmed

My name is Shaimaa. Shaimaa means lofty and of quality. Also, Shaim in Arabic is a mole on the face. Shaimaa is a high mark on the top of the mountain. The most famous person with this name was a sister of the

prophet Mohammed. My father gave me that name to care for him in old age. Also, he thought I would be pretty, successful, marry early, and be happy in my marriage. The girls that carry this name are always frugal with their money.

When I was a child, I didn’t like my name because there were always too many other girls in my class with the same name. I didn’t like it when the teacher called Shaimaa and I didn’t know whether she meant me or other girls. I wanted to be the only Shaimaa in the class because I wanted to be the top one in the class.

I believe when the God created the earth it was perfect and the God gives us the opportunity to be perfect too. So, I am always challenging myself to be better. I can do it, but I need to work hard. Now this is exactly what I am trying to improve.

I had been in Malaysia for seven years as a refugee. I didn’t have any rights there, so I couldn’t work and there was no school for my kids. It was a really hard time, but I never gave up. In the beginning I helped my kids by teaching them at home. Later, I felt that I could help other kids. I had a friend from Ecuador. She was talking with me about opening a class for refugee students. We started with a few students and very simple resources. Then we got support to open a school with 150 students. I was studying by myself to teach students. When it was time to leave

Malaysia, it wasn't easy. The students were crying. But even though I am here, the school is still there.

Now I am in the U.S.A. At the beginning I was shocked. Everything I had learned in seven years didn't help me here. I searched for work, and I found only one simple job as a housekeeper. It has taken me time to think about what I should do. Finally I decided to study and start from the first step. Now I am in the Odyssey class. This class is giving me confidence, and I am sure it will help me to reach my goal.



Shayba Sharriette Pierce

When mothers are expecting, they spend lots of time stressing over what they will name the life they are creating in their wombs. Most mothers set upon a journey to find a name that explains who their child

is—maybe a name like miracle or faith. Some mothers might be inspired to choose a name that reflects their religious background or beliefs, such as Paul, Sara, or Hannah, or maybe an honored deceased relative. Whatever the case may be, moms don't take letters out of a bag and rearrange them to create a name; it's a calculated, well thought-out process.

This is the story of Shayba Sherriette Pierce. If my calculations add up correctly, I was conceived in late April or early May. The day my mother was happily blindsided by my arrival she says she was jumping for joy. It's a wonder why she didn't name me Joy. I am very glad she didn't, though.

So my ma and papa began the name process. People were suggesting all types of normal and crazy names, but none of them were really creating a burst of energy through my parents' souls and giving them that feeling parents get when they know that's the right one, the perfect name, the second step into making this being in your womb human (with, of course, the first step being procreating it in the first place). My ma and papa

searched through baby books and browsed through Swahili books, but nothing was reaching out to them.

Finally my ma and papa settled on Sheba. Now my parents were not religious at this point in time, but they loved the name and story behind the mysterious Queen of Sheba. It was said, "The Queen of Sheba is an exotic and mysterious woman of power . . . immortalized in the world's greatest religious works, the Hebrew Bible and the Koran . . . viewed as the embodiment of Divine Wisdom and a foreteller of the cult of the Holy Cross. In Africa and Arabia her tale is still told to this day, and indeed her tale has been told and retold in many lands for nearly 3,000 years."

At the same time my mother was with child, Abe (one of my dad's best friends) had a pregnant wife, Deborah, and she and my ma were really close friends. Deborah and Ma were really close in due dates, and Ma of course confided in her friend what she would name her first baby girl. Ma already had my older brother Jahmon. Deborah caught a liking to the name, too, and they both joked about who would go into labor first and claim rights to the name.

Lucky for me, Deborah had my "cousin" Sheba first and reserved the name for her baby girl. We could have been namesakes and been named after each other, and still to this day we claim we are. However, my dad decided to take E out and add an Ay, and Sheba became Shayba. It is unknown to me where my middle name derived from, but my papa says he got it from a Swahili book. When I google it, nothing comes up.

On February 8, 1985, a queen was born. My parents picked a gratifying name for me because anyone who knows me knows I am very unique and mysterious. Although I am not equipped with gold, I will share the last of my riches to help someone obtain their own. I didn't come from royalty; nonetheless, my mother bore a queen.



Steven Jones

My name is Steven Jones. Pretty plain, right? I'll leave that to your interpretation. I used to be a quiet kid who was afraid to be different or stand out, so I kept to myself mostly. I listened, learned, and watched what was going on around me. I think this is why I love to listen more than talk sometimes.

As I grew older, I started to come out of my shell and began to love music. This love for music led to a marching band scholarship. So off to college I went, leaving Louisiana and moving to Texas. Unfortunately, my stay was short lived, but I learned a lot about myself. I met different people from different places and backgrounds. I liked all the different people. I started to come out of my shell and became more talkative.

