

ODYSSEY ORACLE

WOMEN OF COURAGE



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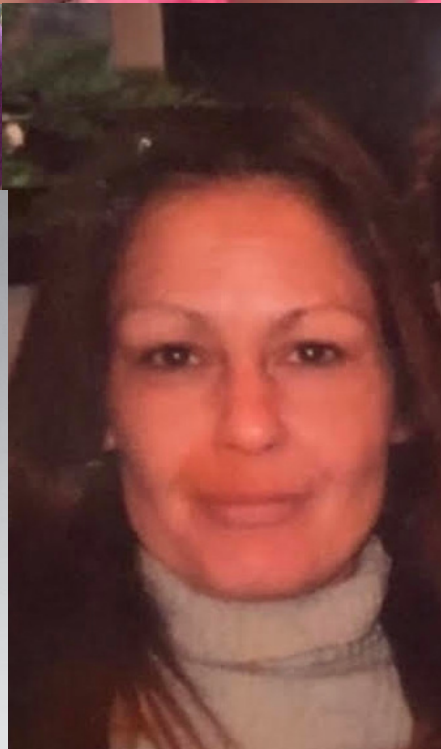
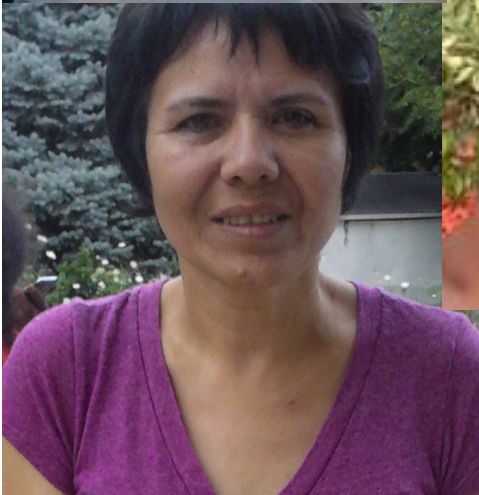
Emily Auerbach, Co-Director/Founder; Oracle Editor
Kevin Mullen, Co-Director
Emily Azad, Program Manager
Christina DeMars, Coordinator
Beth McMahon, Oracle Designer

emily.auerbach@wisc.edu
kevin.mullen@wisc.edu
emily.azad@wisc.edu
christina.demars@wisc.edu

608-262-3733 or 608-712-6321
608-572-6730
608-262-0763
608-262-3885

Class photography by Colleen Johnson, Em Azad, and Christina DeMars

www.odyssey.wisc.edu





Always Keep Going **By Margarita Barajas**

My mom, Josefina Ramirez, is one of the craziest, funniest, over-the-top women that you will ever meet. She went from being raised in the 1960s in San Antonio, Texas, to being married with five children, to giving 24 years of her life to working with the elderly and people with mental disabilities here in Madison, Wisconsin.

My mom was born in July of 1963 in San Antonio, Texas. She was raised by her mother and grandmother, both named Conception. My mom had two older sisters named Rosa Maria and Maria de los Angeles. Maria had been diagnosed with a mental disability. When my mom was old enough to drive a car, her grandma would make her drive from San Antonio to Tampico Tamaulipas, Mexico, to visit family for the weekend.

When my mom was 16, she met my dad, her future husband. At 17, my mom had her first baby, my brother Tomas. At this time, my mom ended up dropping out of the R.O.T.C. Reserve Officer Training Corps and high school. She gave up her dream of going to the Army. At 18, my mom had me. At 20, she had my little brother, Enrique. At age 24, my mom had Alice Marie, and at 27, she had her last baby girl, Lisa Marie. My mom and dad did not get married until she was 34, and it was in downtown San Antonio, Texas. My mom and dad moved us to Madison, Wisconsin, in 1989 to help support my uncle, who had a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head and later became disabled.

My mom always made sure that we were signed up for all and any school programs. We were the FAST program at Lowell Elementary School (family and school together). My mom always wanted us to do something better with our lives and finish school because she didn't get the chance to do so. Years later, the guy who started the FAST program ended up as my disabled Uncle Robert's broker. Almost every year for Halloween, my mom would dress up like a witch. We would go trick-or-treating, and all the other kids would always get scared of her. She would do this crazy witch laugh, and sometimes the other kids would start to cry because they were so scared of her. Now she still scares people for Halloween, but it is much bigger and better. My mom does not scare kids anymore, only our bus drivers, coworkers, and clients' parents at Marc Inc. My mom had started to volunteer at Madison Area Rehabilitation Center (Mark Inc) about 24 years ago. This place serves as a day center for the elderly and people with mental disabilities. My mom loves her job. Matter of fact, she loves it so much that she brought my sister Alice and me to get hired there with her.

I look up to my mom because she taught us that no matter how hard life got or gets, we should always find a way to keep going. She always makes sure that we know she loves us. We just have to pass it onto our kids and her seven grandkids. My mom, Josefina Ramirez, at the same is slowly slipping away from us with type two diabetes. None of this stops my mom. Almost every weekend, my mom makes time to go hang out with her only sister left, Rosemary. They go out to eat and to movies and do their favorite shopping. So yes, in my eyes, my mom is a courageous, phenomenal woman.





She Fought until She Couldn't Fight Anymore

By Tiffany Dixon

Woman of courage: what exactly does that mean? It means someone who doesn't give up, who fights for what she believes in. Even when things get tough, she will fight 'til she can't fight anymore. For example, my mother,

Rosemary, overcame addiction, being incarcerated, and fighting to regain custody of her children.

Ever since I was a small child, I remember my mother doing drugs—crack cocaine, to be exact. My mother was a victim of molestation and a domestic abuse survivor. By the time my mom was in her mid-20s, she had already had four children. There were times when she used to sell things out of our house to do drugs and even leave us in crack houses for periods of time. She had her moments where she would check into rehab, get clean, and then come home to fall back into using drugs. She was still fighting until her last day.

At the age of six, I recall my mom leaving us in Florida and coming back to Wisconsin. When she made it back up north, she had begun getting high again. It caused her to stab two men. The decision she made that day caused her to go to prison. She was originally given fifteen to twenty years, but she only served nine years. She kept her spirits up by writing us letters every week, sending us birthday cards and holiday pictures that other inmates drew for her. While my mother was incarcerated, I was being abused by a man who I thought was my father. It had gotten so bad and severe that I had to move to Madison, Wisconsin, which turned out to be the best thing that happened.

It was 2005 when my mother was released from prison. I was the only one of her four children that was present when she was released. But that didn't tear her spirit down. She got out and got a lawyer and fought to get my brothers and sister away from all the horrific and tragic things that they were going through while living down south. Within the first year of her being home, my mom was granted full custody of all of her children. It was then, when I was 16, that I saw a woman who had been through hell and back, and not once had she given up. She fought to the end [tragically dying this Fall] and went above and beyond, not only for herself, but for her children and grandchildren as well.



With that being said, seeing a strong woman who lost everything, who was fighting addiction, battling mental health issues, not once give up or lose faith in anything shaped me into the woman I am today. I'm a fighter. I don't give up, and even when the toughest battles are thrown at me, I get back up and continue to fight. My perspective on life has changed watching her fight and struggle because it taught me what to do and how to survive when my back is against the wall.





Pain as a Shield

By Rasaki Emmanuel

I know a lot of courageous women, but nobody compares to Bettye. Bettye is a woman of courage because she survived the loss of our child, also putting aside her education and putting on hold her career, and then suffered the loss of her mom in the last two years.

Bettye R. Emmanuel, my wife, my best friend, and the mother of my five kids, has faced hurt from the loss of our child. So you can understand this, I should mention that she was two weeks pregnant when she came home from work and found that our seven-month-old child had passed away in my arms.

Also at this time, she was attending school at MATC to obtain her nursing degree. I must admit, I've never seen more discouragement in a person than seeing my wife deciding to quit school. She had been a CNA for about seven years at this time. My wife's tears prevented her from opening up her school books.



This experience pushed so much pain in her path that her body began to break down, leaving her in the hospital several times. In 2016, I saw a dream come true for my wife: to enjoy Thanksgiving with all her family. She was looking forward to even better in 2017, but then her mom passed away from stress, something that had hovered over her life. I heard the cry of concern in Bettye's voice saying one day, this too should be me.

