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ODYSSEY ORACLE

WOMEN OF COURAGE



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THE POWER OF EDUCATION

By Abdourahman Sallah

In a village called Kusalang in my country, The Gambia, everything men said and did was

right; no women ever challenged male authorities. Women were used as formulas to produce children for men, and men made the decisions. Every year an annual gathering would be held at the village platform ahead of winter to discuss an array of issues affecting the



community and to devise means to overcome such problems. Even though women and children would attend such gatherings, their issues were never on the agenda; they were there just to listen and do what men told them to do. At one gathering, a young, educated woman stood up and demanded an opportunity to speak on behalf of the women, but she was denied. She forced her way to speak about their silent suffering and challenged the men by quoting verses from the Holy Quran, reminding them about what God said about protecting women and children. The men widely condemned her action; they saw it as an insult and a taboo for a woman to speak at such a gathering and go against the men's decision. She didn't relent in her campaign to give women a voice, especially during social activities such as marriage and naming ceremonies, and her efforts helped lead to the founding of an organization called the Mother's Club to boost student enrollment in school and promote the welfare and rights of girls and women. This woman was beautiful, educated (*magilish*), trustworthy, fearless, and pious. The daughter of a World War II veteran, she became a woman of courage. She was a supportive wife, loving mother, and community servant who served as the president of the Mother's Club until her demise. Her name was Aminata Dem Sallah, my mother.

As a wife, she supported her husband in building a family. I can vividly remember she once pointed at an old building in the compound, claiming to have fetched water for its construction. The village well is 60 meters deep, and a pulley system was used to draw water, which was hard work. When I demanded an answer as to why she would engage in such a tedious project, she said to me, "It was out of love and for the welfare of our family."

As a mother of six sons, she exhibited great love and care for her children. I spent more time with her than with my father, as he often traveled out of the country. I have memories of some of the stories she used to tell me every night; most of them were morally based, depicting honesty, hard work, discipline, bravery, and personality. There were many stories, and together they have made me who I am today.

Aminata Dem Sallah became very popular in the community, largely owing to her personality

and her involvement in community programs, such as social and religious activities. Many people looked up to her as a role model; as such, they engaged her services on issues related to marriages and other problems, free of charge. She served as the president of the Mother's Club for about five years until the time of her demise. Mother's Club is an organization established by the Department of Education to serve as a link between the school and community to help boost student enrollment and retention in school. The Mother's Club has had a positive impact on the lives of women and children. Women participate in any decision-making process, be it at the household, family, or community level. Women got their voice, thanks to the leadership of Aminata Dem Sallah.

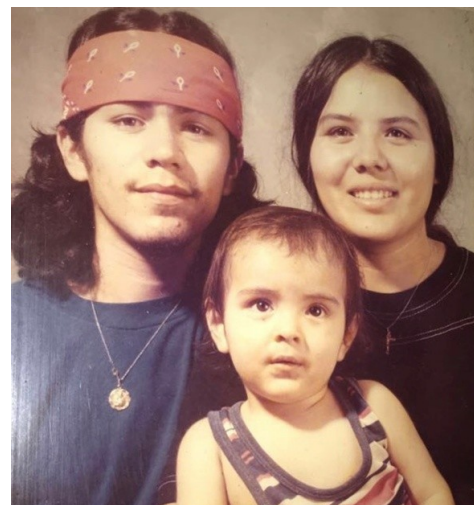
In conclusion, I always thank God for giving me such an industrious mother who taught me to believe in myself throughout my life. She inculcated morals in me to serve humanity generously. I enjoyed cooking with her, although it was a taboo for a male child to cook. She had only male children, and I couldn't afford to see her endure all the domestic work by herself without any help. Even though I am poor, I live happily and contented; I give thanks to her for shaping me to become a responsible person in life. I shall always remember her in my thoughts and prayers for posterity. Continue To Rest In Peace, Mother.





The Untold Story of a Woman with Courage By Alice Ramirez

Josie Ramirez is one of the most courageous women I know. Courage to me is having to face difficulties throughout your life and overcoming them, and I was able to watch that through my mother's life. She gave up her dreams to take care of her disabled sister, lost a 25-year marriage but raised all five of her children, and still managed to dedicate her life happily to helping those with disabilities.



Growing up in San Antonio, Texas, in the 1970s with only a mother, two rebellious siblings, and another with a developmental disability, my mother had life fall heavily upon her shoulders. Having to take on the responsibilities of taking care of her disabled sister was like having a full time job. It eventually resulted in her giving up the ROTC, and her dream of going to the Army was out of the question. I know it meant the world to her to do what she loved by serving this country as her relatives had also done in the past.

In 1979, at just sixteen years old, she met the man she would eventually marry. Together they raised five kids, me being the second youngest. Unfortunately, what seemed to be a happy marriage deteriorated after 25 years. I know that was one of the most devastating moments in her life. I still remember coming home and my dad's things were gone. Our home now somehow felt so empty. I won't ever forget the sad look that consumed my mother's face, something I was not used to seeing. Somehow she managed to keep it together and continue to raise us on her own. As for my father, an undiagnosed bipolar disorder and uncontrollable anger outburst had overtaken him.

Despite the obstacles of being a diabetic and having multiple surgeries resulting in losing part of her lower extremity, she never stopped pursuing what she loved. She has happily dedicated over 25 years to serving adults with disabilities. In 2003 she was awarded the Vivian T Pope award, which is the highest award given by the MARC corporation. I remember watching her receive that award that she so greatly deserved and thinking to myself, "WOW! That's my mom!" I watched her as she stood there so nervously on stage and couldn't help but feel so proud of her. I couldn't imagine how scared she must've been, but she somehow always managed to keep her composure.



In conclusion, my mother, in my eyes, is the perfect definition of a courageous woman. Dealing with what life had to throw at her, she never gave up. Because of her, I learned that courage was not the absence of fear but the triumph over it. She taught me that life has problems but not any too big to conquer.



She Will Fall, But She Will Always Get Back Up

By Breonna Hawkins

Courage: strength in the face of pain or grief. When I think about the definition of courage, I think of strong individuals who never give up no matter the obstacle in front of them. My grandmother, Terri Hawkins, has been through many situations throughout her 57 years of life where she had to show strength. She was molested at only 14, lost one of her children in 2008, but showed she was able to get her life back on track.

My grandmother was raised in Chicago, Illinois. She was mainly self-raised but occasionally would stay with her mother. She often would get into heated arguments with her mom and never really wanted to be home. She had to grow up very fast. While being out on her own, she was molested by an unknown person, and this changed her forever. She did not know how to feel any more about life or even herself. She finally moved back in with her mother and decided the street life was not for her. She wanted to change her life and try to get along with her mother for the better of her own future.

Later on, my grandmother had three children: Temkia (my mother), Robert, and Jonlazaire. It was then that she felt she had a purpose in life and something to live for. Raising two boys and a daughter was difficult with my grandfather being in the Army. She found it was also hard keeping them out of trouble. Her son Robert eventually fell into the crooked jail system and just could not seem to stay clear of trouble. After being incarcerated for some time, he began to have heart pains. My grandmother stressed to the facility that her son was unwell and needed help. The facility gave her son pills for heartburn and headaches. Despite the cries for help, her son passed away on December 8th, 2008, while incarcerated.

Most parents will never have to bury their own children or even fathom the thought of their child passing before them. This took my grandmother into a deep spiral of depression all over again. For years she felt this way. With time passing, nothing seemed to be going in her favor until she finally got a call back for a house she applied for some time ago. Thinking it would be bad news, she had low hopes until she heard the words "Approved." She fell to her knees, as she was overwhelmed by joy. She now felt she could take her life back from depression and learn to be happy again.



All In all, it takes a lot for a woman to show courage when having to show "strength in the face of pain or grief." Even if you are unable to pick yourself up right away, know that better days will come. Every day I think of what my grandmother went through and reflect on my own life today. My grandmother showed me no matter what rough patches you have going on, you can always smooth them out; depression can be defeated. Being around my grandmother today is such a blessing because I can learn from her stories, mistakes, and achievements. I hope one day I can show as much courage as she did. I'll never forget my grandmother telling me, "If you don't believe in yourself, nobody will."

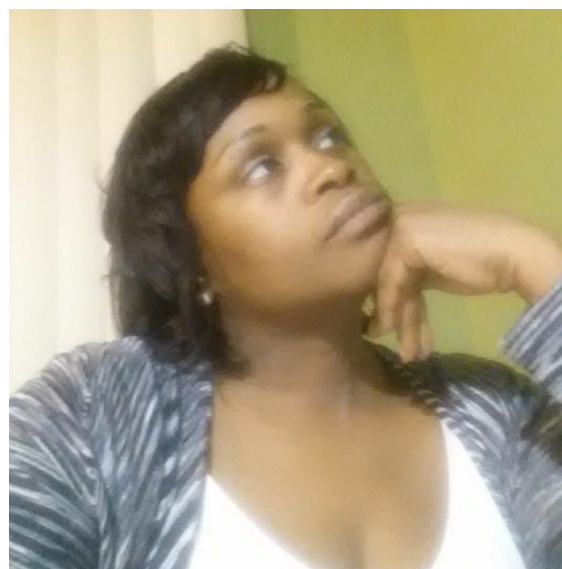


Never Settle for Less or Mess By Candace Howard

She overcame a rough childhood, left an abusive relationship after 17 years, and survived homelessness with her two daughters. Anita Galloway, my mother, is my woman of courage.

Anita was the second oldest of ten kids. Having a mother who used alcohol excessively made a lot of her responsibilities fall on Anita's shoulders. At only ten years of age, Anita had to change diapers, make bottles, and cook breakfast, lunch, and dinner. She was also responsible for getting her siblings ready and getting them to school. Playing the role of a mother to her siblings made Anita feel very betrayed by her mother, but she knew her mother needed help. Being overwhelmed with all those responsibilities at that age, she started to fall behind in school and felt very suicidal. After her grandmother became aware of what was going on, she decided to call Child Protective Services. Anita and her siblings were placed out of her mother's custody and split up between family members and foster homes. After a couple years of staying with her grandmother, Anita's mom was granted custody of her kids again, and they all were placed back home.

By that time, Anita was a 14-year-old teenager whose interest was boys. She fell in lust with a guy named Vernell, who was two years older than she was. Anita became impregnated by Vernell a few months after dating him, giving birth at age 15 to a baby girl. Soon after her first child was born, Vernell became abusive. Being too young to understand that what she was experiencing wasn't OK, Anita stayed around. She was 26 weeks pregnant when she gave birth to their second child following a fight they had that caused her to go into labor early, giving birth to a two-pound baby boy. At that point in her life, she knew what she was going through wasn't right, but she didn't want to leave because she was now 16 with two kids and no income. Vernell was a drug dealer. He took care of Anita and their children. Moving along, they had two more kids over the years, and the abuse became much worse. He started to abuse her in front of the children. The kids were awakened by loud thumps and bangs on the walls, things falling off the dresser onto the



floor and breaking, and glass shattering, with Anita calling for her kids to help. That really traumatized the children. After 17 years of abuse, Anita finally found the courage to leave, taking only her daughters. She and Vernell came to an agreement that she would take care of the girls and he would take care of the boys because neither of them could take care of all four alone. Anita packed her girls and herself up, leaving Chicago to head for Madison, Wisconsin.

Knowing very few people in Madison, Anita had trouble finding a place to stay. With the help of the Dane County Salvation Army, Anita and the girls were placed in a motel for three months. During those three months, Anita struggled to find permanent housing.

She and the girls were living house to house after having to leave the motel. Anita was devastated not being able to care for her girls like she normally would. She struggled getting clothing for them, shoes, and sometimes even food. It wasn't easy living with others with the girls because the girls didn't always get along well with people. She sent them to live with her older cousin in Minnesota for what was supposed to be a couple months until she found her own place. The girls ended up staying there longer than expected because she wasn't having any luck finding housing. Feeling homesick, her youngest would call everyday begging to be back with her. Although she didn't have her own place, Anita sent for her girls to come back.

After staying with her boyfriend for a few months, Anita got approved for housing. She and the girls finally had a place to call home.

