

ODYSSEY ORACLE

"I love the Odyssey program. With all of the discrimination and judgment that goes on in this cruel world, this place is our safe zone. When the whole world wants to count us out and remind us of our different levels of poverty and the color of our skin, Odyssey doesn't."



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Emily Auerbach, Project Director; Oracle Editor
Kevin Mullen, Assistant Director; Oracle Editor
Emily Azad, Odyssey Coordinator
Beth McMahon, Oracle Designer

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

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

www.odyssey.wisc.edu



I LOVE...



I love lying in my bed with a lot of pillows and blankets, with little light in my room. This is the place where the magic happens for me and my family because I spend quality time here. We read stories, plan family events, hear music, and have lots of tickles, hugs, and kisses.

After enjoying our family dinner and seeing the sun coming down, we know we're getting closer to the end of our day. My children keep on looking for me to put my pajamas on because they know it is time to come for hugs and kisses with Mama. (**Grisel Tapia Claudio**)

I love cliff diving because I love the adrenalin that goes through my body. I love the freedom of being able to soar into the air from a cliff. When my body hits the ocean, it feels like what heaven might be. The moments of being under water are like being in a world of peace and harmony. The fast darts of fish going past me, smiling at me, waving at me with their fins until I surface are memories that will stay with me forever. (**Joy Bally**)



I love the Odyssey program. With all of the discrimination and judgment that goes on in this cruel world, this place is our safe zone. When the whole world wants to count us out and remind us of our different levels of poverty and the color of our skin, Odyssey doesn't. This program and these amazing teachers remind us that every one of us has a reason to be here. We all have come from different struggles, different backgrounds, and different heritages, but Wednesday nights we all

become one big, happy family. I couldn't think of a better way I would love to spend my Wednesday nights—improving skills or discovering skills that I didn't realize I already had within me. This class makes me realize that anything is possible. This is why I love the Odyssey program. (**Jessica Tucker**)



I love my children. All five of them are blessings. I became a mom at 15 years old. My oldest made 20 in January. I often said that I didn't know what I'd do if one of my kids left me. Well, as we all know, that happened. I am still figuring out what to do and how to move forward in honoring Zaire. Odyssey gave me the first chance at this! My children mean the absolute most to me. There is nothing I would not do to see them smile. They are the apples of my eyes. If it weren't for them, and even my Angel Zaire, I don't know where I'd be. I love my babies! (**Felica Thomas**)



I love the season of summer, from the hot steaming sun to the largest outdoor waterpark in the Dells. I love the fact that in the summertime, you can almost always find fun. I love where I'm from. I love that where I'm from, summertime means 25 cent cups of ices from the last house on the block.

I love how in the summertime you can see kids playing Double Dutch and games of tag. I love the season of summer when the warmth is enough to smile about. (**Shanon Holmes**)

I love the excitement of reading a new novel. It's so refreshing to read and experience a multitude of stories from different writers. I love when a book can cause different emotional reactions. I have guffawed out loud, and I have sobbed in sadness, all sparked from the text of a book. I love the anticipation of continuing a story, fantasizing about what is to come and comparing it to what actually happens. My favorite stories to read are sequels. I find it so fascinating to follow a character from book to book. (**Cherri Sorrells**)



I love watching TV, but I love reading books more. Books are more in depth, and it is easier to get lost reading a book than watching a TV show. (**Kendra Atkinson**)

I love to plan and set up activities and parties. I love to entertain and make sure all my co-workers, friends, and family really have a good time. At work, I am head of the Employee Activities Committee (EAC). I work with other teams within the whole company system. Our task is to keep up the morale of our department employees. In the beginning, no one wanted to be head of the committee because we were supposed to raise money and have so many activities per month. At first only a couple people helped me do all the work. We had a potato bar, taco bar, sundae social, etc., but as there was success with the committee, then people wanted to take it over. I really love what I do, so I just had to say, "You can be on the committee, but we are a team so we all have to work together." People at work feel they are appreciated. When someone says to me, "Thanks for all your hard work," it makes me feel special. With my family, I love to plan and make sure we celebrate each other's birthdays, baby showers, and wedding parties. Right now I am planning my daughter's baby shower in Chicago. It is so much fun! The shower has a Dr. Seuss theme; that is pretty cool and different. There are a lot of options. I love when

my family supports each other and makes each other feel important. It makes me feel that all the time and planning I put into the event was well worth it because the person we are celebrating feels important and special. The person we celebrate is special. **(Ngina Ali)**

I love you, “Corazón.” You have no idea how much I love you. I can’t survive without you because you are my everything. I love to see you laughing because your smile makes me feel alive. You are the best woman (the perfect one). I love the way you give an opinion, make a decision, or just do something. I think you are my own doctor because you relieve my bad days, my stress, my sadness, and my tiredness when I talk to you. I love you because you’ve always given me good advice, and I always listen to you. Let me tell you that I love you so much because you are irreplaceable and the only one I love with all my heart. I hope we stay together forever. Thank you for being my wife. GOD BLESS OUR FAMILY. I love you, Corazón . . I love you, “Lupe.” **(José Mendoza)**



I love sweets after every lunch. Once a sweet is served, I feel energy and happiness. Sweets give people bright moods. When you love someone, you buy them chocolate. No matter what age you are, sweets are something you love deep in your heart.



Each country has different recipes for sweets. In my opinion, all of them are delicious. In my country, they have many kinds of sweets and different ways to make them, but what they have in common is that I love them all. I

think sweets make our lives nicer. I cannot imagine life without chocolate. I advise you to eat sweets but be careful: do not eat too much because too much may harm your health. Eat a little and live happily! **(Musab Naji)**

I love to see the Sun and Earth, caught in its infinite attraction, showing itself in a person. Even through all the horror, I see it. **(Johnnie Walton)**

I love watching my kids sleep. I love the peaceful faces they make. I love the way they smell after a bath. I love the way my kids look when they are happy or playing. I love the things my kids do when they are hurt. The comfort they seek heals my heart. I love the love they have and give. It’s so pure and powerful. I love watching them sleep because just for a moment, time stops for me to enjoy all of them. **(Alyanna Cooper)**



I love sipping on blended mocha frappuccinos early in the morning before work or during my day. The taste of the cold ice pieces throughout the blended tasty mocha instantly wakes me up, gives me energy, and brings me a pleasant attitude to keep my day bright and positive.

I also love my pug droopy-faced bully-pitbull puppy who follows me wherever I go, cuddles next to me for comfort when he is tired or wants love, drools and burps after he eats, and gurgles water. He is a part of me; my old man he is.
(**D'onna Atkinson**)

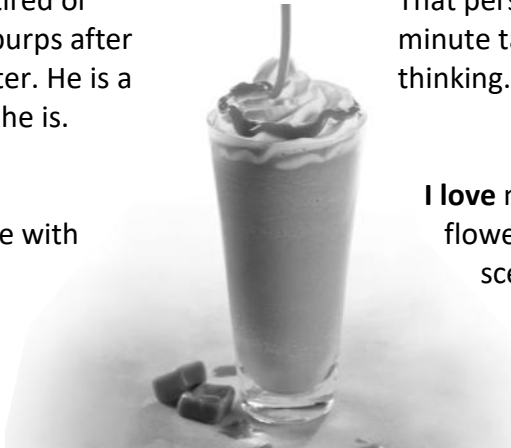
I love drinking hot coffee with whipped cream and drizzled with caramel while reading. Reading puts me in another world and gets me away from my own worries and problems. (**Simone Bell-Perdue**)

I love cooking. Cooking gives me control over the choices I make with the food I eat and serve other people. It's a process I've learned throughout my life, yet I still continue to learn a lot from cooking. Through the process of cooking I get to know so much about other cultures, their food choices and perspectives about taste.