I have spent eleven years with this amazing woman. I became an octopus when it comes to using my mind and love to provide for my kids and others, yet being in pain, meaning underwater, myself. Thanks, my love. Your pain has become a shield to prevent things from hindering us.



Labor of Love **By Ashley Lee**

My mother, Shelly Moore, is a person of courage because she seems to always be positive with every situation she encounters through everything in her life. My mother tells me, "Always remember that God won't put too much on you that you can't handle." My mother is a strong woman of courage because she is positive, loving, and hard-working.

Growing up in Chicago, Illinois, my mom was the seventh child out of twelve children. There were nine girls and three boys in a house with three bedrooms. All the girls in the house had to share everything, including clothes, shoes, and money. Living with so many siblings, my mom felt as if she never got enough love and attention. Growing up, my grandmother was very strict on going to church. She always told her children, "Be grateful for the things you have in life because God can take it away so fast." Having that mindset, my mom always remained humble and positive.

In 1989, at the age of eighteen, my mom had her first daughter, named Quana. In 1994 my brother, Keith, came along. Then, in 1996, she had me. When I was growing up, my mom was not financially stable. Even though she did struggle taking care of three kids alone, she never let us feel her struggle. We had huge Christmases and fun birthdays. I remember for my fifth birthday I had a backyard water party because my birthday is in the summer. There were many water slides, water guns, and water games for everyone to play with. I also had a cake with Tweety Bird, who I loved at the time. Even though my mom did struggle, she always managed to show us love in our everyday life.

In 2005, my mother met my step dad, Kenneth Bell, and moved to Wisconsin. While we were living in Wisconsin, the atmosphere was different, and life seemed to be so much better than living in Chicago. My mom always had a passion to go back to school and become a cook. She enrolled into MATC in 2009 to get her GED. While being enrolled, she worked full time at Belmont Nursing Home as a dietary



aide. In 2010, my brother, Keith, was diagnosed with ADHD. My mom had to juggle going to appointments, work, school, and maintaining a household. Even though she faced a lot of hardships, she still managed to get her GED. After receiving her GED, my mom still worked hard to make her dreams of being a cook come true. She never gave up her faith in God. When things got hard, she looked at the brighter picture for her career and her family. My mom made sacrifices every day for herself and her family. In 2017, my mom graduated from college for culinary arts. In early March of 2019, she got the best news of her life. She got offered the position as a head cook at Meriter Hospital. That moment, I was so proud of her for all her hard work and dedication.

In conclusion, my mom is my hero. She is a great friend and grandmother. She makes me feel like the most important person in the world because I know she would do everything for me in a heartbeat. I wouldn't be the woman I am without her.



No Matter What, Don't Give Up **By Tina Marie Martinez**

I remember Christmas morning when I was nine, my mother decorated the tree with white lights and sparkling silver tinsel. There were no presents under the tree. I accepted that. I woke up Christmas morning, and presents filled the front room. My mom went out on a limb and got us adopted by a family. This made me appreciate what I have.

My mother was a homemaker; she was also in an abusive relationship. She still made the best of her situation; this never changed her love for us. She still made sure we went to school in the morning, and she maintained her household the best she could.

One day, after being kicked in the stomach by her boyfriend, my mom went into labor early. I stayed with friends and family; he worked nightshift in the steel mills and was a very jealous man. He often abused alcohol, and just a few days after my mom brought the baby home from the hospital, he rolled over on the baby in the middle of the night. I remember my mom pacing back and forth in the hall crying hysterically all morning. I was too young to understand what happened at the time; she started drinking heavily after this incident.

The drinking went on for a while. She cried often about the loss of her child and was just not herself. The doctors explained to her that she wouldn't be able to have children again. That hurt her because she loves children, but a few years later she had my brother Michael. This was a blessing to both her and us. You see, without him, I get the feeling she wouldn't have felt whole. It was a miracle.

Today, you will rarely ever see my mom drinking. I'm glad she overcame her struggle because she always made sure we had just enough: clean clothes on our back, food in our stomach, and a roof over our head. She truly has some amazing qualities, in such a loving way that has stung me like a bee. I have always felt lucky to have her a part of my life. She is the best mom. There are many things I want to be in this world, and being the best mom is definitely number one on my list. My children remind me that I am, but I wouldn't be if I didn't have her to teach me that no matter what happens, you don't just give up.



Weathering Many Storms **By Eliázar Martínez Munguía**

At an early age, my grandfather told my mother that she could not pursue her educational desires. Her father told her that a woman's role was to nurture children and learn how to maintain the house for her father and later for her future husband. She was raised in a rigid culture that forced women to develop as nurturers, caretakers, and subordinates to men. And given the labor of maintaining house, my mother was forced to learn how to support the desires of men. But more importantly,

she learned how to live as a strong, independent woman who was able to live her life even without the support of men. My mother was the principal caretaker for her children, given that her husband left the family to pursue economic gain in the US. Her ability to manage money, her strong family values, and her ability to remain resilient in front of familial and social pressures made her an exemplary woman in my eyes and definitely a woman of courage in the eyes of those who know her story.

With limited formal education, my mother's ability to manage money made it possible for the family to live a comfortable life, though this was not always the case. When she first married my father, they lived in a one-room house. This single room constituted my parents' bedroom, kitchen, and living room. The floors were made of dirt, and the roof was made of wood. In order to make money, my mother sold clothes. My mother gained her clothing supply from my father, who also sold clothes in Mexico City, though unsuccessfully. My mother would take his unsold clothes, put them in a manta (something like a bed sheet), and take her clothing to the local city center and distribute them to her clients. My mother became so successful in her entrepreneur venture that she even gained clients for my father, who would later distribute clothing to them. Through this initial venture, my mother developed an economic base that she would later use to develop a chicken coop into a farm, a single-item store front into a multi-item store front, and a one-room house to a two-story brick house. My mother's financial literacy was unprecedented in her humble indigenous town and is an act of courage in the eye of almost certain poverty.

Given their low economic circumstances, my father had to work in the city, and my mother had to work in a little town called Puebla to support her family. Unfortunately, these circumstances did not benefit their marriage. As my father and mother worked in different towns, they only saw one another every two weeks. My mother's efforts at home were rarely rewarded by my father. My father was influenced by the cultural norms of machismo, and during his time in the other town, he cheated on my mother with another woman. This event took a significant toll on my mother. She was confused, hurt, sad, and angry at the same time. In these circumstances, any other person would likely leave. But, out of love for her children, my mother stayed with her unfaithful husband. She endured his machismo for us. Her decision to stay instilled in all of us a strong sense of family values and a profound respect for her decision to stay and support her children.

Despite their economic success, my mother's marriage was falling apart in front of her whole family. She was judged at all corners for her position as a woman, as a mother, and as a wife. As a woman, her family encouraged her to divorce my father, but gaining the approval of her family meant losing the respect of her culture. As a married Mexican, she must always remain loyal to her partner. And, moreover, to leave her husband meant risking judgment of her role as a mother, as she would always be seen as the person at fault for not making the marriage work. My mother was on the defense from all angles -- social, cultural, familial -- and she still stood her ground. In fact, once word got around town, she became a figure for other women to talk to who also shared a similar experience. However, she did not give them advice. She simply gave them a space to talk. And in giving them that space, she gave value to those experiences and helped other women make sense of their lives. She weathered the storm of judgment and pursued economic gain in order to support her children, who she put above all else. Her ability to stare her entire society in the eye and walk with confidence in all her roles makes her one of the most courageous women of her town and the most courageous woman I know.

To live in a society where family values are not so strong, it is very easy to see how families fall apart, sometimes for such simple things such as verbal conflict. My mother, however, was able to come out ahead. She fell into deep social and cultural circumstances that complicated her life, but her life is a standard for my siblings and me. Her integrity is worthy of emulation, and at the end of the day, moral and family values are what helps maintain a family together-- especially my own. I give my mother credit for instilling in me the skills to move money, the strength to fight for my family, and the courage to remain resilient in the eye of judgement and conflict. My mother is a Woman of Courage not because she was able to weather a single storm but because she learned how to live her life and give life to others inside many storms.