I've seen my mother survive so many things that could have killed her, dodge so many obstacles, and overcome so many barriers. She is one of the strongest women I know. Every challenge I face, I have a lot of faith knowing I'll get through it because I've seen her pull through so many times. I'll never settle for less or mess because of her. I'll never give up and will always strive for better, just as I've seen her do.





A Woman Full of Wisdom

By Carmon Caire

Mary B. Caire was the oldest child of 12. She was a woman full of wisdom and courage, as shown through her love and devotion to her family, church, and the community. Her family called her Sister. She was born October 17, 1915, in Gurdon, Arkansas. A woman full of wisdom, my grandmother taught me when I was five years old what I know today—how to cook, clean, and be a housewife.

Mary put family first. Mary had family responsibilities that included bills, gardening, growing vegetables, and raising four beautiful daughters. My grandma was married. She worked for the State of Wisconsin mending films. She retired early due to heel spurs and surgery. Mary always knew how to deal with difficult events in her life such as the passing of her family members and close family friends. She endured a lot and never allowed life to affect her. Each Sunday, Mary would iron all of the children's clothes for school and church. She also used a warm comb on the stove to press her children's hair and braid it up each Saturday for Sunday.

Even though I didn't live with my grandmother, I lived close by. She was courageous because she went the extra mile to teach me how to cook from scratch, clean, and do laundry. I also learned how to pick and eat blue gills with a slice of bread in case I missed a bone (so the bread would coat my throat). I was also taught to sew quilts, embroider, and budget. She always said, "Don't make a bill you can't pay."

She was courageous because of the love she showed her community. She was the founder of BANA Association, which meant the community worked together. Mary was also a part of Mary McCloud Bethune Club, which is an African American organization that met once a month to talk about community needs in different cities around the state. I was able to travel a little and meet other women from different cities around the state. My grandma believed strongly in going to church. She was truly devoted and never missed church. We would make sacrament every first Saturday for each first Sunday, organize the plates with grape juice, and cover them up with a white sheet. We attended choir rehearsals, Bible study, and conferences visiting other churches. Mary had a strong, robust voice and sang at funerals and for other events in the community. When my mom was five years old, Mary sang for an event on a boat that was close to the Memorial Union. You could hear her voice over the entire lake over the loud speaker.

I know today I am a strong, solid woman because of the lessons my grandmother and mother taught me growing up.



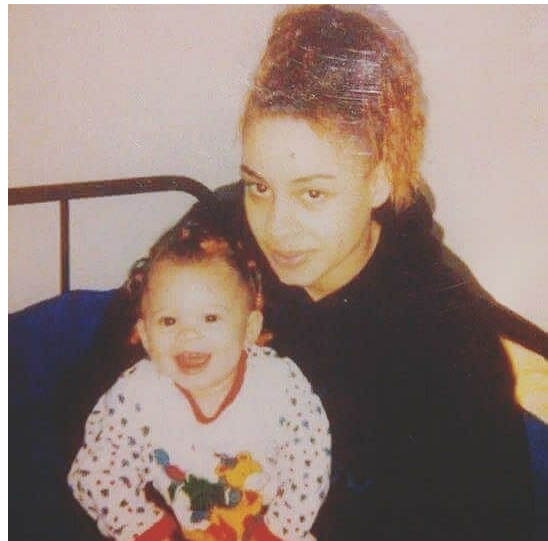


My Rock

By Cheyenne Pete

My mother, Aleesha, was 16 years young when she got pregnant and had her very first child. About two years later when she turned 18, she got pregnant again, bringing me into the world. My grandfather forced her to move into a shelter. Not long after, she got into an abusive relationship and had more kids with her abuser. Eventually, she went into a serious depression from being mentally, physically, and emotionally drained. After having her fifth child, my mother decided to do better for herself and her family, so she enrolled into school. She went to get her G.E.D., later took classes at MATC, eventually graduated, and pursued her dream of hair styling.

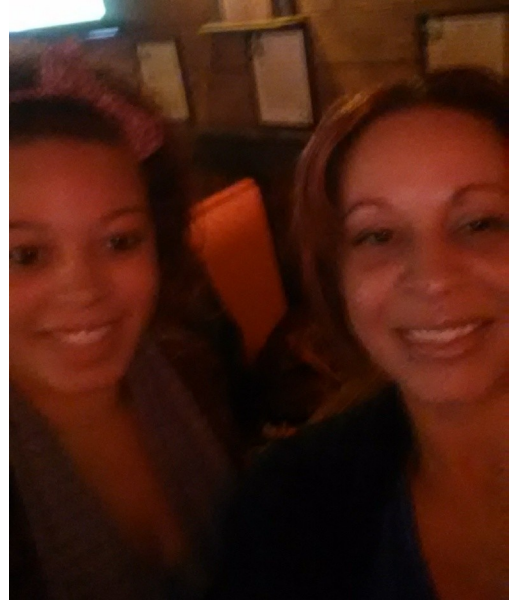
While my mother was a freshman in high school, she met my father, who was a junior. Shortly after they started dating, my mother found out she was pregnant with my oldest brother, Camron. She was scared and clueless, with no idea what to do when she found out. My father, on the other hand, didn't seem to stress about it since he unfortunately was cheating on my mother while they were together. During my mother's pregnancy, she discovered my father got two other females pregnant, and she was devastated. They worked out their issues and decided it was best to be friends and try to co-parent. Almost two years after she gave birth to my oldest brother, she found out she was pregnant with me! By that time, my grandfather was furious and wanted nothing to do with her. My mother was forced to live in a shelter until she could figure out how to take care of herself and two children.



It wasn't long after being in a shelter that my mother found another boyfriend—someone younger, with good charm, so she thought. I remember being three or four years old. My brother Camron and I would spend weeks with Mom and weekends with our dad. We loved our mother very much, but as I got older I realized things about my mother's relationship with her boyfriend rubbed me the wrong way. Almost every weekend, they would go out to the bar and drink. They'd return, and I would be awakened from my sleep due to them yelling at each other at the top of their lungs. I could hear her yell "Stop!" or "Get off of me!" so often. She had slowly gone into a deep depression and lost a ton of weight in a short period of time. I could start to see the signs that she was not healthy. Incident after incident, she stayed with him through it all. I never understood it until she told me how much she loved him. Who would have thought that a love so strong could bring two people together who hurt each other so much? Not only was her boyfriend abusive, but he was also a bully who would pick fights with me. I never knew why. When I was about 15 years old, my mother watched me as I

moved out of her house and in with my father. To think she would choose her daughter over her boyfriend was rational thinking, but that wasn't her plan. It was her job to keep her boyfriend happy and satisfied by any means.

As time went on, my mother had three other children with her boyfriend, a.k.a. the abuser. They appeared to be happy, but behind closed doors the disrespect and abuse was still happening. They decided to have two more children. During her pregnancy, her boyfriend got locked up and sent to jail for a few months. During that time, I decided to go be with her to help watch my siblings when she had to work. My mother's boyfriend eventually got out of jail and made the decision to go to Alcoholics Anonymous, a.k.a. AA meetings, to better himself. My mother took it on herself to do the same. After all, she was a struggling mother in her teens, living paycheck to paycheck, and collecting from the state by her mid-twenties. She obtained her GED and made the decision to further her education in college. January 2008 was around the time she hauled herself up to MATC and enrolled in the cosmetology program. She was able to graduate within two years. Everything she had sacrificed while being in school was worth it, and I couldn't be more proud of her. She's dedicated ten years to styling hair in a salon.



My mother recently enrolled back in school to become a nursing assistant and is doing outstanding! She is seriously my hero. She's turned every negative situation into a positive one and has shown me so many things in this life. All those dark days and storms she's been through have only made her stronger and wiser. She has pushed herself to the fullest while raising seven children! Her story has inspired me to do what makes me happy, never give up no matter what, and believe everything happens for a reason! It's up to us to make the right decisions and do things that make ourselves happy because nobody will do that for us. Now every time I see her she has a sparkle in her eyes and the brightest smile on her face. I am proud to call her mother despite what she's been through. She is my rock! Our family's bond has been stronger than ever, and I now share a really good relationship with my mother's boyfriend. My mother has birthed, taught, and raised seven of the smartest, kindest, and strongest children I know, and for that I will always be thankful. All of her children have pushed themselves to be the best son/daughter, worker, student, or even friend. We all give thanks to a powerful woman who came from nothing.





My Granny **By Diamond Clay**

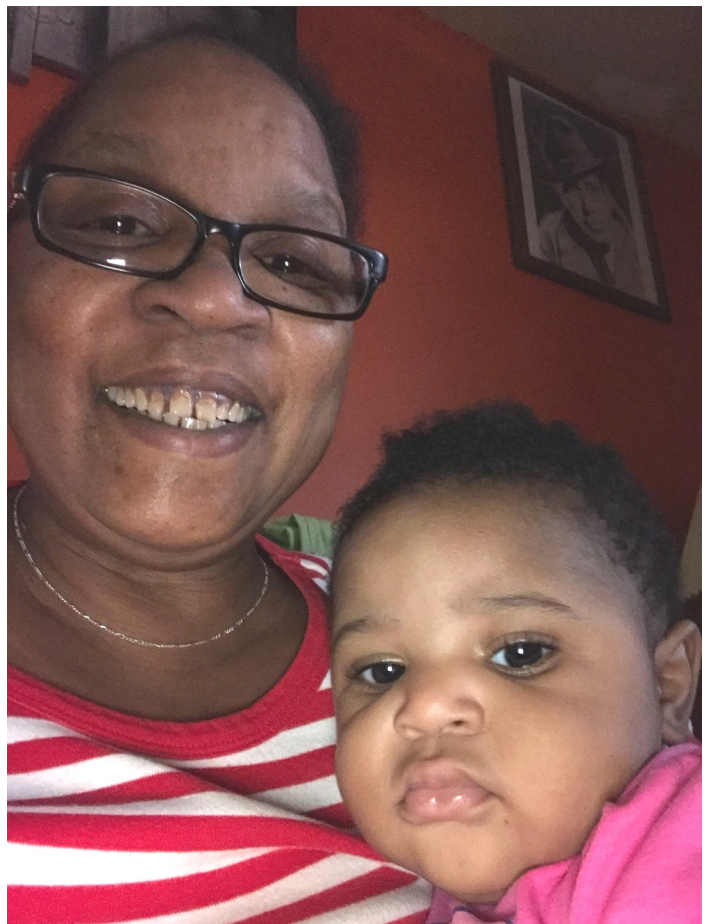
My granny is an example of courage to me because she is a survivor of many health and life challenges, she maintains a positive role in everyone's lives, and she makes it her job, no matter what condition she is in, to support her family.

On December 9, 1958, God created an amazing woman whom I get to call my grandma, Cynthia Jones. Born and raised in Kokomo, Indiana, she turns 60 this year. My grandma and late grandfather, Edward Jones, were together for 42 years and were married 37 years. He was all she knew and loved. She dealt with a few complications with her marriage, such as being cheated on, being mentally and verbally abused, and more, but she stuck out the flaws to maintain a healthy relationship. The smile that my grandpa put on her face made it all better. Although my great-grandmother, her mother, raised her up to be against divorce, it was her own belief, too, that you never give up, even when things get tough. She showed all of us that you can get through anything and that love does not die.

Five years ago, she was diagnosed with cancer. Along with other health complications, she also has diabetes, dealt with multiple blood clots that led to her toe being amputated, and recently overcame a heart attack after she thought it was pneumonia and tried to self-recover.

Just by meeting her, you wouldn't have a clue that she's battling many health issues. My grandmother is so full of life, has an outgoing personality, and is not afraid to be herself. Despite the amount of stress it may bring her, she still makes it her job to help people any way she can, whether it's lending a place to stay, money, etc. My grandmother is always welcoming people with big arms, trying to figure out a way to help.

My grandmother gives me so many more reasons to want to push in life. She is not only a role model for me, but she is also another mom to me. She is someone I know that I can always and forever count on. I am very blessed to have her around, mostly for my daughter, because a mother's love is one thing, but the love from an amazing and loving grandmother is another.