When I returned to Louisiana, I started to realize more and more I didn't feel like I fit in. Most of the people I knew didn't question things around them. They never evolved, and I started to realize how different I was from most people there. So I longed for a place where I could fit in and not be judged for being different, not be judged for talking a certain way. Being a black man, I already face lots of judgment, and being southern our accent is seen as ignorant. I never talked that way. I didn't want to be seen as ignorant! I would have missed out on chances because of the way I talked. It was time for a move, a change. I had family in Wisconsin, so why not there? Madison, here I come!

Since moving here, I feel I fit in. It's a very smart, open-minded city, not like some places in the south. There are more listeners here like me, which creates more room for great conversation! Now I feel like I fit in. I used to be afraid to be different, but now I love that I stand out. I used to

think my name was plain. I will never look at my name the same because nothing about the name Jones is plain. Now I love it, from my core to my bones!



Tamara Thompson Moore

I was given the name Tamara Naomi Thompson by my birth parents. I'm not sure if these were names they had kept in mind throughout pregnancy or something decided on after I was born, but I do recall being told that my name was special. There was an excited celebration in the delivery room when I presented as my father's first girl.

My mother told me as a very small child that my name meant "father is rejoicing." In a middle-school class assignment, I tried to find this but I didn't. What I did find was that my first and middle names originate from the Hebrew language, like my mother's and her side of the family. I could find almost all of their names in the second book of Samuel, right along with Tamar. My first name is the name of a date (the edible kind) that grows on a palm tree in the Middle East. When they are sweet and ripe they are brown, which coincidentally has always been my favorite color. My top favorite things to enjoy in life are coffee and chocolate, so Tamar definitely fits into my puzzle. How cool is that?

Growing up, "Tamara," was a frustrating name to have; it seemed that no one outside of my home pronounced it correctly. Beginning a school year or becoming a new kid at a school was already a daunting experience, but, on top of that, kids would make jokes: "You say tomato, I say tamahto!" or

"Tomorrow, tomorrow! I don't love ya tomorrow; you're only a day away!" Teachers would give up altogether, neglecting the second "a" and calling me "Tamra." When I was sitting in a waiting room, a nurse would enter with her clipboard and a tiny wrinkle would gradually begin to appear between



her eyebrows as she seemed to stutter, “Te... ta... tu....” “Here I am!” I’d say with a sigh.

Whenever I would be persistent about my name and repeat the way my name is pronounced, people would either acknowledge it but continue to get it wrong or they’d force an unauthorized nickname on me, like “T” or “Tammy.” Anything was better than the country-fied pronunciation, “Tah-MaRR-ah.” After a while, I began to resentfully accept these nicknames, and eventually “Tammy” stuck.

At one point in my childhood, if someone were to call out to me in a crowded public place, I could instantly identify how familiar this person was to me. Having a name that was said wrong more often than not had a flipside: it meant that “Tamara” was code for “I know you,” and “Tammy” was like that thing they snap in films to tell the actors when to begin.

At a swim meet, my father registered me by filling out all of the required forms. To our surprise, the announcer called “Tommy Thompson” to the bullpen. He was frustrated. “They can see right there that you’re a girl!” but he had very little idea how I had allowed my name to be trampled on elsewhere. I figured if the popular R&B singer Toni Braxton can get away with being a girl with a boy’s name, what the heck.

It brought about a conversation about my name between my father and me as we sat there. He talked about how there was this famous actress named Tamara Dobson, and that my name shouldn’t be so hard to pronounce. He shared how people would sometimes misspell his name, Brian, with a y instead, or if they are rushing, they spell it Brain. That made me laugh. He chuckled, too.

In retrospect, Tammy was a manufactured personality; a combination of who people expected me to be and my desire to be that. Being from a troubled home can sometimes create the need in children to invent an alter-

ego because they can separate themselves from the stress, worry, and pain they feel deep inside. Kids can be cruel, and teachers pry, so I learned at a very young age how to keep family secrets and put on a face for the world. “Tammy” audibly symbolizes what it sounds like when a person allows who they uniquely are to be drowned out by the noise of public insensitivity and the acceptance of the place they’ve been given.

I was newly separated and going through the divorce process when I began having emotions surrounding my sense of identity as an adult. I felt compelled to hurry and change my last name, but resentment toward my father kept me from committing to that decision. I had been trying to find my way through the depression when I rekindled my love for good books at a local Barnes & Noble. The Starbucks barista asked my name, and I hesitated. “Tam,” I eventually said, trying to avoid having to spell out my full name after confusing the young lady. I had just borrowed the nickname of my sister-in-law, Tamiko (who seldom goes by her full name), when I heard a worker call, “Tams!” I looked at the cup and saw the four letters had been written without an apostrophe. The new me had a name: Tams.

These days, I still introduce myself as Tamara; I do love my name. I also affectionately refer to myself as Tams and offer it as an option to those who sometimes have trouble saying Tamara. It is both aggravating and fascinating how some strong-willed



people simply refuse to accept the big, red Easy Button I've just handed them, and they insist on trying to call me by my whole name, butchering it more and more each time. It's like that awkward feeling when your finger sticks to an ice cube, and all you want to do is rigorously shake it, but you try to keep calm and be graceful. I lean in with my big brown eyes and softly repeat, "Please... call me Tams."