How One Mother Overcame Every Mother's Worst Fears

By Krista Mellott

As mothers-to-be, many women are overwhelmed with many fears about motherhood. The worrying begins to plague their minds. Many questions repeatedly cycle through their thoughts. What if my child gets sick or has an illness that cannot be cured? What if I cannot provide everything that they need? How will I balance my life and a child? Will I be able to maintain the other parts of my life, such as being a wife, sister, daughter, and an employee? What if my child cannot get the education or the opportunities they need to reach their full potential? What if I cannot help my child and must watch them suffer? For many women these questions remain thoughts throughout their children's life, but they never to surface to reality. There are others who are not as lucky. I know one woman who has seen all these fears come to fruition. That woman is my mother. My mother courageously led my family through the painful experiences of mental illness; she upheld her roles as a daughter, wife, mother, grandmother, and caregiver; and she supported our family through death, incarceration and suffering.

My mother had three children relatively close in age. My brother, Eric, is the oldest. I am the middle child. My sister, Brigitte, is the youngest. My mother found a job where she was able to work from home, so she was able to watch over us and be able to provide as well. Our childhood was a happy one with many wonderful memories. Mom has a way of making any event special, but the holidays are her specialty. She begins to unleash the Christmas spirit shortly after Halloween with decorations, music, and family. She created this tradition, and it is one that we all look forward to every year. My siblings and I had everything we ever needed, and our lives were happy ones. It wasn't until the teenage years that things started to change. I became a rebellious teenager and ran away numerous times. I developed depression and fell into the depths of addiction. My mother was my rock during these challenging years. She scheduled counseling for me to attend and went with me to talk to the counselor to get any advice on how to better help me. There were many times that I blew her off, but Mom went to these appointments anyway. I would be gone for months at a time missing most of my junior and senior year of high school. My mom didn't know if I was ok, or even alive. My siblings were scared and sad as well, but my mom maintained her strength and stayed strong for all of us. She wasn't going to give up. Her persistence with getting me to counseling gave me a chance to see how beneficial it was to my health. Her guidance helped me to become stable. This stability created the window of opportunity that I needed in order to focus on my goals in life. The next goal was college.

Shortly after starting college, I got pregnant at the age of 19. I became a mother, and my mother became a grandmother. When I told her I was pregnant, a short nervous laugh escaped her lips and she said, "What!? No, you're not." She then smiled and hugged me with tears in her eyes and congratulated us with love and a little bit of worry in her voice. My mom, being the selfless woman she is, took me and the father in so that she could be as supportive as she could be to us and to her new grandchild. It was a full house because my mother had also agreed to take in her own mother so that she did not have to go into a nursing home. My mom was told by many



of her friends that she was taking on too much, that she was not responsible for everyone. But my mom stuck to her guns and never faltered when it came to being there for her family. She went to every one of my doctors' appointments with me. She helped my grandmother every day with her medications and appointments, and she ensured that my grandmother was happy. She helped my sister move to and from Texas several times. When Brigitte moved to Texas, my mom drove down there with her. After unpacking Brigitte's boxes, Mom decided that they needed to spruce up the place a bit. Mom is the queen of decorating, so she took Brigitte to all the thrift stores and helped make her new apartment into a home. My mother juggled all the relationships in her life with a sense of determination. From sunrise until sunset, she was helping her kids, grandkids, and her own mother, all while maintaining a full-time job and never missing a thing.

After about a year and a half, tragedy struck again with the unexpected death of my son's father. This death sent me on a vicious spiral. I would spend hours sitting in the garage, chain-smoking cigarettes and drowning my sorrows in the bottle; Mom would come to check on me and say, "Come in here and get something to eat. There is no sense in sitting out there all alone." My mom wanted to be there for me and help me through this, but I shut her out. I fell back into the depths of addiction, and this time I went deeper than ever before. My mother was left with my grandmother and my son; meanwhile, I was suffering in a way no one could help. For my mom, loving an addict was like grieving my death and fighting for my life at the same time. She watched my life capsize like a ship in a storm and waited anxiously for it to right itself. But it didn't. My mom had to take a step back and kick me out so that my destructive path wouldn't tear the family down any more than it already had. She watched me make devastating mistakes that would create serious consequences and challenges for the rest of my life. She cared for my son while I spent a year in jail. But she never missed a visit or a single phone call. It was hard to see all the sacrifices she made because she was always there, willingly, with love and support through every single struggle. It must take a lot of courage to face not only your own fears but the fears of your loved ones as well.

My mom dedicated her time, energy, and emotional well-being to the assistance of her entire family. There has never been a moment when I ever thought that she wouldn't be there for me. The troubles and distress she felt during all the difficult situations were emotionally draining, but she remained strong. She had the courage to face each day with any new challenges head on. The courage she possesses to take on other people's troubles on top of her own is inspirational. My mother's direction has taught both my sister and me the importance of maintaining our mental health. She is a beacon

of strength. Her motto, "We are family, of course we will be there to support you," has been a constant reminder that I am not alone and that we will get through any life challenges together. She has spent so many years instilling these values into me and my siblings. These values saved my life several times. I am determined to pass them down to my children. I am overwhelmed with gratitude for my mother and our healthy relationship that grew with her nourishment. Thank you, Mom, for having enough strength and courage for me when I had none for myself and for waiting, patiently, until I did. I love you.





My Favorite Superhero By Loché Mothoa

“A mother is she who can take the place of all others, but whose place no one else can take.” -Cardinal Mermillod

I always said that if I could choose my family, I would do it in a heartbeat. But I would choose my mother over and over again, in every lifetime. I wouldn't want anyone else to be my mother. My mother is my favorite superhero.

I have experienced how she overcame every obstacle in her life, whether it was her daily struggle with osteoporosis, fighting “bad guys” who harmed me, or simply just having a stressful work environment, but she still managed to be there for me, guiding, nurturing, and teaching me.



My mom was diagnosed with osteoporosis when she was a teenager. Osteoporosis is a medical condition in which the bones become brittle and fragile from loss of tissue, typically as a result of hormonal changes or deficiency of calcium or Vitamin A. So it wouldn't be wise to give birth because she could have broken bones, but here I am 25 years later. She didn't let osteoporosis stop her; she continued living her life to the fullest, joined the military, and then gave birth to me. From the stories I have been told, my mom did not have an easy birth. But I would imagine having me as a daughter would make everything challenging. My mom said when she looked at me (once I was cleaned and all the bodily fluids were gone, or I was no longer looking “gross,” like she would say), I am all she needs. Maybe that's why I'm the only child; who knows.

My mom truly is my best friend and the realest one on my team. She's the lioness who would do anything to protect her cub (me). I've experienced it firsthand. I think I was five years old. I believe it's the same year my dad passed away (I am not sure; I was very young when he passed and have no memory of him). A woman tried to kidnap me. I mean, I don't blame her, I was a really cute little girl, even if I have to say so myself. When my mom arrived home from work and was told what had happened, I don't think there's any lion in the jungle or wolf under a full moon that could roar louder than she did. I remember looking up to my mom (literally) and feeling proud to have such a brave mom. I wanted to be as courageous as her when I grew up. A year (I think) after that incident, I experienced sexual abuse from an uncle, and when I eventually said something, my mom believed me (there are not enough words in the dictionary to describe how grateful I am for my mom believing me). She wasn't angry at me, but angry at the man who did it. If it wasn't for the safety gate at my grandmother's house that separated her from the man who sexually molested me, who knows what she would've done? She would probably be like Samson in the Bible, breaking those chains and pillars of the building. My mom did not care whether he was a man (for lack of a better word); she only cared about protecting me.

My mom taught me everything I know. I could read from a young age, as well as tell time. Most of my games and toys were educational. She made learning so much fun. She would hand me books to keep me occupied while she ran errands. The older I became, she stopped getting me books, but she gifted me with a journal each year. I think she noticed I loved writing. My mom entertained every phase I went through. I went through the Manchester United football phase, which meant everything had to be Man UTD – clothes, bedding, book covers, pillows, towels, etc. Then I had the dolphin phase. I even wanted a dolphin tattoo. Then I had the Minnie Mouse phase, and then the Anchor and Paris Eiffel Tower phase, which I am still currently stuck in. I have an Anchor tattoo with a steering wheel. Inside the anchor is my mom's name – Lorraine. The wording around the anchor says “You (my mom) were the one to guide me

(steering wheel) but never held me down (anchor).”

My mom shaped me into the young adult I am today. She spoiled me rotten but also donated many of the clothes and toys. She always told me, “Loché, you need to remember there will always be people who have less than you. Don’t be selfish. Always share.” Years later, those words stay with me, and I always give, even if I don’t have much to give. I stand up for myself and others who can’t because I’ve seen my mom be brave and always speak up. I can fill a library worth of books writing about the strong, courageous, and phenomenal my mom is and how grateful I am that she’s my mom. My mother is my first friend, my best friend, my forever friend.