Woman of Color
By Ebony Anderson-Carter

My grandmother meant a lot to me. She taught me how to be proud and strong. She gave me an eternal passion to never let people doubt my worth and to hold myself accountable for my own life. Julia Mildred Anderson (Johnnie Mae) had children at age 15 and overcame being a young single mother. She never let love define her. Love given and love lost never stopped her from being educated and from becoming who she wanted to be. She also took on two special needs children and adopted one, fostered many, and babysat for women all over Madison, Wisconsin.



Julia Anderson had two children at a young age. She raised a boy and girl, Lola and Leandrew, ten years before she had my mother and raised other children she adopted. My grandma was a very beautiful and powerful woman. Going to school, she built relationships with the professors and colleagues who loaned her money and books for classes she took, gaining many certificates in media production, teaching, etc. She moved her kids to Madison and met my grandfather.

My grandma loved my grandfather very much, so much that she left him, moved to Miami, remarried, divorced, and then went back with him when he came to get her back after he got it together. She gave me good quotes at critical moments of my life: "I love me," "I am beautiful," and "Work soft, Ebony, but carry a big stick like Booker T. said." Even though my grandma married, she left when things were unbearable in her marriage—those deal-breaker things—moving her two girls to Miami, Dade! In the seventies during the cartel and real party era, married with children, raising children, she went to Miami Dade Community College and bettered herself with no distractions. She chose her own passions first, so much so that she went to the UW seniors-free classes until she died. She expected education first out of me, always.

I would always get into fights with my grandma over politics, the news, recipes, remedies, and pretty much everything. She educated herself in so much that she decided by the time I was two months old she would adopt three boys. She put a burden on us all at some point to help with babysitting, going to school, getting more education, and being charitable in any way we could. This is why I dedicated a great portion of my life to her.

Through dedicating a great portion of my life to my grandma, I learned things that only now without her I am beginning to understand. Growing up with two special needs uncles (Harold and Eugene), I learned how to care and be patient with my own child. Through loving people, she taught me how to love others and give chances but not to allow people to take away your own peace and dreams. She chose to love and also not to love, but she always chose herself. My grandmother died giving to family and putting her own love for her passions first, something I will continue to do as I was told.



Love Forever
By Erannia Carter

My woman of courage is definitely my mother. She was a very strong woman that dealt with a lot and still kept her head up high. She was a very down-to-earth, funny woman. There were times when she didn't play either. She was still a firm mother and believed in respect. I have three brothers, and I am the only girl. My mom was the only girl with three brothers also. So, we had things in common . . . definitely. My brothers and I all have names starting with the letter "E." She would call all of our names back to back in order when we were outside playing. A few friends laughingly remember that until this day.

My mother went to college and studied Nursing. I guess that's why I also have a passion for Nursing. She then worked at a hospital as a Nurse's aide or something like that. It was so many years ago. She met my dad in high school and later went to prom and married him. She was very strong in dealing with my dad, who was a veteran of the Vietnam War. Dealing with PTSD and other symptoms he was having was something that only a person who is strong can handle.

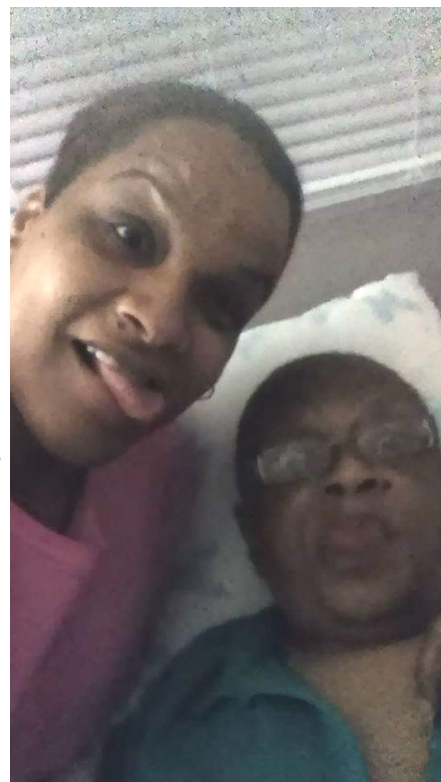
I had moved to Omaha, Nebraska, and my mom and dad followed me and moved there. They were always traveling and doing many different things. My dad then was diagnosed with



stomach cancer. My mom was struggling with that news, but she still kept the hope and faith that my dad was strong enough to overcome it. On December 22, 2012, my dad passed away, and my mother was devastated! I knew she was strong, but that broke her down. She still held her head high and continued to support her kids through it all.

In April 2015, my mom was diagnosed with Stage 4 lung cancer. She fought so hard to hang in there to the end. I watched her fight, and she didn't give up. She had the courage to fight for my dad's life and also hers without giving up. She always was supportive throughout the whole ordeal.

My mother will always be my Rock, my courageous, strong woman who always held it together through the rough times. RIP, Mommy and Daddy.





My Mother, Gail Robinson
By Erica Cocoa Gentry

Female cashier: "Welcome to McDonald's. May I take your order?"

Mom: "Yes. Can I get a large Dr. Pepper and---"

Female cashier: "I know, I know. You want a talk dark and handsome!"

Mom: "You got it!"

This is my mother's ritual every morning. That phrase "a talk dark and handsome" is her signature line (and she says it frequently). She will usually get a laugh out of whoever is around. That's the humor and good feeling you have when you are around my mother. My mother was always very outgoing. Everyone always adored her—the way she carried herself, how smart she was, and how gorgeous she was. Growing up, I always heard that from people upon meeting her. She had long, pretty hair, light skin, and an infectious smile. That's exactly how I felt about her, too: from an early age, I adored her. But since she has had surgery, she's changed at times.

My mother had me at an early age, so my grandmother stepped in to help raise her only daughter's child. My dad was young as well and still was running the streets, so my mom finished school and started working to help provide for her child. She was still going back and forth with my dad, and that was damaging her spirit. She wanted him to stop running the streets so they could be a family. Eventually my mother left my father and worked harder and more frequently to provide for us.

My mother had another child, a son named Damien, and then a girl named Gina. After she had my sister, she started experiencing minor but frequent headaches. She also started blacking out and having seizures. It was hard hearing that. Most of the time she was at home when she had them (thank God). When she went to her doctor, they ran tests and found out she had not one, not two, but three aneurysms. Now that was scary, plus I was living in Tennessee when all of this was happening to her. I was traveling back and forth a lot to be with her, especially when she had the surgeries.

The surgery changed my mother. Thank God, the aneurysms were removed, but having two



operations on her brain seemed to diminish her brain functions. After the two surgeries, my mother changed. She hollered more, she started forgetting things (not remembering where she left items), crying at the drop of a hat, and becoming aggressive and mean. My siblings and I couldn't believe what was happening. Because I was the oldest, my siblings leaned on me to address what was happening to her.

My beautiful mother is still beautiful to me, even though the complications of the surgery took some of the vibrant look out of her eyes. The surgery took some of her memory away, but she is still a fighter to me. It makes me sad when I think about what she is going through mentally. She noticed



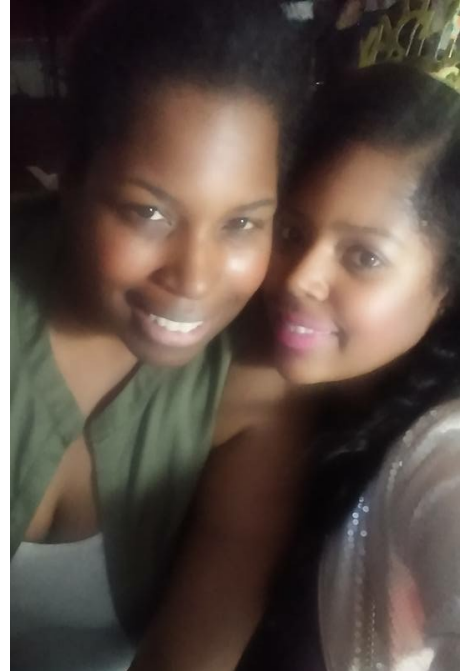
the change of her mind as well. It's hard for me to accept sometimes how she is now. I get frustrated when talking to her, but then I have to remember the mental change she went through so I can be more patient with her. I forget sometimes to call her every day, but I tell her I love her a lot and that I'm here for her. She is depressed at times, and when she is, I encourage her to continue to be strong. That's why I picked my mother as a "woman of courage." Attempting to live a normal life after two brain surgeries is courageous and fearless to me.



A Mother is Love **By Galeca McCain**

Growing up on the south side of Chicago in a four-bedroom home with 14 other family members, my mother learned how to become independent.

Unlike most kids her age, my mother's childhood was quickly shortened when a drunk driver crashed into the home, killing her older sister. Due to this tragic event, my grandmother became addicted to drugs, forcing my mother to grow up quickly. Eventually, my mother handled responsibilities she wasn't prepared for. Still a child herself at the age of 16, she was expecting her first baby. Considering the circumstances of being separated from my grandmother, there wasn't much guidance from her parents or support from her family. Even though my mother faced those odds, she was still determined to provide a great life for herself and her child.



Years later at the age of 26, my mother was now a wife and mother of three. My parents decided it was time for a change, relocating our family to Madison, Wisconsin, so we could have a great childhood. Like most young mothers, she still struggled financially and emotionally, and at one point she was also homeless. Despite all those hardships, she continued to strive for better. With her husband as support and three daughters as motivation, she was able to provide a home and financial stability with her new job working for the Madison school district.

After starting a new life with her kids and with her children's father, now her husband of 16 years, she expanded her family by adopting four more children, which happened to be her nieces and a great nephew. As I reflect on this time period, my mother was only 28 years old when she decided to welcome more children into our home. In my opinion, that took courage. As time went on, our family continued to grow, adding two more children to the family of six.

Still to this day, my mother is and always will be a woman of courage. More than likely, she is occupying her time with being a wife and mother, and in her spare time she is organizing and planning some type of event. As shocking as it sounds, she is probably preparing to deliver a eulogy. Those are just a few things she is doing today. As each day passes, she pushes herself to learn and do more. For that, I will always love her.

I have never met a woman vicious but still charming, a diva but a hustler, a disciplinarian but also nurturing. I have chosen my mother, Shantea, known as Diva Tea, as my woman of courage. All my life I have looked up to my mother, admiring her strength, envious of her ability to be outspoken and always straightforward. As she would say, "I will always give it to you raw, no chaser." Growing up, I have always known my mother to be perfect. Although we struggled and experienced hardships, she still made sure my siblings and I had a great childhood. As my mother continues to grow and learn, she continues to teach me. She continues to motivate me, and for that can't no woman alive take my mamma's place!



My Life's Greatest Teacher

By Hezouwe Walada

Winston S. Churchill, a British politician, once said, "Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts." But Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines "courage" as the ability to do something that frightens one. For me, being courageous is more than just having the ability to do something that others are afraid to do; you have to possess certain characteristics that benefit people around you. This is why as soon as I heard the term "courage," I thought about my grandmother Celestine. Her full name is Celestine Abley, and she was born in 1940 in Togo. After giving birth to my dad, she couldn't have another child, so my grandfather married another wife and told my grandmother to leave the house. Then, she took my five-year-old dad and walked to the nearest village. Life as a single mom was not easy for her. However, she fought and didn't give up. I think this hardship



made her a courageous woman. I look up to her to because her special qualities make her a Wonder Woman. She is wise, she is always willing to give without expecting anything in return, and she never stops fighting for her family and others who cannot fight for themselves.

My grandmother possesses wisdom, which is one of the traits of a woman of courage. In fact, before making any decisions, she always takes time to think. She examines the situation, asks questions, and then makes a judgment. I don't know if this feature has to do with the fact that she is a preacher, but she does not cease to amaze me in her decision making. Besides, I can remember many situations where her wisdom was put to the test. For example, one day she had a disagreement with a woman who was very disrespectful to her, by insulting and calling her names. But my grandmother didn't respond to any of her attacks. That day I was really surprised. Later, when I asked her why she didn't defend herself, she



responded that if I want to live longer on earth, I have to learn not to respond to people's attacks. It was the first lesson that I learned from her.