When I cook, I get a mental picture of what I am cooking, and I get to balance different options and food choices that will fit my own needs and whoever else I get to serve.

Cooking is my passion because it feels like an exploration for me. I get an ecstatic feeling when I try new ideas when cooking, especially when I am not sure of the outcome. Cooking is also a great exercise for me because I get to move around a lot and am on my feet the whole time.

I love cooking mostly because I can relate it to many aspects of life. It involves the risk of investing time,



money, energy, and skill in a task and hoping for a great outcome.

I love seeing people enjoying food that I cook. (**Sukai Yarbo**)

I love seeing a patient with a piece of hope. It makes me happy to know that just by talking for five minutes to that person, I have made a difference. That person may be lying in a hospital bed, but a five minute talk can change the way they're feeling and thinking. (**Belem Calixto**)

I love nature, and, nature loves me. I love the flowers, with their beautiful colors and special scents. I love to see the freedom that the flowers have. All of them are unique. They are not criticized for being different, and the mix of many different flowers together makes the most beautiful bouquet.

I love water, and the water loves me. How do I know water loves me? I know because 75% of my body is water. I love the freedom that



water has. One constant drop of water can make a hole in the ground. Water, we should all be like you. Together nothing can stop us, just like you in all of your forms—liquid, solid, or gas. You can travel wherever you want without a visa or a green card. I love the soil, and the soil loves me. How do I know soil loves me? I know because it produces the food that nurtures me. I love the freedom that the soil has to be spread all around. If only we as humans could be like you, sharing and giving as you do. I love the air, and the air loves me. How do I know air loves me? I know because it fills my lungs and makes me breathe. Oh, the air! I wish humans could be like you, giving life instead of taking it away.

(**Marisol Gonzalez**)

I love my dog when he jumps on my bed in the morning and licks my face, which helps to wake me up. Normally in the morning, I have trouble getting out of bed, but my dog helps to put me in a good mood in the morning. He is always so loving and excited to be with me that I can't help but smile when he is the first thing I see in the morning. He is also always excited to do anything, from going outside for a walk down the street to sitting on the couch and watching television with me. How can I not share some of his excitement when it is always so over the top? He will also eat with me. Even though he begs for food sometimes, I like it when I finally give him a little treat. He seems so happy to be able to have a taste of what I am eating. Basically he just wants to be with me and do what I do all the time, and he is always an unconditional friend.

(Ahmad Nahas)

I love the rain. Now don't get me wrong. I don't like being outside in the rain or driving in the rain. But I do love being inside at home and watching the rain come down. I love opening my patio door and my windows and letting the smell of rain take over the house. I love cuddling up with my kids and watching a movie or just lying in the bed with them and listening to the rain as it takes us over and rocks us to sleep. I love being at work and watching the rain as it falls from the sky. I love how the rain washes away the old and brings in the new. I love how rain can come down in so many ways, from so gentle you barely know it's there to roaring like a lion. I love rain.

(Victoria Patterson)



I love to be loved. I love to see love. I love to feel love. I love to give love. I Love to hug. I love to smile. I love my family and friends. I love to dance in the mirror as if nobody is around. I love to live, to laugh, and to believe that there will be better days. Love is such a beautiful thing. Embrace it!

(Kyisha Williams)

I love the arts. To be more specific, I lean towards the art of performance, cooking, and shows. All three are uniquely "sensible," meaning they involve all five senses. I can taste the salty, sweet goodness of a pretzel dipped in chocolate. I can smell the wholesomeness of freshly-baked bread or the savory, succulent aroma of barbeque on the grill. I can see the multi-faceted style on a fashion model. I can hear the deep bass pounding on the drums, while enjoying a concert. And lastly, I can pull my partner close to slow dance to the melodic pulses of a slow jam. I love the arts. They are a life force for me.

(Spencer Gamble)



I love the little family that I have created! I love my family because they keep me grounded, focused, and, determined to better myself. Whenever I feel like I have reached my breaking point, my family reminds me that I have so much going for myself. They are always right by my side, encouraging me to keep trucking forward.

Ashzianna is my first born child, and as you all may know, I had her at a very young age. I strongly feel

that Ashzianna is my greatest blessing from God. She has turned me into the strong woman and mother that I am today.

Parish III and Little Miss Londynn keep me on my toes day in and day out, but I wouldn't have it any other way. My family is my life and my motivation. Without them by my side, I don't know where I would be. I can't imagine life without them.

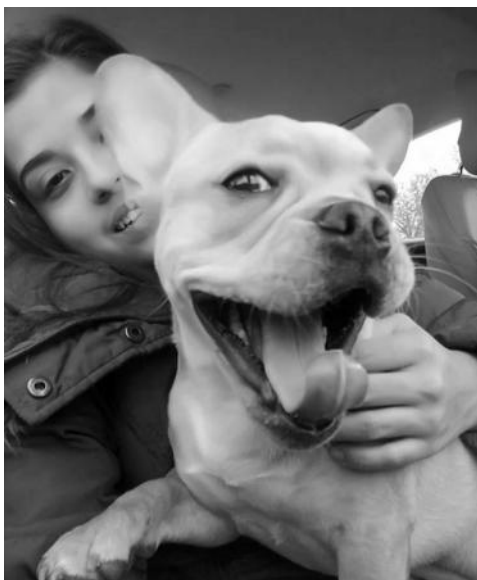
I have been with my children's father for the past ten plus years..... So if the common law marriage exists, I guess I should say husband. Parish is my back bone, my rock, my everything, Sure, we struggle, fight, and argue just like everyone else, but we always find a ways to rewrite our wrongs. It's not how hard you fall; it's about how fast you get back up.

I appreciate the time I get to spend with my family and the small traditions that we have created within our household. Time is a precious thing to waste! Every minute and every second of my free time I spend with my family.

Our families are, without a doubt, the greatest wealth that we will ever possess. Treasure every moment, and take time to ensure that the story you create is one that you'll be proud to look back on with a huge smile.

I love my little family. **(Asha Green)**

I love my dog Oliver. He's the best thing that has happened to me. Ever since the day that I got to pick him up from the breeder, I knew that he was the one. He was the last one left from his litter, and he looked like he had been picked on throughout his short life. Ollie was the smallest, from the looks of it, and his little ears had little red bite marks from the bigger dogs messing with him. As soon as I saw him, he came to me. I knew he was scared, but as soon as I held him, he warmed up and



smiled. He was less than two pounds and a little over eight weeks old. His love has always been unconditional and true.

The day we made it home from the long trip to Indiana was really hard on him. I know he was stressed out being far away from what

he knew to be home, but soon enough he started to come out of his shell. Ollie looked like a little loaf of bread every time he walked. When he ran, he would hop like a bunny, which led to my nickname for him. He didn't know how to climb stairs, and they were probably way too much for him to comprehend. Little by little, he learned more and got to explore his new world.

He has taught me the value of love, how to be patient and have compassion, and what it truly means to put others before yourself.

(Maria Cardenas)



PERSONAL ODYSSEYS



The odyssey that I am on now is to secure my future and my children's future. They say you are what you eat. Well, I believe that you are what you know. Everything that I have known has conditioned me and been an obstacle that has

blocked my path on many occasions. I believe that when I reach the end of this odyssey, it will be a never-ending feeling of joy, no matter what the situation looks like. **(Johnnie Walton)**



I've been on an endless journey to achieve self-acceptance for the past ten years. I can be patient when necessary. I can be humble at times. I've looked deep inside, weighing the strengths and weaknesses, trying to find a

balance. My main obstacle at achieving self-fulfillment is a cynical defense mechanism, i.e. hypersensitivity. I've been known to use sarcasm and dark humor to mask my insecurities.