My Courageous Aunt By Natia Saffold

My Aunt Acacia has always been my favorite aunt since I was a kid. She always would be the one teaching me how to dance and how to sing, although the dancing would sometimes get me in trouble with my dad. My aunt was super fun but also human. She had some roadblocks jump in front of her but broke right through them. From having her kids, to joining the Army, to undergoing some very scary surgeries, she still has a smile on her face. My aunt shows me that whatever life throws at you, you can still make it.

My aunt was in her twenties when she had her first child; she was working a 9-5 trying to make ends meet. Later on in her twenties, she had another child, which made it extremely hard to keep a 9-5 job. For me, having one child makes it hard to keep my 8-4:30 PM. My aunt eventually got tired of living from paycheck to paycheck trying to make ends meet.

My aunt did something new, something that no relative had done in our family. She joined the Army. To me, this was a very courageous act because of the guidelines and requirements that came with joining. Right away, one of them was attending boot camp. Boot camp was nine weeks long, meaning she had to go nine weeks without seeing her kids. As a mother, I barely could last two days without my son.

Later on, my aunt then went on to have another child, which put her health at extreme risk. The doctors noticed that something wasn’t right after her birth. They told her that she had to get “exploratory surgery,” meaning that they would just open her up to take a look to see what’s causing her to be sick. Having this surgery slowed her down. Any type of surgery would put a pause on someone’s life, which can be very depressing.

I am very proud of my aunt. She inspires me to be the best that I can be. Her actions inspire me to never give up and also to work harder. She didn’t let things like kids and surgeries slow her down; instead, it made her a sergeant. Her impact on me is to make me to want to be a boss in life.





My Thai Grandmother By Riley Sessions

I've never been to Thailand before, but talking with my family and the different things I've seen, I can tell you, it's beautiful. My

grandma is from Thailand and spent most of her life there. Her name was Sunanta, and she was a truly incredible woman. After making the decision to move to America to give birth to my father, supporting and raising him by herself, and eventually doing the same with me, she battled the obstacles this world throws at women every single day.

My grandma met my grandfather, Richard, in 1978 in Thailand. He was stationed there during the Vietnam War. Shortly after meeting, my grandmother got pregnant with my dad. My grandpa is black, which caused a problem for my grandma. In Thailand, in those times and even now, multi-racial people were not accepted and were discriminated against. It would have been an unsafe upbringing for my dad. She had a tough decision to make: have my dad in Thailand, where it would be a hard life and unsafe for him, or move to America. She didn't have any connections or family in the U.S., but she decided to move anyway and provide a better life for her son. She moved to California and settled down with my grandpa.



A couple years after she moved to California, my grandparents got divorced. She had to figure out how to survive and raise my dad by herself. Luckily, some of her family had moved from Thailand to Wisconsin in the years she was in California, so she decided to move herself and my dad there. Her family eventually helped her get a job and place of her own. She still struggled – as all single parents do – to provide a good life for my dad. It was also hard for her to find her identity and the direction she wanted to go, being so unfamiliar with her surroundings and the culture she was thrown into. But eventually, she found a spot in life where she was comfortable and they had everything they needed.

When my dad became a father, he was twenty years old. I can tell you, having been twenty, that no one is completely ready to be a parent at that age. My parents split up shortly after I turned one. My dad was granted every other weekend with me. From then until I was about ten, my dad would pick me up on Friday, drop me off at my grandma's, and then pick me up Sunday and take me back to my mom. The time I spent with my grandma made our bond closer than it might have been otherwise. Even though it should have been time I spent with my dad, I wouldn't want it any other way. She took care of me like I was her child.

I can remember she used to tell me stories about Thailand and how when I got older, we would go together. She passed away four years ago, but every day I think about her. Every day, I carry with me her strength, her perseverance, and her courage. One day, I will take all of that with me to Thailand.



A Model to Follow By Carmen Tinajero

During my first communion, what I remember most is spending time with my grandmother. My grandmother was the first in the church and was there ready to advise me on how to take in the day.

She spent the whole day with my family and me. She helped set up the meals and helped clean up afterwards (even if she was told not to do it). She was a woman of courage with strong faith, generosity, and the ability to stand up for herself.



My grandmother was a modern Mexican woman because she stood up for herself. Carlota Martínez, my grandmother, lived with an abusive husband. He tried to hit her just because he thought he had power over her. At that time, in small towns, some men acted like this because no help from police was available for women. But she never allowed him to touch her. She defended herself by asking neighbors for help. She never felt afraid of him. When he died, she gave thanks to God about it!

Her courage came not just from her ability to stand up to her husband but also from her strong faith in God. She was the mother of 18 kids. Only eight survived because there was no access to a doctor in her small town, so when a doctor finally did arrive, her kids had died. I can't imagine how horrible that was for a mother, but her faith was so strong, she believed it was what God wanted and that there was no better place for them than heaven. She was an extraordinary woman. Even if her life was so hard, she never complained, not for nothing. She lived a happy life and always tried to do her best.

She was a caring person, always having a clean and full-of-flowers house. I still smell the perfume of her garden and of course her food. She was always full of stories to tell; that was one of the reasons she was always surrounded by grandchildren. My grandmother did not come from economic wealth, but she was rich in time for us, and she was very generous with friends and family.

I saw my grandmother almost every day. She was always ready to talk. She gave us food, advice, and a home. And after 90 years, she still remained mentally healthy. She was still doing her exercises every day, and she maintained a healthy diet. She was still able to keep a conversation. My grandmother experienced a lot of difficulties, but what made her so courageous was her ability to have faith in others, give time to others, and reminisce with others despite her struggles.



The Mary Shelley-Alice Walker Effect, Framed Like A Monster But Strutting In Her Beauty By Ronald V. Burford

Courageous--not deterred by danger, pain, or grief. Resilience -- to spring back into shape after bending, stretching, or being compressed. And Innovative -- to introduce original and creative thinking or ideas. The woman of courage in

my life, despite her many struggles even to this date, displays all three of these qualities and is a prime example of the phrase "Never Give Up!"

Ogie grew up in the projects of Chicago, Illinois, in one of the city's low-end neighborhoods, where there were lots of drugs, violence, and shootings. Her name means king, but in this case,



it means queen. She has a small stature of about 4 feet 11 inches and has a huge desire to help people. She is generous, sympathetic, and can make you laugh. In school, she was “the fun person, the class clown as they call it.” She was the pretty tomboyish type that wanted to be different than the other girls. She was bullied and physically assaulted, because others were jealous of her, until she grew tired of being a punching bag, quickly learned to fight back both physically and figuratively. At age 16 during her junior year, she took a job at UPS and dropped out of school to support herself and her oldest child. The father of her child was incarcerated, and her mom no longer allowed her to live at home. A few years later while couch surfing and living with her new boyfriend, she secured her GED from Henry Davis High School. Not long after, she took the next courageous step towards change.

A couple of years after her second son was born, she moved to Madison, Wisconsin, in hopes to find new opportunities and a safer place for her children to live. But since coming to Madison, she has been homeless approximately five times. Each time she was homeless for a bare minimum of at least one year, and truthfully this is a modest number. In addition, she has experienced some devastating traumatic events. The first was at age 27, four years after settling in Madison, when she received a devastating phone call that her mom had died, and she never got to say goodbye. Then the most recent disastrous event was in 2013, when she survived a home invasion where the father of her youngest child was shot and killed while they were in bed with their son. Despite all these social circumstances, Ogie remains a resilient woman.

Moreover, each day Ogie finds new ways of getting by without relying heavily on other people. She finds a way to “figure it out” and uses what she calls her “gib fa gab.” Even with everything she has going on -- the doctors diagnosing her with carpal tunnel, bursitis, and insomnia; having been justice-involved; surviving Madison’s over-reporting of black children to the Department of Children & Family Services; and the societal depiction of her as another angry, poor, black woman with a criminal record, an intimidating portrayal “because these days it’s a crime for just being born ‘black’ or ‘brown’ here in the U.S.” -- if she asks for anything, it’s just to have a healthy conversation. She is undoubtedly self-reliant, ingenious, and, yes, innovative.