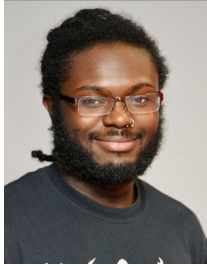
Another trait is her generosity. Celestine is like Mother Teresa, giving without any intention of getting something in return. As a matter of fact, due to that quality, everybody in the village knows her as "the helper." In addition, she likes to go fetch water at the stream for the disabled neighbors, volunteer on the farms, and share her meals with the helpless. She is a kind and compassionate woman who puts other people first before herself. I never understood why she did that until I came across one quote by Dennis Prager, an American radio talk show host and writer: "Goodness is about character—integrity, honesty, kindness, generosity, moral courage, and the like. More than anything else, it is about the way we treat other people." After reading that, I was able to understand why she was always helping others and treating them with respect and consideration. In point of fact, she told me to always treat others the way I wanted to be treated. Now, I begin to realize the reason why I like helping people. It is not random. I got it from my grandmother.

As they say, family comes before anything else. Celestine, my grandmother, is a fighter when it comes to her family. This trait is her best feature. Since my grandfather told her to leave his house, she has been on her own, trying to make ends meet at all cost. By the same token, she shared with me all the struggles that she faced while she was raising my dad. At some point she was even homeless, but that didn't stop her from overcoming these challenges and raising my dad in good condition. Today, my father has become a great man because of her. He is the father of three children, including myself, a loving husband, and the chief advisor of the village. Sometimes, I even ask myself how my grandmother did it alone. She told me she used to be an advocate for our villagers when the chief was violating their rights. Since she is a well-spoken person, she always defends those who cannot speak for themselves. In other words, my grandmother was like the "Maya Angelou" of our village.



Maya Angelou

In conclusion, I can proudly say that my grandmother is a woman of courage who taught me to work hard, to care about other people, and to give without expecting things in the return. One of her quotes that I live by every day is, "Never go to bed with anger in your heart." Today, she is an eighty-year-old woman who lives with my dad and enjoys when I visit her once a year. I am honored that she is my grandmother. Without her presence in my life, I would not be the person I am today.



My Dear Mother
By James Horton Jr.

Throughout my life I have not met anyone as kind and as forgiving as my dear mother. No matter what I said to her, did to her, or didn't do for her, she always had it in her heart to forgive. Maybe that's just because I'm her son, but I choose to believe that's just who she is. My mother has made some tough decisions. Through those decisions, she made choices to put my sister in the best position she possible could. She left her family and friends in Chicago to move to Madison in order to provide my sister and me a better life. She left my father after a decade and some of marriage to protect mainly my sister but for herself and me, too. After leaving my father, my mother decided to go back to school in order to get certificates in Cosmetology and Massage Therapy. This gave her a way to provide for us doing something she enjoyed and found interesting.

My sister and I were born in Chicago, Illinois, but we were raised in Madison. The idea to move came soon after my sister was born. My mom did not want to raise a girl in the dangerous streets of Chicago. My mom's family did not like the idea of her moving away with my father to raise her kids in a strange city. However, my mom did not budge. She was determined to give my sister and me lives where we did not have to get involved with gang activity, drugs, and the overall melancholy vibe that emanated from the south side of Chicago. I was only two years old when we moved, so personally I don't remember the move too much. Knowing what really goes down in Chicago, I am grateful that my mom made the decision to move. Chicago may be a place flourishing with history and culture, but to be brutally honest, I don't know how well I would have done in school or if I would have been able to stay out of trouble if I was raised in Chicago.

There is no such thing as a perfect relationship. I know that. I'm sure my mom and dad knew that. Humans are not perfect, and we all have dark things we secretly deal with. With my father, it was alcohol. In my earliest memories, I remember my mom and dad always being happy with each other, smiling and enjoying each other's company, but as I got older I noticed their attitudes soured towards each other until they just couldn't stand being in the same room together. My father may not admit it, but the way he raised my sister and me was very conservative and old school, with the 'money maker makes the rules' type of household. What my mom



said did not hold any weight if my father thought differently. This would bring many arguments and fights. The main thing they couldn't agree on was how to raise a teenaged daughter—parental boundaries, what she could wear, who she could talk to, where she could go, and that type of thing. The disagreements continued until both my sister and my mom felt my father was not productive to my sister's mental health. My mom moved out; it was a quick arrangement. There were no drawn-out goodbyes; it was just like that.

After my mom left my father, she decided to go back to school in order to get certificates, first for Cosmetology and then Massage Therapy. My mom was very nervous about going back to school. She told me she had not been to school since the 90s. Nevertheless, she still went. It was tough for her, revisiting subjects like biology and math. She never quit, though. She got help—my help if she needed it, help from her professors, and help from classmates. She was not afraid to ask for help if she needed it. That's a quality that I think is often overlooked. She wanted the certificate in Cosmetology because she has always been doing hair—my sister's hair, my grandmother's hair, and her friends' hair—so she thought it'd only make sense to get certified and then maybe start a business and work in a salon. After she got the certificate for Cosmetology, she quickly went back to school to get a certificate in Massage Therapy. Massage Therapy always interested my mom, so steaming with confidence from getting a certificate in Cosmetology, she believed she could do the same thing again. She's currently sitting on her certificates waiting for the right opportunity to come her way.

In conclusion, my mom is courageous for leaving the known in Chicago for the relatively unknown in Madison in order to provide her kids with a safe city to grow in, for taking herself, my sister, and me away from my loving but nonetheless toxic father, and for building up the courage to go back to school after so many years of being away and getting not one but two certificates.





Keeper of Dreams: Deacon Gloria Ladson-Billings **By Joyce Johnson**

Deacon Gloria Ladson-Billings inspires me as a woman of courage because of her work as an educator/author, her role as a mother/wife, and her work as a community activist. She is also the only female deacon at Mt. Zion Baptist Church, where we both attend 8 AM services.

Gloria Ladson-Billings is a retired teacher and professor of education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She spent over ten years working as a teacher and consultant in the Philadelphia Public School System. She also wrote a book that I read called *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Teachers* (1994) for teachers working with African American children.



She has been married over 50 years. I asked Deacon Gloria Ladson-Billings how her marriage was successful. She said, "Even though I'm a Baptist and my husband is a Catholic, we share a common ground: there is only one God." She also said to me, "I have raised my children into adulthood, so I now focus on my grandchildren. I teach them to keep the word 'can't' out of their vocabulary. It's important to get a good education, for it can take one far and beyond one's wildest dreams in life."

While Deacon Gloria Ladson-Billings attended college during the late 1900s, she also became (and is still) active in a sorority called the "Alpha Kappa Alpha" (AKA). She told me that she has traveled all over the world. She also is recognized as a scholar internationally.



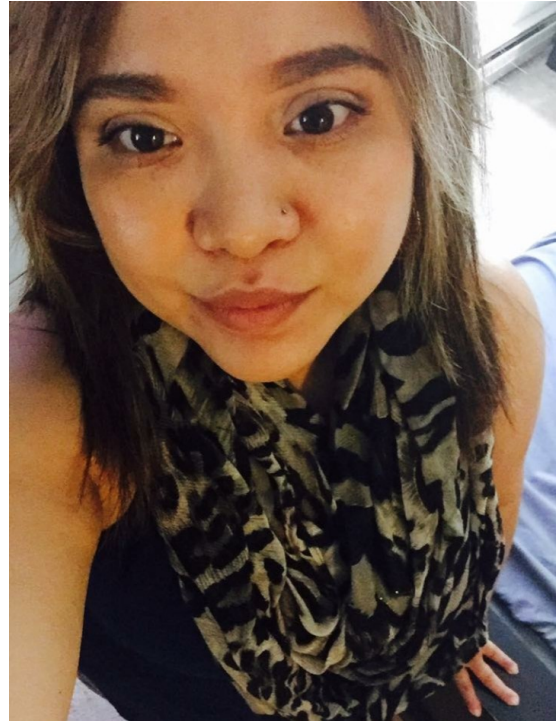
To me, Deacon Gloria Ladson-Billings is a woman of courage being skillfully able to juggle college, marriage, sorority, parenting, duties as a deacon at church, being a writer, and a world traveler together and gracefully, I might add. She has had an impact on my life spiritually, financially, and emotionally. She also encouraged me to go back to school and get my college degree.



A Woman Who Falls and Gets Back Up

By Juan Carlos Abrajan

There are times where life hits you and hits you hard, and you have to decide if you let yourself get knocked out or fight back to move on. I live with a woman that life gave low blows to, but she found a way to recover. This woman is my wife, and one way or another she was able to fight back. I met Lilibeth in 2003 in middle school, and we became friends. Then she went back to Mexico a couple of times, and in 2010 we started living together. She symbolizes the word courage to me because she was able to face the negatives that occurred in her pregnancy, she did what was necessary to get her GED despite having two toddlers and being pregnant with her third child, and she earned her teacher's assistant certificate while balancing homework and housework. She had many ups and downs, but with her courage and bravery she was able to overcome them.



In February of 2010, Lilibeth was twenty and living in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, when she found out she was pregnant. For her it was a big surprise, and then she went to talk to her boyfriend about her pregnancy. He did not want to take the responsibility and walked away. She was blown away by his decision. She doesn't really like to talk about this part of her life, but when she told me I could see in her eyes that she was really sad about her ex's decision. It really hit her hard. Then Lili talked with her mother about her situation, and her mother supported her. Her mother told her to come and live with her in Madison. Lilibeth accepted her help and came to Madison. When she was already living with her mother, she went to the clinic to check up on the progress of her pregnancy. The doctors did her first ultrasound, and they found out that Lili's baby had a cleft lip and palate. When she received this news, she became depressed. She got stressed out because she thought her baby had the cleft lip and palate because of something she did. Her eyes turned tearful, but she resisted the urge to cry. Somehow she got the strength to move on and be in good health for her baby. Now that baby, named Dylan, is a healthy child of eight years old, with his lip and palate repaired.

Lilibeth wanted to continue her education but could not start a career because nothing that she studied in Mexico was valid here in Madison. In 2013, she decided to study for her GED even though she had two kids and was pregnant with a third. Now she had to take care of two toddlers, be a housewife, and take Dylan to his follow up appointments for his cleft lip and palate. Apart from taking care of two little children, she had other reasons why it was difficult

for her to go to school. She did not know how to drive, so transportation was sometimes a problem, and I couldn't leave work to take her. My mom helped her babysit our children, but there were times when she couldn't. When she had to miss school, she had to do twice as much homework, but with her enthusiasm she managed to keep up. With all of these challenges that were presented to her, she still managed to get her GED.

Time passed after she completed her GED, and she stayed as a home mom for a while until she wanted to work. She worked in a couple of places until her third baby was due. Then in August of 2015 Lilibeth started working at Head Start, now called Reach Dane. In this job, she had the opportunity to go to school in order to obtain her teaching assistant certificate. Lili took advantage of this opportunity. There were two long years where she was a mother, a wife, a worker, and a student. There were times when school was getting difficult for her. Sometimes she had to stay up late to finish her homework. Other times the kids were not being cooperative, and she had to read around yelling kiddos. She had to make meals for the kids and me (I also helped her in whatever I could because at that time I was working two jobs; so don't think I was taking the role of a Macho man!). There were times when she wanted to give up, but there I was to provoke her, bring her courage back again, and not let her give up. In this stage of her life in school, she showed a lot of courage and achieved her goal.



I feel very proud of my wife because she has shown herself and me that, with confidence and wanting to succeed, anything is possible. I like that she is very independent and has the courage to accomplish her goals. I always tell her jokingly that it would have been nice if she would have finished her schooling before having kids; that way, she would have begun making the big bucks, and I wouldn't have to be working a lot. Finally, I like how she is because if someday life takes me out of this world, I know she will be fine and will manage to make our children successful. No matter what obstacles life puts in front of her, she will be able to overcome them with her characteristic, "*Si me caigo me levanto!*" [If I fall, I will get up.] This is why Lilibeth symbolizes a woman of courage to me.