However, when I partake in enrichment activities, I find I do this less and less. When my mind is idle, I can sometimes create my own obstacles. I'm trying to be more financially sound by saving more money instead of splurging on needless material things. I'm trying to be a better role model and parent to my son. I'd say I've done a 180 in the past two years. I've kept a solid focus on my future endeavors, and my rage has been lessened. I used to fly off the handle at just a glance. Though my journey is far from complete, I'm eager for the next ten years. I want to be done with school, practicing counseling somewhere. I also aspire to strengthen my bond with my son, give back to my community, and continue to help others. I firmly believe that whenever I get knocked down, I will continue to get back up and try harder. So, if I don't stand in my own way, I'll succeed in every way. **(Spencer Gamble)**



I'm currently on an odyssey to success and greatness. My journey is toward a degree (minimum of a bachelor's). I've chosen to leave behind doubt, settlement, despair, and crushed dreams. I've had two children along the way. The waters

have definitely gotten rough while trying to support and raise the girls on my own, but I have yet to give in. For me to feel comfortable and at home, I would have earned a degree, begun a career in a related field, gotten myself out of debt, purchased a home, and established education savings plans for my children.

(Cherri Sorrells)



I've had lots of obstacles come my way, mostly just life—dealing with circumstances, trying to be a wife, mother, and student all in one. Don't get me wrong: I am very blessed to have a husband and a healthy, beautiful daughter, but I

am also human, so me taking on so many tasks has made my anxiety rise. On my worst days, I feel like giving up, but I can't—I've come way too far in life to give up. When I reach home, or a place that feels like home to me, I will be working as a lactation consultant. I won't have to worry about how many jobs I will have to work to support for my family because I would have gone through schooling to help my future. With Odyssey, I feel like I am reaching a major milestone in my life. I overcame so much last semester. . . . Odyssey really helped me take control over my life and become a better mom, wife, and student. I am at peace when I come here and learn because I know my situation or obstacles I go through won't last forever. In all honesty, I feel like Odyssey is a place that feels like I'm home because it has gotten me out of my fear of failing. **(Simone Bell-Perdue)**



My odyssey at this moment is confusion due to the recent elections. Unfortunately, many Latino and Muslim families don't know the direction of this country.

I don't know if I will be allowed to continue in this great country or not. I'm assuming there are many families in the same situation. So my journey moving forward is to continue studying and to take any opportunities down the road like this great Odyssey program. I know there will be many obstacles on the way like the language barrier and instability due to the future rules or laws, not to mention the environment of discrimination and the division of people in this country.

I have lived half of my life in Mexico and the other half here in Wisconsin. My three children were born here. This is the state where I got married and the place I call home. **(Griselda M. Tapia Claudio)**



To begin with, the odyssey that I am on today is being successful as a parent and with my career, as well as finding true happiness. I am a very caring person, so I never want to make anyone feel any negative way. Making someone else feel that way makes me

feel bad or guilty, even when I haven't done anything wrong. Trying to make everyone else happy robs me of my own happiness. So my biggest challenge is accepting things for what they are and understanding not everyone will accept nor agree with my decision making. It's OK to care about people and give them support, but I can't continue making other people's problems my own. I become overwhelmed and distracted from the things I am trying to accomplish. How can I expect others to put me first when I am not putting myself and my dreams first? Focusing on me will eliminate a lot of the extraneous things I allow to bring me down. Overthinking things is normal for me, so I need to go with the flow.

At the end of my journey, I plan to have a career and live happily with the people I love. Life stands in my way at times, so I need to continue to stay focused and understand that even though the unexpected happens, in order to reach my goals I cannot let the train come off the track because of a bump in the road. I think I should start using a planner to stay focused and organized in order to stick to the plan.

My goal for this semester is to be more successful than last semester. Although last semester was really good for me, I plan to have my assignments done for the most part no later than Sunday because I am a very big procrastinator. My personal life seems to be a little chaotic – there is always something happening, but just like last semester, I plan to stay focused and understand that some things are out of my control. **(Kyisha Williams)**



The odyssey I'm on now... hmmm... well, after being a part of Odyssey, I now know my own journey. I have always procrastinated through a lot of things in my life, including school or career.

Originally, I wanted to be in the dental field – I love smiles! Now due to Odyssey and my new job, I'm finding myself, pushing myself, and NOT procrastinating.

Also, from Odyssey and my job, I now know my path or my home. This will also be home for my children.

I want to be a registered nurse for transplant patients. My job and Odyssey have lit a dead flame, given me a passion in life I never had before.

The only obstacles now will be starting over and pushing myself. Odyssey will be my guide and my stepping stone. This will drive me, and my future will be amazing.

I'm happy this will help me and help my kids. **(Alyanna Cooper)**



I've had my goals set since I started this class back in September. I knew that I wanted to be a nurse to continue to help other people.

For now, it is just a

"wait and see" what this new president will bring, or what he will change. Whatever he does will define what my future will be. I could ignore this, but it's impossible; I cannot start something and not be able to finish it. It would be meaningless to me. Right now, I have two jobs, and I found a way to save as much money as I can every paycheck in case I have to make a sudden decision. Right now, I'm enjoying my work, which I really love doing, and living every day like it's the last. My journey, the most important one, is to go back and live with my parents in Mexico and be a nurse. As of now, I'm working on half of my journey/goal. This is what makes me wake up every morning. **(Belem Calixto)**



The Odyssey I am now on is to continue and finish my education once and for all. I am happy to have found true happiness, and this class has done a lot to bring forth these emotions. Sometimes, I feel like I can be my own worst enemy, but I am

continuing to keep myself motivated and focused. I will not stop until I finish my education because it is not only for myself but my son as well. I know that will be the only way for us to live a comfortable life. I also know that if he sees his mother do it, it will motivate him to do the same. **(Jessica M. Tucker)**



My odyssey is to get an education, and I don't know if I will ever get there. I find it hard to think about getting a degree in some major. First of all, I think about what I want to do, but the more I think about it, the



more I go completely blank. I do not like anything that has to do with the medical field, and already people tell me I should go for being a nurse; sorry, but I don't like needles and blood. I honestly don't know what I want to do. Another obstacle is money. School is expensive, and for me to be a full-time student would be hard on my family since only one income would be coming in. And I know

there are scholarships and financial aid, but I don't like being in debt. I also have a son, and it gets hard to find a babysitter, so that is another obstacle. The moment when I feel like "home" is when I don't think about school. I know it may sound selfish, but I am happy in the position I am in my life. I would really love to attend school, but it can be hard at times. Home would feel like being at my dream job and my family feeling happy. **(Susana Gomez)**



I am on the journey of becoming the very best version of myself, from the shy insecurities of self-doubt and indecision. Along the way, I had to deal with the obstacles of migrating from a different society to adopting a whole new culture and environment.

My culture taught me to be a wife and that raising children is the perfect dream of a lady. But becoming a single mom taught me differently. I had to battle between my belief and my reality to get clarity. Now, I am on the journey of becoming my own dream and turning it into reality. An important part of my journey would be helping other people find themselves on their own journey. **(Sukai Yarbo)**



I have spent too much time away from home (almost 20 years). I started working hard when I was 18 years old, right after completing high school back in Mexico. I didn't have the opportunity to go to college. It was really hard working on a farm (milking cows by hand). I knew that I had to move forward and continue with my education. I decided to come to the USA. I started working hard in two jobs, saving some money. But life in this country is different. I stayed here longer and longer. After five years of living here, I got married. I blocked my way to go back home and continue my education. I tried to continue my education many times here at MATC, but I failed because I had no time for school. I found many obstacles in every way. Now, I have finally made the decision to improve my education and be better. I became a part of the Odyssey class. **(José Mendoza)**



I've been on a lifelong journey, trying to find myself as a person. I have always been very shy and not a very outgoing person. I've been stuck in a cave; I have never had a way out or been shown how to escape. I have tried to find ways in life to help me work towards my goals and dreams. Growing up with no father figure and a single mother raising two kids, we had to grow up quickly and learn to adapt to different trials and troubles in life. Sometimes, I feel like a fish out of water. But with the help of the Odyssey Project, the tutors, and my family as support team, I will succeed and grow into my dreams of being an RN one day. I want to give to and help people. I feel that the place I call home is to come when I have overcome my weaknesses. **(Carissa Love)**

When I first started Odyssey, I thought I had a clear "home." Now, I don't know.