Imagine this: each time you come to her place it is clean with a pleasant aroma, and when she cooks, she makes you a Thanksgiving-sized plate, much more than you can handle, and if your hair ain’t done, she will sometimes freely whip yo head, free of charge, I might add. A single mother of three healthy young men -- her youngest being eight years old -- she gets up every day and makes sure they are well fed, well dressed, and have a roof over their heads. This woman takes many temp jobs because she has been having a hard time finding a stable full-time job. If offered much help from her friends or family, she would reply, “I’m not trying to burden anyone, I’ll figure it out, I got a ‘gib fa gab.’ I’ll be okay.” She is a woman with a big heart and ain’t complaining. And I know this because she is my big sister who took me in as a teenager after our mother passed away. Ogie is the woman with the Mary Shelley-Alice Walker Effect, framed like a monster, but strutting in her beauty.



Looking Death in the Face

By Corey Dean

... And just like that, laughter turned to bellowing silence. A high speed night of adventure, interrupted by an obstructing tree on a dark moonlit back street, was present for all to see when the car my mom and her friends were joyriding in crashed. She was pregnant, tired, scared, and cold. Hobbling out of the car, she made her slightest way down the road, roaming the night for somebody to acknowledge her existence in that very moment. Luckily, her seatbelt wasn't impossible to get off, and she was found on the side of the road that night on the cusp of existence. This is one of the many instances of my mom looking death in the face, and it wouldn't be the last. Jennifer Vandenberg is a woman of courage because she has seen just about everything life has to offer, good and bad, and has survived.

On December 9th, 1997, at 7:59 PM, my mom had freshly given birth to her first and, unbeknownst to her, only surviving child, at the ripe age of 19. Luckily the young woman had a decent paying job as a nursing assistant and lived with her parents in an attempt to bring a little more serenity and stability to her life. When leaving the hospital with her brand new, colicky baby, she couldn't be happier. Things quickly started to set in for my mom, though, when she realized that raising a baby boy with no consistent father around was going to be much more of a challenge than the nine months she had just completed. Between the wavering support from her often absent boyfriend and the constant need to go to work, my mom found it very hard to get alone time in her life. Nonetheless, through the rain and the pain, she managed to keep enough consistent income to send me to Little Red Preschool and to pay rent to my grandparents. Courageous acts are not always immediately gratifying and grandiose, but what my mom did as a single mother whose only reliable help came from her parents was truly amazing. Eventually, through hard work, time, and communication, my mom was able to move out of my grandparents' house; and for a short time, my mom, dad, and I lived together as the ideal nuclear family. But just as the tree sunk my mom's soul eight years ago, so does her spinal cord today.

In 2006 my mom was taken to the doctor because, after running a cavalcade of tests, doctors found that her spinal cord was continuously growing into her brainstem, causing blackouts, facial paralysis, and motor skill deficiencies. This alone is scary enough, but what made this even worse is that now my mom was not able to work at the UW Hospital anymore. What was starting to look amazing quickly turned uneasy as shortly prior we had to move in with my grandparents again. This ended any fantasy we once had of being a "family." All this was a heavy blow for my mom, but I never saw her give up. In 2006 my mom underwent brain surgery to fix any issues occurring between her spinal cord and her brain. This was a scary sight for me, but my mother was a strong woman, and I had a great feeling she would make it. Luckily, she did make it. The doctors told her, once she was done with surgery, that if she had waited any longer she would have died on the spot. But she lived.

Continuing on as a strong woman after her surgery, she had to face many challenges. For instance, she wasn't allowed to go back to her career, so she was forced, and still is, to live off of disability checks. This did not stop her. She kept pursuing a better life for us; even if it took every ounce of strength she had during the six-month recovery stage. When I say I was and still am astonished at how well she's recovered, I couldn't begin to capture the entire emotion. At that point in my life, the only consistent thing I had was my mom. I was amazed when I saw her keep her head held high through every minor and major setback. Since I never truly had a father figure around, I always looked to my mom as my biggest source of inspiration. After seeing her headstrong recovery process, I knew she could do anything. It made me feel like I could do anything.

Crash! The same force of a frontal collision car crash was put into a phone call. One year after my mom's brain operation, on the night of July 21st, 2008, the hospital called. My father was passing away that night. The man with whom my mom was in an on-again, off-again relationship was about to pass

away due to organ failure brought on by sickle cell anemia. Being a single mother for years already had prepared her to be the heart and soul of the house, but not for this. I saw my mom grab my coat and her own and speed down to the same UW where she once worked. She unfastened my seatbelt and led me to the hospital room the receptionist gave us. This was one of the most traumatic experiences of my life, and I don't think I would have been able to handle it if my mother wasn't so strong--or at least acted strong for me. When we got to the room my father was in, we said our condolences and our goodbyes. After spending the better part of an hour inside the room, my mom walked us outside, sat me on a stone wall, and said, "Corey, we are going to be OK." Those simple words sank deep into my soul because I knew that if there was anybody who could look me in the eyes and make such a promise with such admiration, it would be the strongest woman I knew; and still do know.

These three life events were hard pills to swallow. They weren't pretty. They weren't even kind. But they were real. This writing is the testament of a woman who's faced every odd in the book and continues to fight every day. She is a single mother who was forced to get unemployment and social security checks, but that doesn't mean she gave up. She started babysitting my three cousins for 10+ years because she didn't want them to end up in the hands of a potentially bad babysitter. She didn't give up when the person she had her first and only surviving child with passed away. She stayed strong. She always told me that she believed in us and that my dad is looking down on us proudly. This is a woman who has been working 13+ years to gain control over her body again and has been making incredible strides. This is a woman who, even when crying in the garage about not having enough to pay the electricity bill, always shined a light on what we did have.

This paper might seem dreary and drab. It might seem like a load of "woe is me poetry." It might even seem sorry and self-admitting. But it's not. To me this paper is a concrete example—an extension and an exclamation— of how hard one woman has worked to overcome the challenges she has had to face. I could have easily written a paper about how my mother graduated from Middleton High School while she was pregnant, about how she attended M.A.T.C. pregnant, or about how she grew up in a family of two other siblings and stabbed my aunt with a fork over a hotdog when they were kids. There are a million different positive and negative examples of what my mother has had to go through in her life, highs and lows, and she is still amazing. I might not see eye to eye with my mother often anymore, and we might not be as close as we once were, but I can say one thing. You can't show me any person who is stronger, more caring, iron willed, stubborn, dedicated, loving, passionate, and honest. It's impossible. I didn't shine light on these negatives to garner any second hand sympathy. I write these truths to show you where one person can go after being exposed to many minor and major setbacks. Always keep going. You are always going to be ok. These are the truths about a woman of courage.





Hard As Ever **By O'Shane Wilmoth**

Our mothers usually mean a lot to us. I know mine does. What about yours? Some people got care from their mothers and some didn't. Still,

when we think about family members, the first name that comes to mind is mother. Truth be told, how many of us really know our mother?

My mother, Andrea Hines, was born on July 23, 1968 to parents Hughbert and Winnifred Hines. Andrea was the oldest of five siblings. They lived in the rural parts of Jamaica where her parents had a farm on which she grew up. They had plantain tress, banana trees, and a few more fruit trees. They had a small cage on the farm for rearing a few chickens and an old shack outside where they had a pig. They had a she-goat that they used for milk. They lived in a four-room board house that they divided up, but the kitchen was actually an outside fire that they cooked on (it was three stones placed in a circle with firewood in the center). Andrea didn't have much schooling because she had to help out on the farm and with her younger siblings. She had to be responsible and grown up in some sense in her childhood.



While growing up, she met Rapheal Wilmoth and started dating. She later got pregnant and conceived a daughter, but soon afterward, she had to be a single parent because Rapheal was locked up. My mom lived in a small one-room apartment that was barely big enough for two beds. Even though she had a young child, my mom had to work to get by. She did a lot of laundry for other people just for a few bucks. She later got a second job, and things got even tougher for my mom because she had no one to take care of her young daughter. She had to take my sister to work with her, getting up early in the morning and coming back home late at night, but being the hard-working and determined young woman she was, she saw it through.

Rapheal later came from prison and that relationship reignited; they had another two kids. Things got a little easier then, but it didn't last. Andrea and Rapheal broke up a few years later. Andrea went to live on her own and raised her kids alone. Andrea was a hardcore woman. I remember once when I was a boy, an adult man hit me for no reason, and I went home crying to my mom. After hearing what happened, she went and gave that man a beating the whole community would not soon forget. Members of the community named her "Iron Cunny," meaning hard as ever [Jamaican iron cunny is a kind of very tough, hard sugar candy].