When Flowers Grow from Tears

By Kayasia Blake

Courage is defined as strength in the face of pain. As a child, I never saw my mother cry. She would always tell my brother and me that crying never changes your problem but only prolongs the time you have to deal with it. At the time, that was my definition of courage. Subconsciously, my mother was teaching me to push through my troubles. Little did I know that she had faced so many troubles of her own. Virgie Bester is a woman of courage because she has overcome her adversities, loved after tragedy, and succeeded against her statistics.

Born as the eighth of my grandparents' 12 children, Virgie learned early on about working with what she had. She shared a room with at least three of her siblings her whole childhood! Imagine living in a house full of people and never having time to yourself. While both of my grandparents worked, they made barely enough to support 14 people. This meant that hand-me-downs were frequent and that her parents could not go to every chorus event or parent-teacher conference at school. Even with a life as hectic as Virgie's was, her parents instilled in her that education was important. My grandmother didn't finish high school but wanted a different life for her children. Virgie ended up graduating with honors from high school and had plans of completing college as well. My mother had won half the battle, and she pushed on with the support of her family.

My mother and father met when she was 16 and he was 19. They met through mutual friends: he was my aunt's brother-in-law. Falling in love quickly, they established themselves as a couple. My dad escorted her to prom. Because he was from a small city eight hours away, he quickly became a regular at my grandparents' house. Shortly after graduating, my mother became pregnant at 19. She dropped out of college to have me. She realized quickly that caring for a small child was not easy but not before giving birth to my brother sixteen months later. Still, Virgie made no excuses. She worked two jobs to take care of us, not wanting to depend on my father for the well-being of us all. My father was a good person who made difficult decisions in order to provide. In hindsight, those decisions took him away from his family. After going to prison for the second time, he was different. Being institutionalized



changed a fun-loving, goofy, caring man into someone cold and distant. Not even a year out of prison, my father was murdered. Distraught, my mother held onto us tightly. Years after his death, she worked overtime to not succumb to the events that plagued her life. Her own family distanced themselves, not wanting to be involved in my father's ways. Alone, Virgie moved to Madison for a fresh start not only for herself but also for her children. Losing the love of her life changed her, but it did not change the love that she had to live on.

At only 27, my mom had already been through more storms than most people her age. She made a decision that she wouldn't struggle forever. Tired of being away from us, my mom quit her job in retail and started working for an insurance company to make a better life for us. She wanted to be able to send us to school and be there when we got home. My mom knew she was our role model and wanted to set the right example. She signed back up for school, and for four years she worked every Wednesday toward finishing her bachelor's degree that she started so many years ago. I used to watch my mom walk through the door so exhausted but still ask us about our day. If my mom didn't have a sitter, she would take us to the library with her, and we all did homework together. Virgie never gave up. She set the example.

Virgie Bester never made excuses for the twists and turns the path of life took her through. Through her trials and tribulations, my mother taught me that you can grow from anything. While our troubles were not the same, I adapted her strong will to get through. Even with me, my mother never gave up on me. There were times that I'd given up on myself, and my mom would continue to be my rock.

She never let me go off the deep end. She continues to learn from her experiences and shares the wealth with others. I'm lucky enough to experience this wealth on a daily basis. As a child, I defined courage as someone who didn't cry, but now I know the opposite to be true. I've learned that not letting others see your tears is different from not having them at all. My mom defined her own courage and continues to thrive. As she always says, "Tears can't change your situation. What you do afterwards is what counts."





The Courage You Give By La'Cee Webster

"It was September 1977 in Virginia, and summer had just ended. I had graduated, and now it

was time to go. The sun was shining bright and high in the blue sky. My dad, mom, two brothers, and I were piled in the light green 1974 station wagon. We were leaving Mclean, Virginia, and heading to Madison, Wisconsin, pulling a U-Haul behind us. It was a long day and a half that seemed to take forever. I'll never forget!" says my mother,

reflecting on her childhood. Dawne is a woman of courage because she was

strong enough to move and adapt to a new environment, she started school and pursued a career while maintaining the responsibilities of a mother, and she was able to overcome hardship and reinvent herself later in life.



Dawne moved to Wisconsin while still young, just out of high school, not knowing what to expect. While her siblings were already in Madison, Wisconsin attending school, she chose to finish up her last year of high school in Virginia before making the big move. She sacrificed her comfort zone by leaving Mclean, Virginia, where the community was very connected and everyone knew each other in the neighborhood. She had to leave friends who were more like family behind. She adjusted to many changes, including climate. In Virginia, she and her siblings had many pets that were kept outside. They had two or three dogs because my grandfather would hunt, and they had a gerbil and a cat. So when my mother came to Wisconsin, she had to adjust to this different lifestyle with pets living inside with their owners and even the houses being so close together. In Virginia, it was more suburban because there was so much more land.

My mother is hard working. While balancing the responsibilities of becoming a mother and being in a relationship with my father, Anthony, she was able to maintain her career, although there were many obstacles. While first working toward developing a career in healthcare, she attended MATC for a year, taking a coding class and a secretarial medical program. Most of her classmates were white, and mostly women, due to being in the secretarial field. There may have been a few people of color, but the majority was white. Coming from the south where most people she saw were of color, she found Madison's whiteness intimidating at times. She then took on a part-time job working at Home Depot, maintaining childcare and after school programs for me to make ends meet. She ensured I was taken care of and didn't go without. Therefore, if we were ever struggling, I wouldn't have known at all.



Starting over and reinventing herself was a huge turning point for her. It was like having the rug swept from right under her feet. After she ended a 13-year relationship with my father, a lot of things changed. This change wasn't easy for the both of us, but she always assured me nothing was my fault, and it had nothing to do with me. While only being in the third grade at the time, I had a lot of questions, like any child would, and she was prepared for them all. I wanted to see my parents together again under the same roof as they had been. However, I didn't understand it was more complicated than that. My mom,

now a single parent, had to adjust to this new, overwhelming change and figure things out as far as maintaining all the bills financially. She now had to be thinking two steps ahead in every situation in order to stay on top of things and not fall short, as well as having a backup plan. She later reconnected with a previous friend she had dated years ago, but she lost him later to cancer. She also needed to adjust to a new job after the elimination of her position after 24 years. Overcoming these hardships built her character. Getting through times as tough as these, she never gave up or lost her faith in herself. Furthermore, she plans to continue her education by going back to Lakeland College, where she had been previously attending before these hardships occurred. So in Fall or Winter semester of 2019, she will pick up where she left off with Business Administration. For now, she is still working at Unity Point Health Meriter.

My mom has impacted my life in many ways, pushing me to my full



potential. Anytime I want to give up, I can imagine this “look” she’s giving me, cutting her eyes at me and saying, “Things in life worth having don’t come easy.” She has always instilled in me the importance of education and working hard, especially if I want to get somewhere and be something in life. I was accepted into the PEOPLE program in the sixth grade. I remember crying and wanting to drop out, but she pushed me to stick with it. She saw the value and how it would open so many doors for me. It required a lot of dedication, but I didn’t want to put forth the effort because I wanted my freedom. Opportunities like those weren’t easy to come by. To this day, she encourages me to further my education because education is power! She encouraged me to apply for the Odyssey Program as well and wants the best for me in every aspect. I want the best for myself as well. Lastly, my mom was by my side the entire time after I lost my father to cancer in 2015, the most painful situation I had to go through. It still feels so unreal to this day. So I honestly couldn’t pick a more courageous woman than my mom to write about; she is truly my rock! I am forever grateful I was blessed with a strong mother to look up to and to be influenced by in my life. She’s always, always been there for me through thick and thin. She was there for me whether I was right or wrong (educating me on my wrongs!). Most of all, she was there for me even when I thought I lost myself.





Lolita's Valiant Soul **By J. Luis Perez-Olguin**

As I cleaned bathrooms and mopped floors five years ago, I never dreamed my boss would end up being an inspirational mentor to me, embodying the idea of courage. Lolita has not only become a mentor, but her fortitude has given her the ability to help others and give charitable donations. I consider myself very fortunate because without her help it would have been very difficult to finish my degree at Madison College. Based on the little I've gotten to know about her in the last six years, I can testify that she is a person with a lot of courage. She owns two businesses, a janitorial company and rental properties. I worked for her janitorial business for a few years, and I still help her from time to time with fixing things around her rental properties. She is a hard worker who is the first at work and the last one to leave, and who's not afraid to be on her knees cleaning a toilet or using a sledgehammer to knock down a wall. As a cancer survivor and mother of a daughter with bipolar disorder, she brings that same energy and resilience to her personal life, even finding the time to help me through my own rough times. I consider Lolita a woman of courage because she has not only found time to be a mentor to me, but she has endured her own health issues and her daughter's bipolar disorder while becoming a successful businesswoman.

She has managed to build and run two businesses on her own. She holds a master's degree in business from UW-Madison. However, she hardly mentions she has such a degree, as she believes that telling people she has a Master's in Business does not mean she is smarter or better than others. Lolita possesses a great deal of knowledge as a businesswoman, and her commitment to nonstop learning, hard work, and being well-informed reminds me of Socrates' words, "The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing." Lolita usually gets up around 4 or 4:30 in the morning to start her day. I know her success hasn't come easy for her, and as she says, "You need to have the desire and be consistent if you are to reach your goals, whatever they are." I believe there is no magic formula, but her dedication, perseverance, and hard-work has given her success as a businesswoman in a male-dominated environment.

Furthermore, Lolita has not only endured surviving cancer, but she has also gone through hard times in dealing with her daughter's bipolar disorder. I believe that being a cancer survivor has made Lolita a strong woman. The impact of finding out she had cancer and the struggles she had to go through while dealing with the treatment gave her a new perspective on her body. For example, she now understands how body image can affect self-esteem; it can be a life changing experience that can trigger fear, depression, and anxiety. However, only a woman of courage such as Lolita could get out of the quagmire. Besides dealing with cancer in her life, she had also the challenge of raising a daughter with bipolar disorder. Ever since her daughter was diagnosed with bipolar disorder at a young age, Lolita needed to have a lot of courage to face it and be strong for her daughter without much support. In some of our conversations, Lolita has told me about some of her daughter's manic episodes and how she learned to deal with those moments. I have experienced first-hand one of the daughter's episodes when Lolita

and I visited her a couple summers ago. Thanks to our conversations about it and her honesty, I was somehow prepared for such an experience. Lolita has been a guide and a mentor to me in many ways--her courage, mentoring, and willingness to help me further my education have given me the desire to exert myself for more in life.

Moreover, she always minds her business and doesn't really get in other people's lives. She uses the saying "not my circus, not my monkeys" when she doesn't want to know about others' lives. She likes to carry on with her life and her daily chores on a professional and personal level. However, she is still sensitive to others and always willing to extend a hand for support. I have come to admire Lolita for her way of giving back to others, since she is very familiar with the struggles one faces daily. Furthermore, she was a big help for me to go back to college to pursue my higher education—she gave me a place to live and helped me finance my education. She has told me several times she sees good in me and how I am always striving for more. I believe; therefore, she has taken the time and energy to help me and to mentor me as well. She senses my desire for more and wants me to keep going, to never stop. Hence, I consider her not just my mentor but also a person from whom I can learn a lot personally and professionally. She told me once, before I started my studies at Madison College, how education will change the way I think, feel, and see things. It reminded me of Frederick Douglass, who wrote, "I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. It had giving me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out." The more we read and learn, the harder it is to understand why some people set to serve only a certain group of people and do not care about the whole.

In conclusion, Lolita has been a role model for me because she is not afraid to be unique. She is a good leader and demonstrates confidence. Also, she is a single mother who has struggled with her daughter's bipolar disorder and a hard-working woman who runs two successful businesses all on her own. She still has found the time to give back to the community by helping others like myself. I feel very fortunate to have crossed paths with Lolita and for having her as a friend and mentor. Although we are not connected by blood, a unique and higher connection unites us as family. Therefore, I have chosen Lolita as my woman of courage, a model woman I have always looked for. She does not only strive to be a better version of herself, but she has also taught me to show respect and concern for others and have humility to admit my mistakes. She is not only an inspiration to me but also my mentor.