This time away from class has left my mind clouded, almost akin to the lotus eaters. While I am still traveling on my path of progress, my destination is now lost. I'm moving forward for the sake of progress despite any challenges I might face. No matter what is to come, I know I will become stronger. My road block has always only been me. **(Nathaniel Lake)**



Today, I am on a journey to find my belonging in my community. I know I have the gift of gab; however, it's of no use if just hot air is expressed without meaning. Today, I am on a journey to accept the things I can't change, learning to respect each and everyone's way of living. We are all doing the same thing, just using a different approach. Who am I to judge someone as right or wrong? My odyssey is to continue to focus and look forward, let nothing distract me or get in my way. In the past, I didn't allow myself time to accept being without. I took on more obstacles than I had time to overcome. Now I have learned better time management and to not take on more than I can physically handle. You see, to be successful, I had to learn the hard way that something had to give. Working full-time with mandatory overtime, having a family, and school full-time was quite a combination. It took me failing to realize my mistakes. Now I am better situated and ready to reach higher ground and education, to bring the gold home, setting an example for my children to follow as we all strive for higher education. **(Lawana Diagne)**





I feel like my own personal odyssey began in 2001 when I decided to leave the city of Chicago, where I was born and raised, in order to come to Madison, where I had no family or friends. I felt the need to start this journey because I wanted to live in an area that would be safer in terms of raising a family.

Due to educational and financial limitations, it has still been somewhat harder for me to gain stability. However, I am on the right path, taking necessary steps to get there.

When I finally do arrive at the place that feels like home, I imagine it to be where I have fully completed a degree, own my home, have my own business perhaps, drive a fully functioning automobile, and have children that sleep peacefully through the night with full bellies in beds that they don't have to share.
(Avé Thorpe)



OK, I'm from Iraq, and that country had a war. My journey started when I left in 2006 with my family. I had no idea where I would go, when I would come back, or if I could come back to my home. I went to Syria and stayed five months and left that country to go to

Malaysia with my wife and my four kids. We stayed there seven years and still had no chance of going back to my country. We came to the USA – to Madison – in 2014. We started our life over again from zero to find a better life and future, but we still can't go back home. I think home is where you live your life in peace and safety, but I am still looking for the day when I can go back to my old home and see my mom, my brothers, and all of my big family. Everyone thinks what you start you should end. I miss ALL my beautiful memories. We work hard, and we are looking for a beautiful future.

I can write of my odyssey from its beginning, but I can't put an end to it because it hasn't ended yet.
(Musab Naji)



The odyssey that I am on is one I cannot describe. It is one that I never imagined I would experience. Truthfully, I cannot name this odyssey, but I guess I can name it "finding myself."

The obstacles that have blocked my way are (do I really say this? Yes, I do) some of my family and friends. The people I love tend to hurt me more than anyone else. I have perfect strangers that have shown me more love, support, and dedication than the people that should automatically be there for me.

My life hasn't been a crystal staircase. It took me losing my son to realize a lot about myself. I am strong, I am a fighter, and I can survive!

I've realized that the primary focus for the rest of my life is seeing myself and my kids through. I am on a journey to succeed, and this odyssey only has room for those that are headed in the same direction I'm headed.

I have lost so much, but I stand to gain so much more! Nothing can hold me back. I am destined to be great. I shall make my son proud of me, and I shall give my other kids something to look forward to! I know deep down I have something about me that God left me here to deal with. I intend my journey to be amazing.

I have learned since Zai's passing that people and things fade away, but you will be you. The best take away from this is to be the most authentic you that you can be. I've learned that the only person to please in life is yourself and those that truly appreciate you.

Home for me looks like... me, Felica, over depression, healing and striving. Home in a perfect world would be to be with Zaire. My heart longs to be with him, but I know he's not ready. So, I will stay here and continue to advocate and fight for justice for Zai. This is my life, and I am fighting to find my way. All my life I've taken others into consideration. Zaire has taught me to give my own self, my authentic self, a way to find my way home. (Felica Thomas)



The odyssey that I am on right now is the learning phase. I am grasping all the knowledge that I can. I am learning so many new things that I am overjoyed. I can't wait to learn more. I am thirsty to learn even

more. The journey I want to take is to finish this program and then come back to talk about my experience and how the Odyssey Project has helped me. I want to be able to give back as well. I want to eventually apply to the UW Madison and get accepted into their Bachelor of Nursing program, and then get my Master's in Nursing as well. The obstacle that has blocked me is that I worry about my oldest son and sometimes feel like I failed him. Who has ever thought or dreamed of their child going to prison? I sometimes sit and cry and blame myself for his mistakes. I know I am not the cause of his mistakes, but I just sometimes wish he would listen and become a better person.

When I reach my place that feels like home, I will be floating on air. It's going to be an AWESOME experience, but I will never forget where I came from. **(Ngina Ali)**



My odyssey right now is the fear that I have about the political situation in the USA and my country, Mexico. I feel like it is not the way to go. I feel hopeless. I have a big fear that I will

not be able to keep moving forward or that there will not be a bright future for my children. I know that I have to be strong and do whatever is in my power to reach my goals and keep going in my education because by doing that I will give a good example to my children. It is also very hard for me to be away from my parents and my family. I would love to share my success with them. It's just impossible now.

Feeling like home means being with my family, having the opportunity to study and provide an education for my children, and also living in a country where people are more important than money. **(Marisol A. Gonzalez)**



I'm journeying toward building myself a career and financial stability for my future and my children's future. I'm moving out of the cave, getting my life together, striving for greatness. I am pushing myself so that my children will know what to

do and how not to give up on themselves. I want to be my own boss and make my own schedule.

I have allowed financial burdens to stop me from moving forward with my life. Losing our home has set me back in many ways—mentally, physically, and emotionally. I am the only thing keeping me blocked and in the same spot.

When I finally reach home, it's going to be my paradise, my happy place. I am slowly coming around and finding that space.

I'm home. I'm home. I'm home. **(Asha Green)**





The Odyssey that I'm on right now has been one that I never imagined I would ever be on. My life has been turned upside down many times, but you know what they say, "The only way to go is up." My life is finally falling into place one day at a time. The last three months of 2016 were the hardest for me. My dog broke his leg, which cost so much money that I didn't even have. I was in a job where I was unhappy, but I had to stay; otherwise I wouldn't be able to afford anything. That didn't even work out because I ended up losing it. I was unemployed for almost a month, and it was the hardest time because I had to sacrifice many things, including my education. I wasn't focused on anything, lost myself in the process, and didn't know how to come back. I was financially unstable, my bills were going up, and all I had was my part-time job that only gave me 12 hours a week. Not being able to continue my classes at MATC was hard because I was already on academic probation. . . .

I believe that when I reach a place that feels like "home," I won't know what it will be like. My life has always been chaotic, and there is always a stress I'm under or something going wrong. I have learned that maybe nothing is meant to be right for me. Maybe one day my life will finally become stable. For now, I must push forward for my future and not let life take me.

(Maria Cardenas)



The journey I am on now is to endure the next seven years. Within the next seven years, my goal is to accomplish retirement, which I feel is going to be a task.



keeping busy makes the time go by fast. I've decided to do the things I really love, like getting certified as a personal trainer. This I will be doing next fall with the University. The other is learning how to dismantle a bicycle and put it back together, as I am an avid cyclist. And, of course, I'll continue to travel.