To my mom, I give my thanks and appreciation for helping find my way in this world. Not everyone can say this about their mom, but thanks to you, we had more than plenty: plenty of food, safety, security, shelter, and, most of all, plenty of love.



Dancing with the Face of Courage

By Marcello Segovia

Courage is “mental or moral strength or to venture, persevere and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.” A woman-to-be of courage from my life is my daughter Madalena Aissa Segovia. Madalena illustrates her strengths to withstand fear through her hip hop and ballet dance, speaking her mind, and making friends easily.

Madalena practices her hip hop and ballet three days a week at the “Dollhouse Factory” to prepare for competitions over the year that are against other dance companies. She is nervous before competitions, but she’s a natural on the stage. Despite being shy in front of me, she does really well; her company wins these dance competitions. They are all day long in front of large audiences with impressive choreography that seems exhausting at times. She tells me some of the time she feels tired, but she perseveres. With her hard work she has recently moved up a level. Madalena’s perseverance in dance shows courage by overcoming fear before, during, and after competition.

My shy yet fearless daughter speaks her mind. If she feels something is not correct or not nice, she will speak up for those she feels are afraid to speak for themselves. Even if it’s me arguing with my son, Madalena will stop us because she wants us to get along. She doesn’t want us to argue because it’s not nice. This shows Madalena’s courage because she knows there are other ways to resolve disagreements. Plus, she’s not afraid to tell us.

Madalena’s ability to be a kind and respectful to people is one of those traits you can’t find in many people. My daughter shows courage in so many ways it surprises me. She loves to make friends and has so many of them. They love being around her because she brings joy to so many people. I’m her father, and I am full of joy just having her in my life. I know that I’m the one that needs to be teaching her, but she teaches me that with courage, no matter the size or age you are, we have the ability to overcome anything anywhere.

Learning is everywhere; we just need to open up our eyes and just focus. There is courage in all of us.



Since the first day Madalena was born, she amazed me with how strong she was. As I took her in my arms, I gave her my pinky finger, and she just had this strength. As I pulled her closer to me, it just kept getting stronger. We looked each other in the eyes, and our connection couldn’t be stronger. I’m still amazed by her strength at the age she is now, plus the power of our connection. Courage is the “mental and moral strength or venture, to persevere and withstand danger, fear, difficulty,” and Madalena portrays this superpower.





Don't Let Your Crown Fall **By Shiloh Simonsen**

Amy Danielle is a person of courage because her upbringing was often very dark, her young adult years were very trying, and she never let the odds stacked against her make her crown fall.

As a child Amy was not in a stable environment. She had a mother who was addicted to drugs as well as a father who was big into drinking and chicken fighting. She was dependent on her maternal grandparents to show her the way in life and help her be a successful child/young adult. This affected her in many ways, such as lifelong trust issues, periods of times where she held grudges for years, and unhealthy relationships with the ones closest to her.

She got pregnant at 19 and had her daughter at 20 by a man (boy) who was not ready for the responsibility at hand. During her daughter's younger years, the father was in and out of the picture. At one point the father told them that he was leaving to go to New York for New Year's Eve and ended up moving to Florida for a number of years, leaving Amy to raise the little girl primarily alone. As the years went on, she faced some prison time, which resulted in her daughter going to live with the man who was still not ready to be a father. Times were stressful, but she never failed as a mother and always made sure her daughter was mentally and emotionally stable, even from behind bars.

Years passed, and she found herself again. She met an amazing man, attended college, had a son (16 years after she had her daughter), found a job she loves, and built a house! She travels the world and lives life to the fullest no matter what her life was like before now. She doesn't use her past as a crutch or an excuse but as a lesson, and it has made her who she is today.

Through all her trials and tribulations in her life, she has always kept pushing and wanting better in her life. She has never let her crown fall and now tells her daughter, "Don't allow your crown to fall. Remember you were raised by a queen." I am proud to say that Amy Danielle is my mother.



Courage Comes in Many Forms **Nina Salisbury**

If I didn't know any better, I'd think William Shakespeare was referring to my mom when he said, "Though she be but little, she is fierce." Standing at only five feet two inches tall, my mom has the courage and demeanor of the Hulk. I was recently reminded of this while watching family videos when I was six years old and my sister and I were pretending to work at a mechanic shop for an imaginary guy named Fred. While we were explaining to my mom the logistics of our game, she interjected, "Can

I make a suggestion? Why not make it just be your service station and you be your own boss? You don't need Fred to run you." This is how my mother has approached life. It's how she raised us to think. And when at the age of 52 her life did a 180, she didn't need a "Fred" to fix it. My mother is a justice crusader who faces challenges head on while supporting others and holding them accountable for their actions. She is a true woman of courage.

Starting from scratch is hard to do but was necessary in my mom's case. Shortly after my sister and I moved out in 2008 during the worst economic downturn in history, my dad left her for another woman after 23 years of marriage, taking their financial stability with him. Finding herself in the middle of a stressful divorce, severe depression, and financial ruins, she had no choice but to dive head first back into corporate America. To her chagrin, she found that technology had vastly changed and young millennials were hard to compete with. Many people would be discouraged, but my mom continued to seek out gainful employment despite numerous rejection letters and minimal call backs.

Around this same time, my mother found out I was going to have a baby. I had been dating and living with a man the Madison police categorized as a notorious and violent drug dealer, and I spared my mother no consideration over how my dangerous lifestyle affected hers. She was now living alone and feeling hopeless at times. While my decision to keep the baby was one she didn't agree with, she still painfully held my hand through the whole nine months. Shortly after I had my son Damien, his dad was sentenced to 13 years in prison. My mom took over his role without flinching or complaining. While she took Damien on many cold and snowy winter walks that he should have been on with me, I was home suffering from what I now think was postpartum depression on top of depression over my life choices. My mom tried to help me but I was not ready for help, so she helped me by raising Damien. While most 56 year olds are nearing retirement, my mom was just entering the job force and helping raise a baby she had no say so in having. She was always supportive but held me accountable under these very difficult circumstances.

After being fired from two jobs within two years and taking on the almost full time responsibility of my son, she decided to funnel her talent and experience as a writer and artist into her longtime passion for social justice. But this time, the stakes were higher; she was helping raise a mixed-race child in a racially dangerous climate. With the heightened awareness of incidents like the murder of Trayvon Martin and other unarmed black men and boys in the media, Tony Robinson right up the street from her house, an education gap channeling young men like Damien's father into prison, and research on mass incarceration in Wisconsin, my mom became proactive toward social change. She wrote articles shining a much needed light on these issues and other flaws in the prison system and how they affect children and families. Through her work she gave marginalized people voices that others generally do not want to hear. In addition, she started a nonprofit that works with kids in the Madison schools who have been affected by incarceration.



Instead of being bitter and angry over the challenges I brought into her life, my mom selflessly turned what others would see as a negative into a positive while giving Damien pride in his culture. She constantly challenges me to be better than the person I was the day before and reminds me I always have time to turn it around. Despite all the curveballs that have been thrown my mom's way, she's never taken off her rose-colored glasses. My mom is courageous because she's never folded and has remained supportive when I and others have needed it the most. I am so proud to be her daughter. Although she has huge shoes to fill, I hope to one day impact the community the way she has.



Social Justice Trailblazer Dr. Pauli Murray

By Melissa Herriges

Women who have had the courage to be trailblazers, the bravery to stand with integrity for what's right, and the dedication to make a difference have always stood out to me throughout my life. I'm choosing to write my paper about someone who's motivated me since the age of seven. "Dr. Pauli Murray," born Anne Pauline Murray, is a woman whose rive led her to do many things. She was a civil rights lawyer, Episcopal priest, women's activist, and author. The many things that Dr. Pauli Murray accomplished has led me not only to my work in social justice today, but also continues to motivate and influence me to a make a difference in the life of others.

Dr. Pauli Murray experienced many adversities growing up. Born in 1910, Dr. Pauli Murray had parents who suffered from illnesses that did not have cures at the time. She went to live with her aunt, a school teacher who upheld the expectation of excellence and integrity. Dr. Pauli Murray excelled in school and graduated from high school with honors, but in 1926 many women of color were not awarded scholarships. Nothing seemed to stop Pauli Murray from moving forward to achieve remarkable things. Dr. Pauli faced adversities, developed skills and talents throughout her career, and played an inspiring role overall for women of color.