The Preacher's Wife

By Martina Mitchell

Walking down the streets of New York City on a cool fall night, Renee was homeless with her mother and sister, yet again. They were put out due to her mother's ongoing drug addiction. Having nowhere to go, they went from house to house, being met with the same response: "Sorry, we don't have room." Vividly remembering that night as an eight-year-old girl, Renee says that in that moment that she wanted more in life and to never be in that predicament again! Renee is a woman of courage because she overcame poverty and addiction and became a preacher's wife.

Growing up in Harlem, N.Y., watching her drug-addicted parents fighting and tearing each other apart all the time wasn't easy for Renee. Being the oldest, she usually had the responsibility for calling the police. Enduring abuse, her father going in and out of jail, and constant moving around made Renee feel trapped in a cycle of dysfunction. Early on, Renee began to realize she needed a way out and decided school would be her ticket. Never wanting to miss a day, she did whatever it took to get to school, including washing clothes in the bathtub and hanging them out to dry on the radiator so that she and her sisters had clean clothes.

By the time Renee reached high school, she found herself entertaining the same behavior patterns of addiction modeled by her parents. Although drinking and partying excessively, she was still sure of one thing: she didn't want to get pregnant and stuck in New York! While out walking one day, she thought to herself, there must be a better way. Soon after, she encountered a street preacher proclaiming the gospel. Though never raised in church, Renee remembers being intrigued by the message of salvation. It was then she decided to join the military and get out of New York for good! It was in the military, stationed in Germany, that Renee met her husband, Dale. Despite Dale being an alcoholic as well, Renee proposed marriage. Now married and still drinking profusely, the couple saw their lives spiraling out of control.

Dale found himself on a park bench one early morning, holding a brown paper bag concealing the liquor he was drinking. Tired of how he was living, he uttered this prayer: "Lord, if you are real, show yourself to me." Two days later, some men knocked on their door and invited him to church, where he got saved. He encouraged his wife to attend. Although hesitant at first, Renee finally agreed and got saved, too! Dale left the military ranked as "sergeant." He and Renee joined Bible School and graduated with a Ministers of Theology license. They went on preaching the gospel in many different states until finally ending up in Madison eight years ago as the new pastor of my church.

Renee's parents both died of AIDS due to their drug abuse. They never made it out, but she did! The message of hope that comes through my woman of courage's life is that anyone can overcome the cycle of poverty and addiction. Now a minister's wife and mother of two sons, Renee uses her background to connect with people from all walks of life, building bridges of understanding and trust with everyone she meets. In my eight years of knowing Renee, she has become more than the pastor's wife to me. She has become a friend and confidante. It does not matter what I go through: she never ceases to see the God in me. Renee's outgoing and fun-loving personality keeps me laughing, but her determined and earnest wisdom keeps me reflecting and growing. She entreats me freely to be me. I see in her the epitome of who I aspire to be! Renee Walls is my woman of courage.





Rise, Fall and Rebound of a Queen

By Monica Mims

It was Sunday, September 1958, at the peak of the civil rights movement; the US president was Dwight D. Eisenhower. In the month of September alone, Governor J. Lindsay Almond, Jr. of Virginia was shutting down schools left and right if they forced integration, Governor Faubus shut down all four high schools in Little Rock, Governor Almond closed one in Front Royal, Virginia, and the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states may not use evasive measures to avoid desegregation. Momma was born at home on a cotton plantation in Marks, Mississippi; she was the second of her mother's eight daughters and one son. She had a great deal of responsibilities and household chores by the age of six because she had three younger siblings to help look after. Momma had started mothering many years before having her own children because the last two of her eight siblings and her only brother were born in 1968: a set of fraternal twins, girl and boy, Cherry and Barry. In her lifetime, Momma suffered many heartbreaks and traumatic experiences before her rise to self- realization and self-love.

Grandma was diagnosed with breast cancer shortly after the birth of her twins. Then she moved to Chicago with her nine children and without her husband. Her move was to be closer to family for support and better medical attention. Momma said that the move was great, but unfortunately, shortly thereafter, she experienced her first of many heartbreaks. Her only brother and youngest sibling passed away from a sudden illness. "It happened so fast," she exclaimed. "One day he had a fever, and he was dead the next," just after his first birthday. And within two years, Momma and her seven remaining siblings became orphans. Their mother had lost her battle with breast cancer, and their dad couldn't be found. Momma and her sisters were "fortunate" enough to find someone to adopt all eight of them and keep them together; then, the west side 'Henry Horner Projects' is where they were raised. That "fortune" came with a childhood of abuse and missed opportunity, but they survived... Right?

Momma gave birth to the first of her four daughters in 1979; she was, of course, very well acquainted with the west side of Chicago by then. It was during the rise of the crack cocaine epidemic, and my gang- related parents were no strangers to the streets or the hustle. They became one of the most well-known couples on the west side. They'd have small house parties and card games sometimes; those nights were especially fun because we got to stay up late, and we'd often have cousins or friends there to keep us company. We played video games (remember the Atari?), the smell of weed and food filled the air, and oldies music was turned all the way up. On the other hand, my parents were robbed and raided often. When Momma wasn't on pins-n-needles from that, she was putting up with my dad's cheating and physical abuse. She eventually managed to drop his ass. My stepfather was a far different man and possibly the coolest guy that I've ever known. He and Momma had their differences, but he loved us girls to no end. After they broke up, there were only a few other men in Momma's life, the next no better than the first or last.

Momma moved us to Madison to escape our misery, but it still caught up to us, eventually. After selling drugs for so long, it was only a matter of time before she started doing them and became an addict, too. Her first prison stay in 1994 was only a few months long but felt like a lifetime. The next was in 2003. Momma was facing a 96-year maximum bid due to a heroin overdose that led to her arrest. She was sentenced to sixteen and a half years in the Wisconsin State Prison Corrections System. Then she was diagnosed with stage-4 lymphoma after just six years in. It was especially devastating for us because there was nothing that we could do to take care of or help her. Our visits were very limited because of her health. She sometimes spent weeks at a time at the hospital in Madison, but we couldn't see or talk to her during those stays. When we were able to see and talk to her, she assured us that she was all right, and her uplifting spirit put my mind at ease. She healed well and is now stronger than she has ever been.

Momma has been living a very nice, relaxing lifestyle since her prison release a few years ago. She has a nice group of friends that she visits with almost daily, attends a dance class every Friday morning, and just started working a part-time job at a woodwork shop in Milwaukee. Momma is my woman of courage because of her resilience; I've seen her endure more than her share of heartbreak and struggles. No matter how hard it was or is, she always rebounds with a smile. She is my woman of courage mostly because of her amazing ability to raise my sisters and me to be strong, educated, and self-reliant women.





Fearless **By Muhammad Abdullah**

My woman of courage is Dr. Mary Ellen Brady-Jones-Shadd-Strong-Gaines. She was my former employer when I was a supervisor in her marketing company, Reach America, Inc. She was the mother of one of my oldest friends, media mogul Jerry Jones, and a benefactor.

Mary Ellen was fearless, the way Wynton Marsalis described jazz bandleader Art Blakely. Mary Ellen was a giant and a lady in a world dominated by men. She wasn't afraid to go anywhere in the U.S. as well as abroad, and she traveled to Egypt, other parts of Africa, and the Middle East. She was one of the smartest businesswomen I ever knew personally. Mary Ellen started and ran her own spice company when she was in her seventies: Gugi's Global Foods (the name "Gugi" was a term of endearment from her grandchildren), with Miracle Blend Seasoning and Aunt Cora's Creole Spice Blend.

Mary Ellen had a distinguished look, and when she looked at you, you had the feeling she could see into your heart or right through you. When I first started working for her in Chicago circa 1984, she was the editor and publisher of *Black Family Magazine*. She walked up to me, looked into my eyes, and said, "Boy, do you have any money?" "No, ma'am," I said, and it was like she already knew. She handed me a fifty dollar bill. From that point on, whenever I saw her she found a way to put money in my pocket.

Mary Ellen also owned her own marketing company and had contracts to deliver product samples for Purex, Duncan Hines, and Proctor & Gamble door to door. She wanted to take the business



beyond the Midwest to Atlanta, Georgia, where she owned a large house and a number of rental properties. Some of the companies objected, telling her that they had a bad experience when they sampled in Atlanta neighborhoods. For example, when the samples were placed on one person's door, others would come along and remove them, destroying their ability to get feedback from the consumer. "No" to Mary Ellen just meant "not right now." She devised a brilliant plan to



overcome their objections about sample thieves. She proposed distributing them through churches as parishioners left church. That became my job: to go to every church in metropolitan Atlanta, meet with the clergy or their secretary, and make my proposal to distribute the samples at the end of the Sunday service as parishioners were leaving. We would hire one per one hundred members and pay them eight dollars an hour to help set up, man each exit, and pass a packet consisting of a cupcake, tube of toothpaste, a bottle of mouthwash, and coupons for each item, which would serve as a market tool when used at area grocers. My most famous encounter was when I met the late Reverend Ralph David

Abernathy, a close friend and companion of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., at his church.



I met Mary Ellen in 1984 through her son, Jerrel Jones, who has been a friend of mine for over 40 years. Jerrel went to California and sat with her during her final two weeks. He said he had started a project with an Obama family T-shirt business right up to her final days. Jerrel said her last words were, "I wish I could do it all over again." Mary Ellen knew everybody who was somebody—presidents, ambassadors, governors, mayors, senators, congresspersons, entertainers, actors, civil rights activists, and clergy. She had a lot of wit and witticisms. Classic Mary Ellen, this one sticks with me. After becoming a millionaire in Chicago and Atlanta and buying and fixing up property, she once said to me, "You can open up a stand selling watermelon sandwiches in Chicago and get rich." She was something special, and I'm proud to have known her.



Rita Warford, Jazz Star
By NatuRa Warford

My woman of courage has traveled the world: Cuba, Germany, Japan, Canada, Africa, and several states within the United States! She has hosted fish fries with live jazz bands at her home and has sung at the Jazz Fest several years at the Petrillo Band Shell at Grant Park in Chicago.

My woman of courage has been interviewed on CBS Chicago. She was one of the founding musicians in the AACM (Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians) in Chicago. She is a mother, teacher, daughter, and advocate. As a child, I remember going to several performances, some tributes to Billie Holiday, and some plays she was in with starring roles.



One of the things I'm most proud of is an article from the 1960s where this woman was being carried away by the police during a civil rights march.

However, before, after, and during these highlights, she endured domestic violence, depression, and interactions that come within a dysfunctional family and surroundings. My mother was a single mother, a domestic abuse survivor, went to prison for a crime she didn't commit, overcame substance abuse, traveled the world, and held music and art workshops in Chicago schools and communities, but I

think her toughest battle was to find balance as a parent and to be with her son (my brother) through the final stages of his life.

My woman of courage is my mom, Rita Warford.





Picking Up the Pieces **By Queeneice Creamer**

Isha Jackson is my woman of courage because she survived a less than normal childhood being a young single mother and continues to stay strong and never let anything bring her down.

Isha lost her mother at the age of five. She and her two older brothers were then raised by their father. At the age of 15, she fell in love with an older man and gave birth to her first child shortly after. Even though she became a single teenaged mother, she didn't let that stop her from getting her education and getting her first apartment at the age of 18. Several years later, she lost her father to a car accident.

She has managed to raise two talented, smart, respectful young men. She continued to do what she had to do to survive without the support system most of us take for granted. Even with her sister being murdered just last week, she still finds a way to pick up the pieces and take care of business for her loved ones.

This is a woman who has always reminded me that I am a beautiful, intelligent person who deserves the best. Honestly, I often lose sight of this, but she is always there to pick me up and encourage me. To pick someone up even though you may be falling apart is a true act of courage.





A Black Woman and Educated Queen, Mrs. Eleanor Jean Cary
By Quishanta Cary

On September 2, 1939, in Chicago, Illinois, God created the most beautiful, caramel-complexioned baby named Eleanor Jean Jones. She was raised on the Southside of Chicago on 45th and Forrestville. She was a Presbyterian who sang in the choir at Greater Walters Church. Many would say that she had a strict upbringing, like she couldn't leave the yard, had to speak to friends through the fence, and couldn't have any friends over. When she went to school, she talked about how segregated it was for kids when it came to parties, dances, proms, etc. Also, she was able to meet with the singers and bands before and during times when they came to her school's special occasions. There were three important life lessons that my mother instilled in me: strength, wisdom, and understanding.