The importance of having a retirement is

also blocking me. I cannot see how I can get away from this to continue a degree, but I am very good at taking a personal interest in things I don't know about so I will continue learning and educating myself, just not in a traditional way.

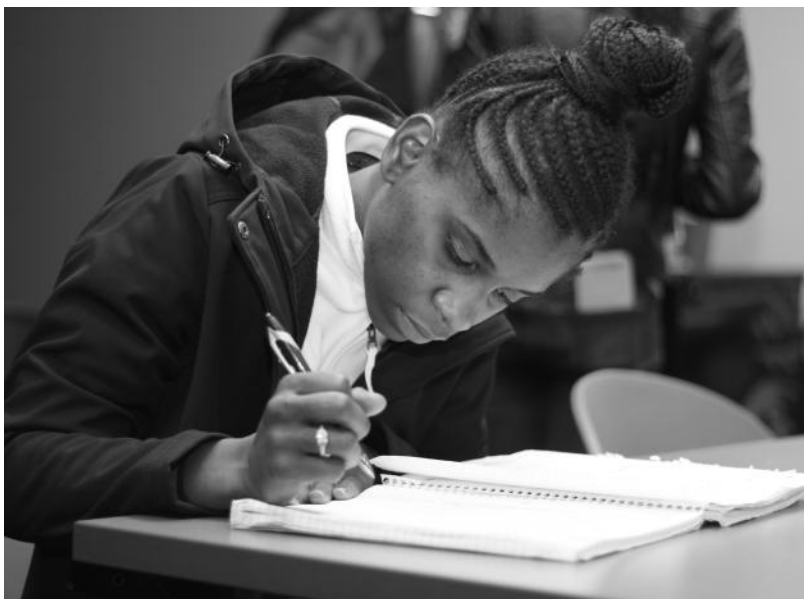
Home would look like winter months in the Caribbean and summers in Madison. **(Joy Bally)**



I am actually working on earning my degree from UW-Madison. My journey has been facing difficulties since I was in Syria. In my home country, I tried to earn my bachelor's degree, but my country went through hell. All of the

obstacles that I am facing are making me stronger and stronger. I have been learning a lot of things that make me want to win and beat all my obstacles. Someday, I am going to reach the place that I am seeking, and that will definitely make myself, my mom, and the people proud. **(Ahmad Nahas)**

I spoke to Coach tonight, and he mentioned that



and the meaning of my life is coming together, but obstacles are getting in the way of enjoying this and making it difficult to pursue my goals. All I want for myself is to finish school

with my bachelor's in Nursing and to buy a home—hopefully not too far away, but in a different state. In the midst of all that, I want to build my relationship with GOD more than I do now. While going to school, I am having complications with bills, debts, paying for school, living on my own, and working full-time to become debt-free so I



I would like to give back to where I took the most resources from; eventually, I want to become strong enough to help other kids find ways to deal with alcoholic parents or loved ones! I lack the education part, but I'm overqualified for firsthand experience...

I believe my info was stolen from me years ago. I've had no luck with MATC trying to help me figure this out. I've been stuck for too long in the same spot, dreaming instead of turning my dreams into my reality. I'm also still learning new ways of coping and understanding that my mom's addiction is not mine.

To be home would mean I would have a degree or at least a certificate proving that I went back to school and made something of myself. Also, being home would mean I would be able to help at least change the thinking of the way we love people with nasty habits. I want to start a small group to at least start growing awareness about this topic. **(Shanon Holmes)**

It seems to me like I have been facing obstacles my whole adult life. This past year I took a whole spin

can raise my credit score and buy a house. This is all a challenge, but it will get done sooner rather than later. **(D'onna Atkinson)**



I used to think my journey would only be done when my bank account read a certain number or I owned a certain something. Today I know that the knowledge that I am finally financially stable and independent is the grand finale. It

won't look a certain way, but the feeling it will give is the serenity and confidence to wake up and face new days, rather than sit back and try to survive them. It is mainly about staying hungry for it because, for myself, being complacent can lead to inaction and ways of thinking that aren't constructive. **(Anthony Jefferson)**



I believe that no matter what journey I'm on, I will always come across an obstacle. The journey I am on now is called self-love and improvement. I am learning to love myself and the flaws that I have. I am learning to change my bad

qualities into positive qualities. I am learning that being educated is the best way you can improve.

School has really helped. They say that a mind that knows little has so much to say, but a mind with a lot of knowledge has very little to say. The more knowledge I gain, the less I say. I am learning how to appreciate the small things in life and not take them for granted. I'm learning that both negative and positive situations will teach me to move forward and reach for my dreams. What will home feel like when I reach it? To be completely honest, I don't know. I pray it will be a warm, loving, comfortable place. **(Kendra Atkinson)**



My end goal has always been inner-peace. I struggle with anxiety, and many times it prevents me from finishing things well, or finishing them at all. I've really wanted to just finish school, and I've tried to concentrate on it and work hard.

But I get anxious that I'm not doing my best and I quit because in my eyes doing nothing is better than trying and failing. I've wanted to be a teacher to help kids like me, but I guess I have to learn to help myself. My first step this year was to quit smoking, and although it helps, it also makes me feel slightly anxious. So I try to fight through it. Breathing helps—I try to breathe through the attack and can't. I think I'll find peace once I can

start an assignment and am able to finish it and feel comfortable with it. **(Maria Dary)**



The obstacle that is in my way right now is time and me believing in myself as able actually to succeed on my own. I completed the first semester of class with flying colors. I felt so good about myself, but at the same time was in disbelief, like I made it even

though I was going through the fire. I got the job I wanted and worked and prayed so hard for. I had so much support and help to get there. Now I'm here, I wonder can I really do this? Was this really for me? I have a very heavy workload with long days and nights. The thing that scares me the most is that I have to make all my decisions on my own with staff, the kids, hiring and firing, and meetings: it's all me. I don't get to call or text and ask my friends what they think. I must stand on my own and believe in myself. It's a scary and hard thing, but I know with God and my kids (mine and all kids), I can do it. My "home" will look like me being confident and walking in it. It will look like me practicing time management skills and finishing Odyssey with flying colors again. **(Victoria Patterson)**



LETTERS TO PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

Dear President Obama,
Before I say anything else, I would like to thank you for everything! My name is Shanon Holmes. I'm a 24-year-old African American. I hate to admit it took you to come into office to help me understand what the government--this White House thing—really meant. I recall it like it was yesterday when you were elected; my whole block was very happy. The fact that we had a Black man as our president

meant way more than America could understand. I work at an elementary school; hearing the kids' thoughts about you makes me smile and feel good. I remember I had a third grader bring me a book with your face on it. He said, "This looks like me. Can we read this one?" After reading the book, he wanted to be just like you and do your job. I shared that to say this even after your eight years in office, books will still share your legacy and have many children looking up to you.

I found it pretty cool that you love to read books. For me, reading could be fun, but it's not easy. In your speech [and in your interview with the New York Times Book Review], you talk about how books helped you become the man and wonderful president that you are. I think if I get over my fear of not knowing how to understand what I'm reading, I could easily find my purpose and meaning. To really show you I appreciate you and all your hard work, I'm working hard this year of 2017 to read more books! **(Shanon Holmes)**

The last eight years of your presidency were an important part of my life. I did a lot of personal growth, and today I am in a place that I never thought I would be. In many ways it is like what you talked about in your Farewell Address: "If I had told



you eight years ago that America would reverse a great recession, reboot our auto industry, and unleash the longest stretch of job creation in our history...you might have said our sights were set a little too high." This sentence struck me because I feel like no one ever knows where life will take them, and this is very true with me. I didn't plan the successes and failures that I experienced during the last

eight years, but no one can.