When she was out of work, Pauli Murray just moved forward with something new and developed another talent; nothing seemed to get in the way of achieving her dreams. During periods without work, she took her passion of writing and turned it into published poems and articles for the Carolina Times. She went on to become involved with the NAACP, graduated from Harvard with a law degree, worked with Thurgood Marshall, Martin Luther King, and Eleanor Roosevelt, and advised the NAACP during the Brown vs. Board of Education trial.



Pauli Murray went on to become one of few female priests and also fought for same sex, women's, and civil rights. Hopefully now you can see why it seems like there is nothing that Pauli cannot do. She is one woman who accomplished many things during her life from 1910-1985 and was truly ahead of her time, not only as a woman but also as a woman of color. She opened the door for both women and persons of color to have a voice in places where they had to once be silent. Dr. Anne Pauline Murray is a true unsung hero whose efforts have a timeless effect on the advancement for women and people of color.

There were so many things I admired about Dr. Pauli Murray growing up. It often crossed my mind how she handled not having her parents around, facing situations when she was told no because she was a woman or because she was a person of color. Imagining how she handled and persevered through these things gave me courage to speak up in times of racial tension or to push forward with being dedicated to accomplishing my goals of paying it forward for others. Her ability to master skills in various areas has motivated me to continue in my ministerial work, being an advocate for those who cannot speak for themselves. It is hard to say where I'd be today without being able to look up to Pauli Murray.

STAY COURAGEOUS!

By Melissa Herriges



In moments riddled with adrenaline, our courage innately kicks in, and we act without thinking. Courage, however, cannot exist without fear at times when we are forced to challenge ourselves, our thoughts, and our beliefs. When I had to face the fear of possibly dying from cancer at age 16, my courage was challenged and rocked to its core.

My strength is something that I learned to value. Growing up, my strength always got me into trouble for being outspoken, challenging authority, or pushing the envelope.

Our health is something that takes the strength of courage to overcome in its darkest hour. I'm happy to share a defining moment of my life with you in hopes that you, too, can find the strength to be courageous.

During the early part of 2005, life was perfect because I finally had everything in order to start working. Being overly independent, I was excited to start working and move out of my mom's house ASAP. On the day of my first interview, something strange happened: I was too ill to go to the interview, so we had to reschedule. Thinking it was a winter bug, I made soup, crackers and 7-up my friends. The only problem was that it lasted for three weeks. Not being someone who was sickly, I knew it was time to visit Dr. Sans. The only problem was it wasn't a cold, the flu, or a seasonal bug. In fact, Dr. Sans had no clue what was wrong with me, so it was off to the hospital for a ridiculous amount of invasive testing. It turned out my iron was low despite the fact this was never a problem in the past. After getting those levels back up, life was good until six weeks later when, another weird illness came about. This pattern continued for six months until I became too weak to walk.

I was rushed to the ER. After 12 hours of testing, there was rush to surgery. With no time to be worried or scared, I woke up hoping to hear what in the world was going on. After recovering in the hospital for a few days, I still had a waiting time for all test results to come back. Three days later, the news of having stage 4 cancer, on the borderline of being terminal, led to one broken phone.

It was in this moment that a conscious decision had to be made to fight or give up. It sounds crazy, but when you have no idea what or how you're going to have to fight, decisions have to be made. Deciding to kick cancer's you-know-what was not an easy war to win. I had to win this war one battle at a time. There were blood transfusions, bone marrow transplants, and extensive experimental cancer treatments, but six months and about 1,500 hours of medical care later, I was cancer free. They told me there was a one in three chance I'd have children, but I have three healthy kids today: ages 20, 18, and 15.

Every time I have a bad day, I just take time to remember that I had to fight for this life. Since I was able to do that, then there is no limit to what I can do. I hope that this short but long story gives you the courage to take on life's battles and kick its you-know-what. Stay lifted, empowered, and courageous!



SONGS OF OURSELVES



I am Margarita.
 I am the daughter of two good parents.
 I am the mother of three wonderful boys.
 I am a survivor of suicide.
 My two oldest boys are survivors of suicide.
 I am from San Antonio, Texas.
 But my family descends from Mexico.
(Margie Barajas)

I am Ronald Vincent Burford
 I am not the names, nor am I the things
 In which my society or my enemies have inspired,
 ordered, or proclaimed me to be.
 I am a handiwork, a son, and a song.
 I am fierce like a warrior, yet gentle with people.
 I am an author, songwriter, producer, teacher,
 actor, comic, advocate, and poet.
 I am a father, a brother: I am a friend.
 I walk among the wise and receive wise counsel.
 I do not fit the mold of what society says and
 people's perceptions are
 About what men should seem and be like.
 I am who God says I am, and I will not apologize for
 the favor that is upon me.
 Though like an afflicted city, lashed by storms, and
 not comforted,
 I am loved and I am rebuilt anew. **(Ron Burford)**

I am Laisha
 Daughter of Leroy
 Sister of Leroy
 Cousin of Leroy
 I am the mother of Nick and Martell
 I am most proud of that
 I am striving to be better each and every day
 I will be a nurse someday, hopefully soon
 Then I will also be proud of that as well
(Laisha Cooke)

I am Corey
 Don't call me 'nigga' as an honest admission
 I done came a long way to make demos instead of
 demolition
 My abolition has able-bodied the appellations,
 through dissemination and generational laceration
 I've seen hell that brought flame to the sword
 And I've accomplished much more than I've
 expected before
 Wen' toe to toe with depression, but my soul
 carried on
 Did it all to be just like my mom **(Corey Dean)**

I am Tiffany
 A daughter of a fighter
 A daughter of an addict
 But most of all,
 A daughter of a woman who never gave up.
 No matter what obstacles were thrown in her way
 I am Tiffany
 A Woman
 A fighter
 A mother of three beautiful children who look up
 to me
 I am a contagious smile,
 Listening ear,
 I am the peace to your storm.
 I am Tiffany.
 I am a tower of strength
 I am a warrior. **(Tiffany Dixon)**





I am Kossiwavi
 I am the oldest daughter of my family
 A daughter of a hardworking woman
 A daughter of a farmer
 I am a mother of two kids
 I am a descendant of West Africa
 I am a traveler and a lover of new adventures
 I am an African American
 My skin is black
 I am beautiful and strong **(Kossiwavi Elo)**

I am Rasaki
 I am the smooth tone you hear when that
 Smile comes on your face
 I am that beat that's under your feet and won't allow
 You to sit in no seat.
 I am Rasaki
 A man that's blessed to stay away from all
 unhappiness. **(Rasaki Emmanuel)**

I am Melissa
 I am a fighter determined to win, win, win
 no matter what
 Keeping my head up
 Eyes on the prize, seeing through the deceit and lies
 I am human, no race without a place
 Making my own, blessed and free
 My beauty is not what most people see when they
 look at me
 Free to be my own me and not who you tell me to be
 Fighter determined to win, keep my head above my
 chin **(Melissa Herriges)**

I am Jyneevea,
 A daughter of seven siblings
 I am an angel's one and only baby girl.
 I am a product of our ancestors.
 I am God's child.
 I am high, low, weak, strong, angry, happy, proud,
 loving, honest, loyal;
 I am human.
 The smile I share overfills a room with brightness.
 I am rain,
 I am the sun, I am the rainbow. **(Jyneevea Hunt)**

I am Ashley
 I am a mommy
 I am dedicated
 I work hard each day
 I always strive for the very best
 I love what I do and always push for success
 I am unique
 I love making people smile
 I want people to know that everything will be okay
 Laughing and smiling helps me overcome hardships
 I am strong
 I am wise and weird
 I'm just Ashley, an extraordinary loving person
(Ashley Lee)

I am Tina Marie Martinez
 I am the daughter of Native American Indians
 Blessed by divine gods
 I am Mexican American
 I am love
 I am a healer
 I am a mother
 I am a sister
 No matter where you come from
 I will always
 Accept you as my brother
(Tina Marie Martinez)



I am Eliázar
 I'm the ham in the family sandwich
 I'm the third of five siblings
 I'm introverted, quiet, melancholic, and
 phlegmatic by personality.
 I'm a good friend in good times and bad times.
 I'm the support of my beloved parents
 I am what I am by the grace of God.
(Eliázar Martínez-Munguía)