When she was married to my daddy and they had five children, she would say, "It takes a lot of strength to be married and to be a mother." She showed it took a lot of strength in you when finding out that your husband has cheated on you and dealing with the type of living situation you and your kids were in. The strength she had to have was not divorcing him for cheating on her and leaving her. Instead, from the time I was young they just slept in separate rooms. Their religion didn't believe in divorcing, or maybe it was just that she didn't want him to pay child support. Her strength as a mother was priceless! She showed that there was nothing she wouldn't do for her children. Even though we had no hot water or heat in the house, she'd heat up some water on the hot plate for my youngest brother and me to freshen up with before she did. She was deep into church and taught me that it's wonderful to go to church as a family because you learn about God together. Another of her strengths was that she always encouraged me, saying, "Never give up, no matter what life may bring." I live by that until this day.

Eleanor had tons of wisdom. She had a famous saying when it came to relationships: "There are more fish in the sea." In any of my relationships when I would get hurt and upset, I would just get so vengeful and have evil thoughts of hurting someone. But I would think back to what my mommy said, which helped a whole lot. I would just hear her say, "If he could go for someone else, just grab another pole and the right fish will come along." She also instilled in me the importance of being an independent woman and raising a family, too. I remember she'd say, "Even though you may have a man who cheated and/or physically hurt you, you can still show how independent a woman you are by still being able to raise your children." This beautiful queen, Eleanor, showed that even though my daddy cheated and left her, she refused to go back home. She showed that she didn't need no man. She showed that she's her own independent woman who is able to raise her children but in a better living situation. Ever since I can remember, we always



went to church as a family because learning, reading, praising, and singing together to God is such a beautiful thing. I'll never forget one day I asked my mommy, "What does it mean to have church within you?" She said, "Quincy, church is inside of you. See, we as God's children go to the House of the Lord. But we always have church in us!" I guess that's why I've always liked going to church because of the way I was brought up, singing in the choir. I even took my daughter to church with me, and she was even in the choir.

The last type of courage this phenomenal child of God taught me that I'll forever take with me and instill in my daughter until my last breath is her understanding. When things were not always going my way or as I had planned, she would help me to understand that I need to have faith, keep looking up, and hold on. My mommy, this phenomenal woman, never lost faith in what she was doing, even when she became ill and had to stay in the hospital, from which she never returned home. She also taught me that life won't always be roses and sunshine and that I won't like it, but remember these three things: Faith, Keep Looking Up, and Hold On! I teach and instill these three things in my daughter. When it came to time management, her saying was always, "Stop rushing things because you may still forget." She, she would never rush, and in return it helped her to stay on track. . . . Her technique on how to budget was simple: she would show, teach, and break it all down for me in detail. It would show me how she was able to get extra things after paying the bills. . . . She took me to open my very first account and helped me make a chart so I could see how I'm budgeting my money. By doing that now, I also show my daughter and take her with me.

This sensational woman, my beautiful mommy, has instilled and taught me a lot of other kinds of wisdom that I'll continue to remember so I can instill them in and show my daughter. One thing I'll never forget is how just so angelic and soft my mother's voice was when she sang! It always



would bring tears to my eyes because she sang so wonderfully! Another thing I'll never forget is how happy she'd get when we'd share special occasions together, giving and exchanging gifts, etc. Out of all the gifts bought and made, she loved the picture of her children together and all her grandchildren the most! My best friend, mentor, and mommy, Mrs. Eleanor Jean Cary, left this black and dark hole in my soul on Easter Sunday night on April 23, 2000. Following her in death were my other two best friends, my daddy and my oldest sister. Losing my other two best friends forever, I felt like my heart and spirit fell into an abyss! I can still hear all three of their voices and laughter, just as you would any other living person. Everyone says that my daughter and I look just like my mother, and that's very comforting. It still won't stop my spirit from crying, my soul from dying continually, and my heart from descending further and further into a black hole.



A Mother's Love Never Ends:

"You will always be my baby no matter what your age is"

By Ricardo Isaías Marroquin Santos

At the age of 16, *mi madre* kept one secret away from everybody but especially her *padres*, although she couldn't hide it for long. She lived in a *vecindad*, a Mexican-style home where multiple generations of our *familia* shared a large house with a courtyard in the middle. However, her secret wasn't safe. Very unexpectedly from far away her cousin, Elliot, asked, "Hey, Silvia, are you expecting!?" Since her *padres* were standing next to her, *mi madre* couldn't hide it anymore. She stated, "Within three months of my pregnancy, I stopped going to school and eventually dropped out of high school because I wanted to prepare for a safe birth delivery." She then happily married *mi papa*, Miguel Angel Marroquin Guerrero. At the age of 26, *mi mama* had given birth to four boys who she loved and cared for, and she took on the role of a full-time stay-at-home mother. Time after time throughout her life, she made decisions that benefited the lives of her children. She sacrificed a career outside of her home, her *familia* (brothers, sisters, and parents), and her comfort zone.

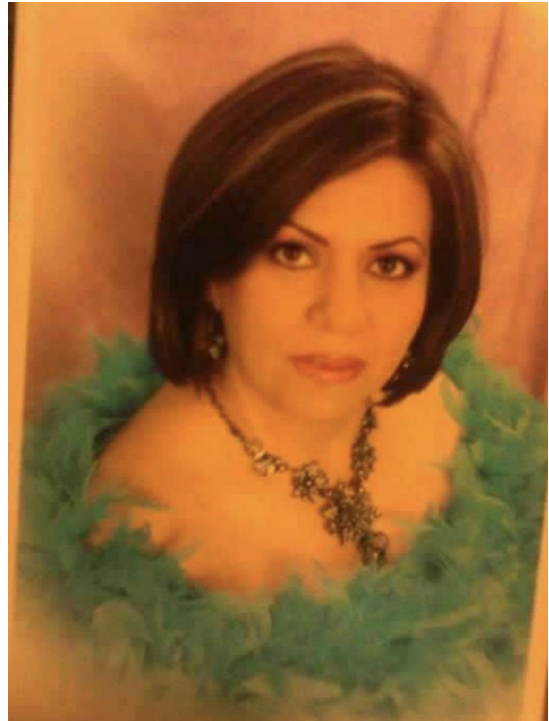
Mi madre worked very hard, but she sacrificed a career outside the home. Her dedication throughout the day was hard work, and every intention she had was to benefit her children. Every day she worked hard to have something ready for us to eat without delay once we arrived home from school. The meals prepared were simple *pero muy deliciosos*! Meal planning provided *mi madre* endless possibilities of varied combinations and healthy choices to pick from. She served the simple base of rice, beans, lentils, ground beef, vegetables, soups, quesadillas, *moyotes*, and *chiles rellenos en salsa verde*. Anyone can relate how much extra measure it takes to build a meal from scratch. It is indeed beneficial, but I see how a large part of her day and energy was sacrificed to providing food for all four children and husband.

At the age of 35 she heard of an opportunity for a better future. What could possibly go wrong? In a word, everything! When she decided to reach U.S. territory, *mi madre* was sacrificing the things she loved the most, which was *familia*. It is very hard to connect the dots in my head and think of *mi madre's* odyssey. The opportunity for a better future wasn't guaranteed. In fact, this was the biggest sacrifice that covered all the things she loved the most: *familia*, *memorias*, and *amigos*. She wanted *mas* for her children but at the same time for herself. The plan to come to the U.S. was made quickly, which made her odyssey more dangerous. Soon enough, she was encouraged by her close *amiga*, Norma, to cross the Mexican border and reach U.S. territory with the help of a *coyote*. Then she would settle in Madison, Wisconsin.

When *mi madre* arrived at Madison, Wisconsin, she had to



do things outside her comfort zone. Amazingly *mi madre's* odyssey and sacrifices were worth it, and she arrived safely after two long weeks. A period of two weeks makes such a difference! There are many factors she bravely faced, like the language barrier. She also managed to do things for the first time. For example, she got her first job, learned how to drive a car, bought her own car, and, most importantly, overcome her comfort zone. In the process, *mi papa*, three older brothers, and I crossed the U.S border and joined our lovely mother in January 2001. Looking back at this exact time brings tears to my eyes, and I cannot relate it to a feeling I have ever had before. Because I felt like I was following her footsteps, I got a taste of the sacrifices she made.



When *mi mama*, Silvia Santos Garcia, found out she was pregnant for the first time, she kept it a secret. Time after time again, her outgoing dedication of putting herself last was the work of her selfless acts. I can reflect on the way she always stated, "*Si tu estas bien, yo estoy bien*" or "If you're good, I'm good." For the people that know her, she is a mother, a father, a friend, and a visionary who broke down walls. She came to the U.S. with a gut feeling that it was the right choice to leave everything behind. On the surface she is *mi madre*, but in my *corazon* and conscience, she is my sixth sense that guides me with a gut feeling. Because of those feelings, I have also stepped outside my comfort zone and made sacrifices to take my education seriously. Because of her experience, she will say, "*Estudia! Si no vas a trabajar donde yo trabajo*" or "Study! Or you'll work where I'm working now." I take this quote very seriously. She is glad that I am following her legacy of being courageous.

Translations:

Mi madre: my mother

Padres: parents

Familia: Family

Mi: My

Pero muy delicioso: But so delicious

Molletes: A traditional Mexican open sandwich with refried beans and melted cheese

Chiles rellenos en salsa verde: Stuffed peppers with green sauce

Memorias: Memories

Amigos: Friends

Mas: More

Coyote: A human smuggler

Corazón: heart



Freedom with Abandon **By Sandra Zintzun**

My mother is a person of courage because she tolerated years of abuse but kept silent. Being surrounded by family, she was able to find small escapes at time. Entering a relationship that took her away from her children allowed her to find freedom so she could grieve, grow, and educate herself to assist migrant workers in her community and students in area schools.



As a child, I was always aware of the torment my mother endured for years. Her body was used as if she had no control over what was happening. This happened for such a long time, and I have always wondered why she never spoke up. Growing up in a very big household that included brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, and even my grandmother, someone could have listened to her. We were always playing together or causing mischief outside. There would be your occasional disagreement and a boxing battle to clear it up. Our frequent games of softball, whiffle ball, water balloon fights, and BB gun wars would attract even the neighbors. How could it be that my mother had to face such difficult circumstances surrounded by so much laughter, fun, and unity among the rest of us?

As the years went by and I grew older, my mother decided to leave, without us. My brothers and I really didn't feel it as much since we grew up calling her by her name and never by Mom. She seemed like a sister to us. We were surrounded by family and stayed with our aunt and uncle, so we really didn't feel as lonely. The man she left with wasn't the nicest, but he was the one who was able to give her the freedom I know she needed. Once she left, she didn't come around often, but I understood why. After a few failed relationships, she finally met the one that would save and love her. As she built a family a distance away, I felt we were the least important, as she cared for them more. The death of my aunt occurred my senior year. My uncle was unfamiliar with school functions and put in many hours at work. This led to me becoming my brothers' keeper. It was my senior year, and hard decisions had to be made. All I wanted was to have my mom take us in, but that was never an option, nor did it come up.

Continuing her journey, she found something she enjoyed: her calling as a teacher's aide at the local school. Throughout the years, she received guidance and counseling to further her education, as she only had a high school diploma. With continued education, she is now able to help students in the classroom, with the Spanish Club, and migrant families. I see how fulfilled she is helping others by offering her services to fill out paperwork and provide information and resources throughout the community. Now that we are grown with children, she is always more than willing to care for them whenever there is a need. Her accomplishments may not be of giants, but being recognized by her community and loved by many puts my mom up there with the greatest women known.

For the longest time, I felt so much anger towards her leaving us. I could see she longed to beat the haunting ghost and regain her freedom. I grew to understand this might have been the only way she could. Abandoning her young didn't mean she had to say goodbye forever. It was just for a short while, as she found her way back as a whole, wise, and willing mother eager to shower us with love again.