Overall, I thought you did a good job as the president, and I want you to know that even though your time might be done at this job, people will not forget you. I also completely agree with your point about true success only happening when we work to better understand each other. You stated, "If our democracy is to work in this increasingly diverse nation, each one of us must try to heed the advice of one of the great characters in American fiction, Atticus Finch, who said, 'You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.'" This statement really struck me because I have often [as a Syrian refugee] had to learn how to better understand people in the last eight years. I work very hard to understand the perspective of people I meet, and I can say that based off my experiences, your quote is correct. If people refuse to recognize the perspectives and beliefs of one another, no progress can be made. I think in your last eight years in office, you did a very good job of working to recognize everyone's perspectives. I think the best leaders lead by example, and you definitely displayed this the last eight years. Thank You! **(Ahmad Nahas)**

My name is Jessica. I am a biracial, hard-working 27-year-old mother of a six-year-old, biracial boy named Choho. It's been hard having to explain to my son the concept of race that has come alive in his mind with this election. Despite those struggles, I like to think I was a part of history, being privileged to be able to take part in voting for America's "first African American president." This was my first election since I had turned 18 years old in November of 2008. You took everyone out of their comfort zones by emphasizing your ideas of change. Most people resist the idea of change due to fear of the unknown and lack of control.

I've been nothing other than proud to call you our president for the past eight years. You've taken us in the right direction and steered us out of a recession. You have always made sure to let everyone know that we are all equal, that we all have something to put forth that will make our nation great, that we need to end discrimination, and that we need to "pay attention and listen," meaning listen to one another regardless of occupation, race, and gender, because the only way we will become great is if we come together as one nation. I want to thank you for truly showing America what a great president is. Who knows if there will ever be another one like you? Thank you. In response to "I am asking you to believe not in my ability to bring about change – but yours," I think because of you, I and the rest of America can truly believe with your encouragement. Sincerely, your fellow citizen. **(Jessica M. Tucker)**

I was honored to have you as my president for eight years. You accomplished so much in that period of time. You've had a lot of things to fix in this world. Those people that were saying you didn't do enough don't understand the challenges that come along with your job title (president). You have addressed everyone in your speech having to do with race, different cultures, and our issues as a whole. The biggest thing you said in your speech that I learned from was: "But the laws alone won't be enough. Hearts must change." We as a country



blame others for what is not being done instead of focusing on how much has changed. You also said, "We blame the leaders we elect without examining our own role in electing them." . . . I don't feel disappointed with what you have done for this country. You are a man of integrity; you will always have my support. **(Simone Bell-Perdue)**

It is an honor for me to write you this letter. Please let me introduce myself. My name is Grisel Tapia Claudio. I am an immigrant from Mexico. I came to this country at the age of 15, escaping from poverty and looking for a better life. The transition coming to this country for me was like being reborn. I had to learn a new language, get used to a new culture, new food, new laws, new customs – new everything.

Today, I feel extremely grateful to you and to this country for all the opportunities I have had here and so honored to be in the United States during your presidency. During your eight years as commander-in-chief, I was one of the 800,000 beneficiaries under your executive order, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), signed in June 2012. Because of this order, I was able to go back to my country of origin after 13 years of not being able to go. This gave me the opportunity to see my brother, grandparents' grave, and my husband's family.

Unfortunately, other families were not able to have the same opportunity. Instead, under your administration, mass deportations happened because of former President Bush's program in 2008 called Secure Communities which was an American deportation program that allowed separation of many innocent families while looking for the most serious criminals. In 2014, the Secure Communities program was discontinued by the Department of Homeland Security and replaced by the Priority Enforcement Program (PEP), which would begin rolling out in 2015. On January 25, 2017, the Secure Communities program was restarted by the Department of Homeland Security per an executive order signed by President Donald Trump.

I understand that not all immigrants living in this country are honorable, but if these parents that get deported would have the opportunity to prove to the law that they were good people, they wouldn't have to be deported. I also understand that there are many struggles to make sure the job gets done, but it is necessary to do so to avoid these kinds of hard situations like families who are suffering from a deported parent. Children need to be raised by both parents. Once the damage is done, there is no way to go back and fix it. These children cry every day because they have a broken family.

Now, with the new administration things are getting worse. The new president, Donald Trump,



does not care at all about diversity and most importantly about civil rights.

As you mentioned in your Farewell Address on January 10, 2017, "If something needs fixing, then lace up your shoes and do something. If you are disappointed by your elected officials, grab a clipboard, get some signatures, and run for office yourself." We, people of color, the LGBT community, immigrants and refugees more than ever need to stand up and fight for our civil rights.

As you leave office, I want to thank you for your service, for being the amazing person you are, for the wonderful heart you put in this country. There are no words to explain my gratitude for all your accomplishments. **(Grisel M. Tapia Claudio)**

"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6) Thank you for your amazing guidance. Martin Luther King, Jr. would be so proud of all our country has gained under your leadership. We as Americans will never forget our first, accomplished African American president.

Here is a just a small thank you list: Creating jobs; your humor and patience; your family love; health care reform. **(Alyanna Cooper)**

My name is Belem. I'm originally from Mexico, and I'm one of the lucky and thankful immigrants that benefited from DACA. I cannot express my thanks enough to you. With DACA, I was able to go back home and see my family; with DACA, I got an opportunity to have a job I love, helping people; with DACA, I got a chance to go out of the city, state, country without fear. For that, I am thankful.

When you became president in 2009, I was in school watching history being made. 2009 was a great year: you became my president, and I graduated from high school. "I am asking you to believe. Not in my ability to bring about change



Like your wife, Michelle, I was born and raised in Chicago. My mother worked hard and raised our family. I went to Chicago public schools. I had my firstborn when I was young, but I had a drive to get my college degree. I went to Roosevelt University and got a degree in paralegal studies. My family was close and helped me with my children so I could attend college. I wanted a better life for all of us.

– but in yours.” This is something you said in in your farewell address speech. Somehow, this gives me a bit of hope with this new change that is coming after you. To be honest with you, the only thing I’m afraid of is this guy #45 taking this country to war, separating families by all the nonsensical things that he is saying and doing. If it comes to a point where I am no longer able to be here, I will be grateful for everything this country has given me. “Because those brown kids will represent a larger and larger share of America’s workforce.” I said it before, I’m happy to go back home, but that is because I have a loving family to go back to. By your saying that we the immigrants are a large share of this country, I couldn’t agree more. I have friends, relatives that have been in this country, and this country is all they know. We will keep on holding together; I will be here to fight with my people for sure.

Thank you for everything that you have done for us personally. You will remain in history as the president who helped young “Dreamers” to have a chance to live their dream to be free. Thank you, Mr. President. **(Belem Calixto)**

I want to say goodbye and tell you how proud I am of you. I want you to know that I love Michelle, Malia, and Sasha. Michelle is so beautiful as the First Lady. She has been such a wonderful role model for me, my family, and friends.

I moved to Wisconsin for better opportunities for my kids. I am not going to say it has been easy living in Wisconsin. Like you, I have felt a lot of racism in Wisconsin--on a much smaller level but similar to what I have seen you experience in the White House. Like you, I have to push back to defend my rights and my children’s rights. I know you were blocked by Congress to do some of the things you wanted to do. Though I have not been blocked, I have had to push back at times to let people know that I won’t be pushed around. We are both professionals, and, like you, I expect to be treated like one.

Like you, I do everything I can to protect my children. I have tried to provide a better life, more opportunities, and a safer environment for my kids. I have watched your two beautiful girls grow as my own children have grown. I have done my best, and every day I get up and think, “I am going to do the best I can.”

After listening to your speech, two lines stand out to me: “Our democracy won’t work without a sense that everyone has economic opportunity” and “The uninsured rate has never been lower.”