I am Krista
 I am a daughter, mother, sister, friend
 I am a mother of two
 But I am known to more as mama
 I welcome friends with open arms
 I am from Wisconsin
 My mama's mama is from Illinois
 My dad's dad disappeared as if deployed
 I am a protector, lover, fighter, conqueror
 I am proud to be Krista. **(Krista Mellott)**

I am Timothy
 Son of a hard working mom that would do
 anything for her kids
 I am a father of two
 I am a brother to three
 A survivor of the mean dangerous streets of
 southside Chicago
 I am a king
 A king that will determine his own destiny no matter
 the odds **(Tim Mosley)**

I am Loché
 I am the oldest daughter
 Of the oldest daughter
 I cry when I am happy
 I laugh when I am mad
 I am an oxymoron **(Loché Mothoa)**

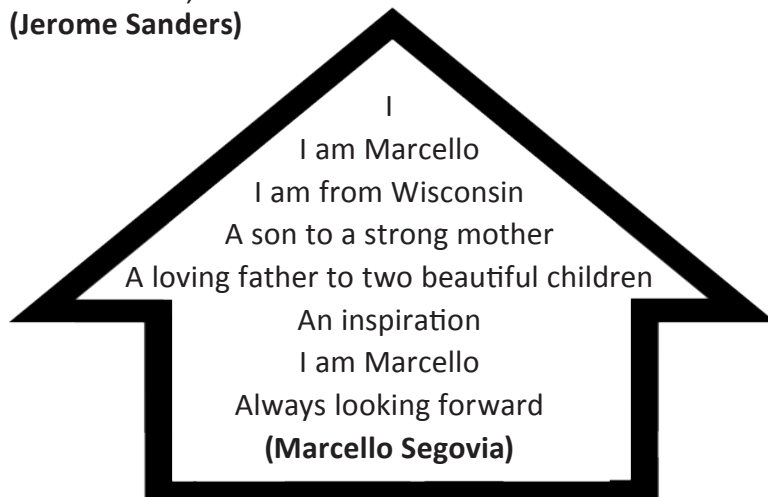
I am Moriah
 The third daughter of a first child
 A daughter of a mother who's a hard worker
 A daughter of a father who was unloved and hurt
 I am my past generations' dream
 I am an educator and a learner
 I am a descendant of the motherland
 My skin is the color of bronze
 I am peace
 I am happiness
 I am Moriah
(Moriah Parker)



I am Natia
 I am a princess born from a queen
 A melanin princess with skin that glows like honey
 A brown princess who loves the skin she's in
 I am a boss
 A beauty who never gives up
 A beauty with a mindset of a hustler
 I am she!
(Natia Saffold)

I am Nina,
 The product of two artists
 I am the rich colors on my mom's canvas
 And the curves and twists of the scribbles
 in her notebook
 I am the blinding flash on my dad's Nikon
 And the plaster that adheres his sculptures.
 On my good days I am the calm ripples of
 Spring Lake
 And on my fierce ones I am the whispering currents
 of the Mississippi River.
 I am an ever-flowing masterpiece.
(Nina Salisbury)

I am Jerome
 Known for mostly the wrongs I wish I could undo
 You, too, know Jerome, oh why surely I do.
 You talking about B.G. tall as a tree B.G.
 No, you mean Jerome, the new dude I see.
 Cuz B.G., well, that's a whole separate tale.
 But Jerome, the tall funny one, I know him well.
 Quite the comedian I heard, can make a rock break off
 in laughter,
 You'd never know he was a fatherless bastard.
 All them jokes he tell don't hide his pain too well,
 If you look hard enough every ten minutes tears settle
 like water in a well.
 Tried and true but so are you,
 Jerome always wipes his eyes in the coolest fashion.
 Man, that bastard sure do hide them cries!
 The greatest pleasure is found in my daily efforts of
 making today better than yesterday,
 So I am grateful to hear and see the magic of my class
 While I'm out, home in Muscoda.
(Jerome Sanders)



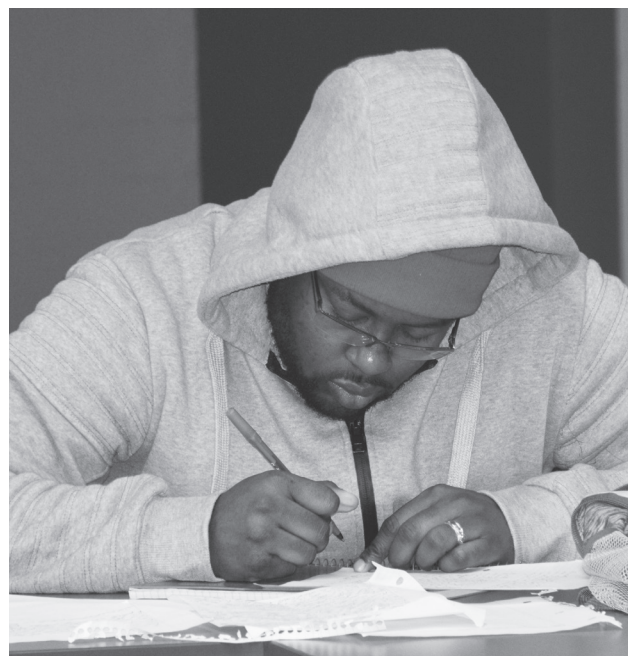
I am Riley
 I am a hard worker
 I am from Wisconsin but spent a lot of time in the south
 I am caring when it comes to my family
 I am an older brother
 I am of many different backgrounds
(Riley Sessions)

I am Shiloh
 Most commonly known as Miss Shiloh
 Proudly known as mama
 Secretly known as beans
 I am from busy roads and bus fumes
 But love beer tents and snowmobiling
 I am loud,
 I am outspoken,
 I am me.
(Shiloh Simonsen)

I am Carmen
 I am from where the sun shows up every day
 From a sky full of stars
 I am a daughter of Mexicans
 Daughter of hardworking, loving parents
 I am from here and from there
 I am from the tortilla place
 I am from grandma's house
 I am from earth
(Carmen Tinajero)

I am Savannah.
 I am a mother, trying to survive
 An aunty always loving and kind
 Descendants of the Menominee tribe
 I am native with spiritual beliefs
 Hispanic but Spanish I don't speak
 A survivor with ambition to succeed
 I am a mother when my children need
(Savannah Torres)

I am O'Shane
 A son of Jamaica with
 A touch of African
 A policeman
 A bodyguard
 A security officer
 Now a student
 A mixture of Christian and Rastafarian
 An aggressive but quiet fellow
(O'Shane Omar Wilmoth)





SONG OF THE ODYSSEY CLASS OF 2020

Inspired by Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself"

We are the Odyssey Class of 2020.

We have worked as a waiter, cashier, dietary aide, swimming teacher, babysitter, custodian, busboy, car detailer, pizza server, light fixture assembler, hair dresser, McDonald's server, cook, housekeeper, CNA, telemarketer, carpenter, omelet maker, flooring installer, forklift driver, nanny, call center operator, security guard, oil changer, and mother.

We hail from Wisconsin, Illinois, Tennessee, Minnesota, Florida, Colorado, New York, Mississippi, Texas, Missouri, Togo, Jamaica, the West Indies, and Mexico,

With ancestors coming from Thailand, Ireland, India, Togo, Jamaica, Italy, Germany, Israel, Holland, Malaysia, Spain, South Africa, the UK, Mexico, somewhere unknown in Africa, Texas, Mississippi, Arkansas, California, Illinois, Wisconsin, and a Menominee reservation.

Speaking Spanish, Hebrew, French, Ewe, Sign Language, Dutch, German, Hindi, Thai, and English,

Worshipping as Buddhist, Rastafarian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Jehovah's Witness, and Christian, including Catholic, Evangelical, Baptist, and Coptic.

We call ourselves stressed, dramatic, pretty, positive, kind, average, fun, poetic, loved, loving, caring, helpful, persistent, everlasting, short, tall, outgoing, outspoken, busy, humble, open-minded, stubborn, juicy, happy, sweet, sassy, laid-back, determined, sarcastic, goofy, nice, efficient, aggressive, quiet, curious, authentic, hardworking, and ambitious for success.

We are the Odyssey Class of 2020.