Strength in the Face of Pain By Savannah Rose Perry

“‘A setback is a setup for a comeback, and if you can’t figure out your purpose, figure out your passion,’ said T.D. Jakes. This very sentence brought me out of

some of the toughest situations I’ve been in,” my sister said. As the words came out of my sister’s mouth, my brain was like one of those turning machines, starting back up and processing things a little differently. My sister’s courageous and positive vibes and actions make up the strong black woman that she is and helped her transition from the wild teen she was to the beautiful business woman and mother she became.

She never forgets the long nights where school was the only place she could actually get a full meal, going to school an entire year with only a week’s worth of clothing, and getting bullied and picked on because she wasn’t as fortunate as others. She may not be rich and probably isn’t where she wishes she could be, but she never forgets those nights. Now that she has her own child, she gives back. Every other Christmas, she gives presents instead of receiving them, and that has left a positive effect on us all!

Out of all five of my sisters, who all work in health care, Georgia is the only sister who understood business and administration. She was great at it. She just recently worked at

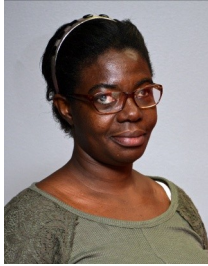


Meriter Hospital on the phone for the last few years until she decided to take a business venture for herself. Now she’s in the process of establishing her employee-owned nursing facility as well as a staffing agency starting here in Wisconsin.

Growing up, we girls all wanted to be a mommy. You get older and realize maybe you were signing up for more than you could handle. You get pregnant and realize you didn’t understand the responsibility and effort that you would have to put into play. My sister is an amazing mother! She shows affection and patience and is a mother who educates.

My sister is my woman of courage.





My Admirable Grandmother
By Tchallassi Edoh

Courage is the ability to do something that frightens one, and it can be physical, moral, sentimental, or mental. I see that courageous strength and power in my beautiful and sweet grandmother, Joana Fansi Atchade. She was born on

December 31, 1910, in the little town of Atakpame in the country of Togo, West Africa. She is my woman of courage that I will admire and respect all my life because she survived a hard childhood and rose to be a mother, a successful businesswoman, and a knowledge-of-life teacher for my sisters and me.



My grandmother was a very admirable woman. She inspired me a lot because of her beautiful and unusual life. She was miraculously born because her mother passed away at her birth. She was raised by her aunt, her father's sister. Growing up, she was smothered by her family and was beaten when she tried to go to school like other kids from her house. She got married young against her will. The family married her to the king of the village, who was an abusive man. She was beaten for no reason. She got lucky one day with her family on her side to pack her up to move back home. She divorced and started her own life as a single woman.

She was a powerful woman because she rose from that abusive and painful marriage to be a mother of seven children and a businesswoman. She had five biological children, four girls and one boy. Sadly, she lost one girl (my uncle's twin) at a very young age, at less than one year old. Her two other children were an adopted nephew and niece. She created her hardware business. She worked hard selling anything you could imagine. She would sell ornaments, chocolates, and toys during the Christmas season, and at harvest time she sold cereals, vegetables, and fruits. Her success as a single mother and working woman let her take care of her family and give them a good education by putting them all in school. She was also on their side for every step of their lives.

I am very grateful because I got a chance to spend two full years living with my grandmother. I can't forget those days of joy. She gave my sisters and me love and advice and transmitted our traditions. My grandmother would tell us stories about her children and even about us when we were babies. She shared her life with us. Most importantly (and I keep it jealously), she shared the care of our children. She showed us love through her children, her grandchildren, and even more through her great-grandchildren. She would name her family members and tell of some of the ancestors and how they built our village, Atakpame. She helped us learn and speak our ethnic language, Ife, and taught us how to cook home foods in detail.

My grandmother, Joana Fansi, was a real and unique woman of courage. She was an exemplary woman. She came to life without her mother alive and on her side to hear her first baby cries, to warm her as a child, and to hold her hand as a mother walking her child, but she lived like a golden star that will shine forever in our hearts! I still miss her so much. She was my mother, my grandmother, and my woman of courage. I know now that she is in Heaven and resting in peace with the love of the Creator.



Making the Impossible Possible **By Yangchen Lhamo**

Can you imagine being courageous at age eight? My mother, Choezom, was very courageous at that age. My mother showed me how courageous she was by sharing her childhood stories about escaping Tibet. She survived a two-month journey to India on foot, her life in an orphanage, and building a home out of a thick forest for her family.

She had to leave her country behind due to the Chinese occupation of Tibet. Chinese officials started confiscating her village, questioning village leaders and sending them to a detention center for no valid reason. My mom happened to be at her uncle's place that night when he was leaving for India with the hope of being near the presence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. My mother showed her courage at age eight when she had to leave her home and country at the spur of the moment with her uncle. She took off with her uncle because she was separated from her parents. She crossed the Himalayan Mountains on foot for about two months to reach India. Once they reached India, Indian authorities sent the adults to a labor camp to build roads and sent my mother to an orphanage home.

First, she was separated from her parents, and now she was in an unfamiliar country separated from her uncle. Her uncle had to move from place to place for road construction. She was assigned the number 65 and had it stitched on her shirt as her identity. Her uncle came looking for her two times. He could not find her because she was not in a traditional dress and had grown tall and chubby. The warden at the orphanage had to interview many girls of her age to identify her. She remembered her uncle's name and the story of how she fled Tibet with him. Because that matched his story, they reunited and were able to visit each other. At the



orphanage, she was taught how to read and write Tibetan and how to weave carpets. At age 15, she was made aware that her uncle died of a fever at the labor camp. She was devastated by the news because he was her only family. Even today, her eyes fill with tears whenever she talks about him.

At age 16, she started a paid job at the Tibetan Handicraft Center and met my dad there. She had her first child at age 16. During that time, each day there were new Tibetans arriving from Tibet due to Chinese oppression. The place was getting overcrowded, so the Indian government forced them to resettle to the southern, western, and eastern parts of India. My mom and dad were sent to the southern part of India, where they started building a hut by cutting down the forest. It was not easy because the forest was very thick. They came across an elephant and didn't know its danger. They used all kinds of tricks to get it away from their camp. Thereafter, the small land turned into a farm, and they grew corn and vegetables. The family grew to eight children. I was born in a hut on that land.

Through surviving all the ups and downs in her life, my mother showed her courage and showed me how to be a courageous woman. Today, when I look back at my own life, my life path is like hers. I didn't know where I was going when I first left India. I was scared. I was fearful and cried at times, but I always thought of my mom. I kept her stories in my heart, and it gave me the courage to face my fear no matter what, making the impossible possible.





A Strong Black Woman

By Zataiya Gober

My mother was just fourteen years old when her mother passed away. She passed away suddenly and unexpectedly of a blood clot, which left my mother, the middle child of three, motherless and confused. My mother lost her mother at a pivotal time in an adolescent girl's life, forcing her to figure out the world on her own. After my grandmother passed away, my mother and her two siblings were sent to live in Coahoma, MS, by their father to be cared for by their maternal grandmother. Did I mention that my mom is from Chicago, IL? Talk about a culture shock for a teenager going from a big city to Coahoma, MS.



It took some time to get adjusted to life in Coahoma. My grandmother had three adult daughters who stayed with her at the time, and they were anything but welcoming to my mother and her siblings while they lived there. They would curse and fight, and one time they even shot at them. After surviving the relentless torment at the hands of her aunts, my mother finally graduated from Coahoma Community College and decided to head back to Chicago. Once back in Chicago, she found work in a warehouse packing meat, which is when she met my father.

My mother and father met in the summer of '84 in Chicago, IL. Their relationship flourished fast, as she fell hard for my dad. A few years would pass by before addiction and domestic violence caused my then pregnant mother to relocate to Wisconsin. She arrived in Madison, WI to stay with family until getting a job in data entry. Then she finally got her own place to stay on the east side of Madison. My mother never drove and still to this day doesn't have her license. She was a single mother who didn't even drive but somehow did what was necessary for her child every day. For that alone I believe my mother is a woman of courage. Her relationship with my dad was on and off up until I turned 15 years old. That is when they decided to try and rekindle their relationship.

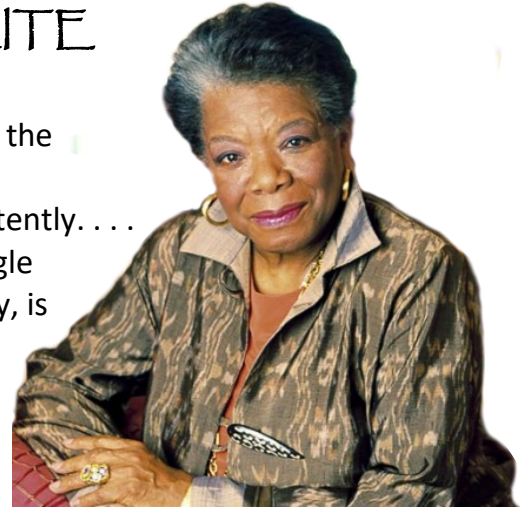
Getting back together with my dad after all those years was no easy task for my mother. It took several years for him to earn back trust and respect. Eventually that must have happened because they gave birth to my younger sister in 2004. I was a sophomore in high school when my sister Asia was born. Two additional siblings, a brother and another sister, would follow in 2005 and 2006 respectively. I love my siblings, but I still to this day do not understand why my mother and father would start over with raising children when I was basically an adult. I guess love has no sense of time. To this day my mother and father remain together, raising my younger siblings, who are all teenagers now. Their story is the oddest one by far, but it's absolutely my favorite one.

I have learned so much from my mother's story. She has faced her fair share of tribulations but has also celebrated many triumphs. I grew up watching her embody what it means to be a strong, black woman whose strength and resilience is also matched by her grace and beauty. She taught me that it is okay to make mistakes because that is when we learn our greatest lessons in life. Most importantly, she taught me that it is ok to fail at love and to try again. I admire my mother's strength and courage for everything that she endured and what she has grown to be from it all.

FAMOUS WOMEN WITH THE COURAGE TO WRITE



"Courage is the most important of all the virtues because without courage you can't practice any other virtue consistently. . . . I believe that the most important single thing, beyond discipline and creativity, is daring to dare." — Maya Angelou



"There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others. My courage always rises at every attempt to intimidate me." — Jane Austen

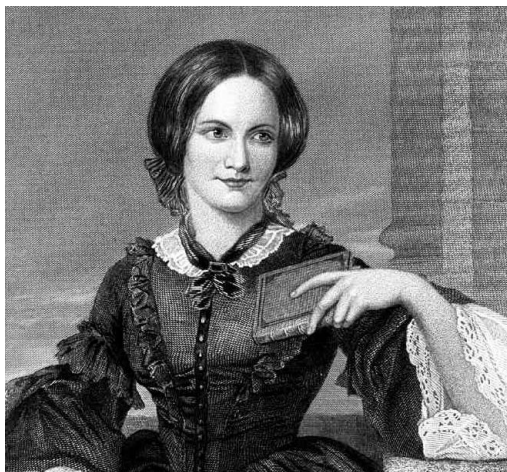


"I took my Power in my Hand / And went against the World." — Emily Dickinson

"It takes a lot of courage to show your dreams to someone else." — Erma Bombeck



"It takes courage...to endure the sharp pains of self-discovery rather than choose to take the dull pain of unconsciousness that would last the rest of our lives." — Marianne Williamson



"I remembered that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had the courage to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils." — Charlotte Brontë





"When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid." — Audre Lorde

"It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends." — J.K. Rowling



"I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It's when you know you're licked before you begin, but you begin anyway and see it through no matter what." — Harper Lee

"Above all, be the heroine of your life, not the victim." — Nora Ephron



"Risk anything! Care no more for the opinion of others ... Do the hardest thing on earth for you. Act for yourself. Face the truth." — Katherine Mansfield

"I know what I want, I have a goal, an opinion, I have a religion and love. Let me be myself and then I am satisfied. I know that I'm a woman, a woman with inward strength and plenty of courage." — Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl*



"I told myself, Malala, you have already faced death. This is your second life. Don't be afraid — if you are afraid, you can't move forward." — Malala Yousafzai, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*