Yes, there are more jobs now than when you took office. However, I work two jobs, and I felt that would allow me some privilege. I question if I am paid the same or less than my co-workers. Also,

when I started my job, I was asked to show my college diploma. I don't think that others have had to show theirs.

I have found my children caught in a justice system for doing acts that they wouldn't get in trouble for if they weren't African American. With the police, I have felt outright hostility. I don't feel that I should be treated like that. I have seen you keep your head high through attacks from people and leaders. Like you, I have to do that, too. I have to stand tall and let people know that I work hard to support my family. Like me, you have suffered a lot of abuse, but you still worked very hard for America.

However, I know too many people who work hard every day, and they don't seem to get ahead. Yes, things were tough when you took office. I know people who couldn't find a job anywhere. Now there are more jobs, but our pay hasn't increased. My daughter, who is really smart, didn't attend college and has to work two shifts to support herself to try to get ahead. I don't think that is right. My daughter could be anything she wanted to be, but college is expensive. We didn't have the luxury of spending all the money it takes to get her through college. I had to go into debt to get my college degree. My daughter wanted to earn some money for herself. Like I said, she works hard and should get paid more. I see my daughter and other young women working service jobs and working hard, and I think they should get more respect and more money.

I am sad to see you go. You brought such dignity to the White House. You accomplished so much. I wish Obamacare wouldn't have been attacked like it was. I work in the

healthcare field. I am going to school to become a nurse. I appreciate how you made healthcare so much better for everyone. I agree with you that the uninsured rate has never been lower. I see it at my job. There used to be a lot more people working with uninsured patients. They would call to get help to pay their hospital bills. Though there are still many people in need, especially since Governor Walker didn't accept federal dollars, I have seen a lot of change in Obamacare. My two oldest children, who are over 18, are still on my insurance policy. Knowing that I can still provide healthcare for them is important to me. I really appreciate that you fought so hard to make sure more people had healthcare. I do wish everyone could afford it. I am disappointed that you weren't able to make that possible.

I say goodbye to you, President Obama. I want you to know that you are really loved by a lot of people. As an African American, you have made me proud because of who you are and how you have behaved. You have made Americans proud. I am sorry you weren't treated well as the first African American President, but I think you will go down in history as one of the best presidents in American history. **(Ngina Ali)**





I would like to begin by thanking you for your service to our country for the last eight years. I remember as if it were yesterday the day I voted for you. I had just turned 18 years old in 2008, and I was thrilled to exercise my right that countless men and especially women fought for me to have. I was very pleased with the stimulus boost awarded to us. I am so very grateful for the Affordable Healthcare Act. It has made a huge difference for my family and me. We would not be able to afford health insurance otherwise. In your farewell speech you stated, "Understand democracy does not require uniformity." This passage resonated with me because I agree that it is the basis of a democracy: the ability to agree or disagree and make our voices and votes count.

I would also like to touch on a few points that disappointed me. I am fully aware that you did not order our U.S. troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, but you also did not remove all troops as promised. This war in the Middle East has gone on way too long and needs to end. I also wish gun safety legislation would have been pushed harder on your part. The United States has seen an uptick in public gun violence. We need laws in place to prevent the violence before it occurs.

"If you're disappointed by your elected officials, grab a clipboard, get some signatures, and run for office yourself." I found this to be a profound and powerful statement. It reminds the American people that we have the chance to make a

difference. A young senator from Chicago showed us this. I plan to run for school board in the near future to make my voice heard!

Thank you for your service. **(Cherri Sorrells)**

I am very proud of you because you were the first African American president of the United States of America. As a president, you worked really hard for this nation, full of troubles. First, I would like to thank you for helping immigrant students who applied for DACA and were able to make their dreams real, and others who are still working hard to finish their goal of becoming professionals. Other people benefited from Work Permission and were able to keep helping their families. Second, thank you for providing health care. A lot of people had benefits with your Obamacare. It was really helpful to many families because they had access to health care when they needed to see a doctor. Also, thank you for helping our country through the economic crisis because now there are more jobs.

When you announced DAPA (Deferred Action for Parents of Americans), many immigrants were happy and excited because it was time for them to come out of the shadows and start living a dignified life. Having a work permit meant people could find a better job, would be able to get a driver's license, and eventually obtain citizenship. Unfortunately, your executive order was denied by Congress, and our dreams vanished again. Even though you did excellent work as a president, I am disappointed because during your administration many people were deported, and millions of people were separated from their families unjustly.

Thank you very much for your hard work. People will miss you because your administration was excellent. You, along with your wife and children, are recognized for being excellent human beings, humble and hardworking. It was an honor to have you as president of the U.S. God Bless your family. **(José Mendoza)**

“Now this is where I learned that change only happens when ordinary people get involved, and they get engaged, and they come together to demand it.” President Obama

President Obama, you are a down-to-earth man, and I admire you for that. Throughout your eight years, you took time to understand the people and acknowledge their ways of living, thinking, and communicating, proven from your quote that change only takes place when the normal people of a country oppose whatever is wrong in social life and political life. Change can happen when people decide and actually take action toward whatever the problem is rather than only talking about it. **(Musab Naji)**

I am writing in response to your farewell speech. Respectfully, I would like to point out some issues that are very important for the people living in the USA. In your campaign to become president, you promised an immigration reform that never happened in the eight long years of your presidency. Immigration was never your number one priority, and actually the promise of immigration reform turned into a mass deportation of more than 2.5 million, making it the largest number in history. Many families were separated, many children became orphans, and many lives were affected by the massive deportations.

You said “if every economic issue is framed as a struggle between a hardworking, white middle class and an undeserving minority, then workers of all shades are going to be left fighting for scraps while the wealthy withdraw further into their private enclaves.” It is a true reality that we are facing now and during your presidency. Your solution of this issue was dividing the communities by helping only the children of immigrants with a false hope, with a

minimal effort in making real changes. Do you ever think about the immigrants who have been working in this country for 30, 40, 50 or more years? They don’t deserve a retirement? In the end we are all workers, workers that contribute to the economics of this country. Unfortunately, for most of us hard workers and undocumented immigrants, that issue is not a priority for the government, even though we are the people who clean your house, take care of your children, and make your food. Talking about food, most of the food that you, the government, and the whole country consume happens thanks to the undocumented hard workers that don’t even have the privilege of fair pay, driver’s licenses, health insurance, education, and housing. Many people believed in your false promises. Many immigrants are now in the system because they believe in and enroll in DACA, and now they are at a big risk because they are in the system.

If I remember under your power as president, you exiled Edward Joseph Snowden for being a hacker, as you called him. The truth is that he discovered how the government abuses power by spying on people’s computers, smartphones, or any device with a camera and microphone, invading the privacy of the whole country. Mr. Snowden does not deserve to be in exile for saying the truth, for being honest in his fight for Americans’ rights, rights to our privacy. What happened with the words you say about how we are all created equal, endowed by our creator with certain unalienable rights,

among them, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? That only applies to some, but not all?

I was definitely disappointed that during your presidency, many Black people were killed and you did nothing; instead, you authorized the sale of 100,000 military weapons to civilians. You



encourage us to go out to demand, to not just argue on the Internet but to talk to people in person, but it's a big problem if we are afraid of getting killed because now there are so many people with weapons that our children are not even safe in school, in churches; we are not safe in walking down the sidewalk.

I feel hopeless because in the eyes of many others, you were a good president, yet look at all the horrible things that happened. What can we expect with a horrible president like Donald Trump?
(Marisol Gonzalez)

I have a confession to make. When you were running for president of the United States, I did not vote for you. At that time, I admit that I didn't see eye to eye with you on some of your views, but now that you have carried out your vision, I am able to see more clearly that my own views at the time were one-sided and selfish. Over the last eight years, I have raised children under your watch, obtained and maintained stable employment, pushed myself to go harder in fulfilling my dreams, and also have come to realize that although your views didn't fulfill all my needs, that some were met not only in my life, but also in the lives of several of my family members.