Tasha Thompson

My name (Tasha) isn't interesting at all. I have a very common, boring name. I am a unique individual. My name has no significance. I wanted to be someone else growing up.

Growing up, I used to go around playing house with my siblings and saying my name is Keyana or Kiesha.

I don't think that if I would have been named someone else I would be any different. I would still be the same person I am today because I still have the same mom and dad. I still would have gone through what I went to.

The difference between myself and other "Tasha's" is that in middle school when I met the other Tasha's I was always quiet. They talked and hung around each other. I was shy; I didn't have any friends, I was solo dolo. When I became solo and quiet, I sat back and observed my surroundings. Because I had things going on at home, I became distant.

When I went to high school it was hard because I didn't know anyone, but my sister/twin sister was with me, which made my high school experience a little better. I was in an alternative program, and she knew me. She treated me different. She saw the individual and not only me as an outsider. So my name...it is not so important.



Tory Latham

My first name, Tory, had original origins. According to many google searches, it is a popular girl's name. Most of the people I know say they know more males than females with the name.

Most uses of the name for females are short for something. To me it's an ice breaker. You are wondering what I am talking about, right? Well, I am the youngest of five boys. My first two brothers have what I call traditional male names, Edward and Phillip. The rest of us were not so lucky: #3 name is Terry, #4 name is Shelly, and then there is me, Tory. I think my mother really wanted a girl. After I explain that to people, they tend to laugh and become much easier to converse with.

There is another story that goes with my first name. That's the story that really counts, my mother's story. One of my brothers and I each have a piece of one name, Dontory. Dontory was the name given to the son of my mother's and aunt's best friend Penny. The three of them were pregnant at the same time, with due dates within weeks of one another. Penny went into labor first and early. Dontory only lived for a few weeks before passing away due to AIDS. As a tribute to Penny, my mother took part of his name and gave it to my brother Shelly as a middle name, Donta. I got the second half of the name, Tory.

I'm not sure where my middle name, Ajmal, comes from. It even has an apostrophe in it. The strange part about it is that neither I nor anyone else uses the A (A'mal) or spells it correctly. I changed the spelling to Mel. And that has taken on an identity of its own. Most people under 22 that really know me call me Uncle Mel. Mainly from being around my nieces and nephews, but also from being places they can get guidance, I have become the

community uncle. I'm a safe person for them to talk to about things they can't talk to their parents about—I am somewhere to get honest feedback, unbiased opinions, and a listening ear. Learning many of these traits by seeing what not to do and being the baby in the family allowed me to unconsciously provide positivity to others.

I am so proud of my last name. If my father, who passed away last month, didn't give me anything else, he gave me this name. I never thought to make my son a Jr. because I thought carrying the legacy of a last name was more than enough. I didn't even know what that legacy would be or is to this day. What I do know are the stories that were told about the early days in Chicago, after arriving from Alabama. There were talks of how cool my father and his brother were, how clean and pressed their clothes were, the dancing they did, and the sweet rides they drove. I knew they were some smooth brothers. Almost every weekend, my dad and uncles would get together to play cards, watch the football games, drink and sing. Yes, sing! They would sit around harmonizing and just blowing acapella. That was enough of a legacy for me. Even in Madison, the Latham legacy carries on, seeing that I work on Latham Drive.

So, what's in a name? Whatever you make it...



Umaina Mohammed Saed

My name is Umaina, and it means a little mom. When I was born, my grandfather gave my mom three names to choose from: Maymona, Amena, and Umaina. She chose Umaina because it was a cute, girlish, and unique name. I am really lucky to have that name because it describes me. I am the oldest sister, so I always feel that I am the second mother for my siblings. I clean the house every day, cook sometimes, and take my siblings to school. I used to call my



brother "Tufuli," which means my baby.

I always have done my best to be responsible for my siblings, even after we left Iraq. I love my siblings a lot because they are everything to me. When we went to Malaysia, we were homeschooled because they asked for a huge amount of money, which we did not have. I feel that family is really important. After five years of homeschooling, we found a refugee center. I started to go there every day. Also I used to volunteer in the kindergarten because I love kids and want to be with kids. There was a girl named Laila. She was very cute, and I used to feed her milk every day until she slept in my arms. She used to sleep only with me, so I was a little mom not only at home but outside of the house too.

My dreams for the future are to be strong and successful by helping others. To follow my name as a mother, I need to have a big heart and love others. When I left my country, I found that life is not only about money; it is about feeling safe, loving others, and helping others. A lot of people ask me, "Why are you smiling all the time?" I told them my problems are inside me, and I don't want others to feel sorry for me. I love children because they taught me to start my day with new thoughts and forget about the past. I am happy to have the name Umaina. I am going to be a little mom for my siblings and to all the kids until I die.