I now know that there has to be a balance where even if you're not receiving all that you desire, that each group represented can sacrifice some of their requests in order for all parties to receive. There has to be compromise. As you stated in your address, "our economy doesn't work as well or grow as fast when a few prosper at the expense of a growing middle class, and ladders for folks who want to get into the middle class," which is very much the truth. You also stated that, "If we're unwilling to invest in the children of immigrants, just because they don't look like us, we will diminish the prospects of our own children," which is similar to what Dr. King when he said that "an injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Because of your viewpoint, Americans over the last



eight years have come together and united for the greater good, stronger than ever before.

Now, I wasn't completely happy with the health care changes because at some point I was forced into paying for the insurance provided by my place of employment, which in my opinion wasn't as affordable as I would have liked. However, quality care was provided through Obamacare for my father, who is also a veteran. So again, there's that balance.

I thank you and your family for eight years of service. It was amazing seeing a Black family as a representation of all Black families across the world, going against statistics and stereotypical views of a typical Black family. You all gave us something to strive for. Although everyone wasn't completely satisfied, we all were able to receive a little bit of something that we wanted, whether it was lower gas prices or the union with Cuba. Each win gave us hope. Having you in office has given us a sense of peace in America. It was nice to see that because of your acceptance of all backgrounds, people of all walks just purely began to see each other as simply humans.

Thank you for your service; you have truly inspired me. **(Avé Thorpe)**

Thank you for all that you have done for all of us. Thank you for not going to war. Thank you for the Affordable Care Act, although I disagree with fining individuals who refuse to take advantage of this act; after all, this is a free country, and freedom of choice should be applied.



Thank you for inspiring me to participate in civic and political affairs. I like your observation that we can accomplish anything if we work hard and work together.

I was touched by your genuine love for this country and its people. In my fifty years of being alive, I do not think I've heard another U.S. president speak so magnificently as you did. Your speech touched on every point that makes this country a great country to live in.

Unfortunately, if we all took a personal interest in studying the history of the world, we would see that history always repeats itself, and this is why we have Trump today. That being said, Mr. Obama, the next Democrat that comes into power will definitely have a task on his or her hands just like you did. Thank you again for all that you have done. **(Joy Bally)**

After these wonderful eight years with you as our president, you will be truly missed. You made it true that anything is possible, and you lived up to nothing but greatness. My name is D'onna, and in the mix of my low-income, crazy household, you've helped me a lot with grants to attend school to better myself and my education. I was able to accomplish some things during the time you were in office, and I pray I still have the opportunity. You really sought out and showed sympathy for your country and people as a whole and not just for certain individuals. You helped and saved everyone, and, for that, we bow to your greatness. I wish things could have been taken care of that you wanted to change, but others denied. I don't

think you should have had any power taken from you, but you survived, and you did everything that you could. "I've seen hopeful faces of young graduates..." With your help, you boosted us people, and we proved that it is possible. All we needed was a little belief and help.

"My fellow Americans, it has been the honor of my life to serve you. I won't stop; I will be right there with you, as a citizen." President Obama, you made yourself equal with us and not higher than anyone. With that said, we all worked together, and you will be truly missed. **(D'onna Atkinson)**

Thank you for an amazing eight years as president. Your time in office is especially important to me for it is when I migrated to this country and had a greater perspective of American politics. During this whole time, I must say Obamacare was one of your greatest moves. You did give some very eloquent speeches, but I doubt if the average American knows what you are talking about. You already know that your successor has no idea about what you are talking about.

Mr. Obama, you delivered an epic farewell address, but I doubt if it's understood by many Americans. Well, now that you are no longer president, please tweet a lot because it seems people pay more attention to tweets because it's easier than history books.

Also, I never knew presidents could sign this many executive orders because now I am wondering what happened to your pen. You paid too much mind and attention to scrutiny and exercised very little of the powers you had as president. I feel like you delivered a flawless presidency, but you didn't deliver the expectations of your voters.

Well, I am sure now you are seeing how this 45th is exploring his title whilst your terms are all over.

You knew you were the dream, but also the nightmare, of many Americans, and I wish you could have given us an epic presidency. Tell Michelle to get back here and fix your mess and let her know a lot of us have switched back to unhealthy food because we are very depressed by the 45th.

I wish you and your family a great life, and please tweet some more. **(Sukai Yarbo)**

I am a native of Chicago, Illinois, born in the heart of the city in the Englewood community. I am a continuing education student of the UW Odyssey program. The past eight years of your presidency in the White House has made a strong impact on the way I look at your leadership as commander-in-chief. As a middle class worker, I once was against the Affordable Care Act of 2010. When this reform came into play, working citizens such as I were affected tremendously with the out-of-pocket cost of health care. I was deeply disturbed by the passed health care reform. To the present time after your presidency, I was not in favor of this reform due to working class people paying for individuals who are not seeking employment. It disappointed me to see people having bariatric surgery several times a week, and yet for a full-time State of Wisconsin DHS worker like me, the procedure wasn't covered. On the other side of things, I would like to thank you and your family for setting as role models to American families across the globe. The good of your presidency outweighed my dislikes. You broke all barriers – the first African American president of the U.S. This was an epic accomplishment.

President Obama, I am pleased to be a part of your history. Thanks for ending the war in Iraq, kicking banks out of the Federal Student Loan Program, and expanding Pell Grant spending, passing mini-stimulus, passing credit card reform, passing the Fair Sentencing Act, investing heavily in renewable technology, improving school nutrition, expanding hate crime protections, expanding health care for

children, and most important to me, cracking down on bad for-profit colleges. Your entire presidency had a great effect on my family as well.

As you and your family pack your things to exit the White House, I am pleased to have called you my president #44 of the U.S., first African American crowned with this glory. As you leave the White House, it will truly not be the same without you. I will continue to pray for you and your family. I am also very pleased to know that you will continue to live in Washington and lift every voice and sing until earth and heaven ring... (James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938). Today, I will never forget your farewell speech as, "For Blacks and other minorities, it means tying our own struggles for justice to the challenges that a lot of people in this country face – the refugee, the immigrant, the rural poor, the transgender American, and also the middle-age white man who may seem from the outside like he got all the advantages, but who has seen his world upended by economic, cultural, and technological change..." or that, "for white Americans, it means acknowledging that the effects of slavery and Jim Crow didn't suddenly vanish in the 60's, that when minority groups voice discontent, they're not just engaging in reverse racism or practicing political correctness: that when they wage peaceful protest, they're not demanding special treatment, but the equal treatment our Founders promised." It truly saddens many to see you leave the office. It is comforting to keep in mind that your feedback on the fight for equality continues. **(Lawana Diagne)**



LETTERS TO MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Dear Dr. King:

As I was reading your "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," I started to think of the importance of demanding human rights, freedom, justice, and love, the same love that God taught us. I am convinced that it's time not only to demand these things but also to work together to change the oppression, racism, ignorance, and hate that this country is facing. As a minority in this country, I suffer when I think of my children's future and my community's future. This is why I am with you. Let's move forward and keep demanding what we deserve as humans and children of the same God.

I like the example you write about when you mention the rebels and extremists. I feel very angry, but we must shift our anger towards love. Let's not destroy things or misbehave; let's not hurt or be hurt. Let's just follow the example Jesus gave us as an extremist of love, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you." Let's demand extreme freedom, the same extreme they use against us in abusing us. We've been suffering without deserving it, along with oppressed freedom. . . .

Like you, millions of immigrants and undocumented workers face the same injustice. They are exploited in the fields, working long hours and getting very low pay, while the rich benefit from it. It's unjust that as immigrant workers we have to pay taxes but can't get any benefits. It's unjust that millions of families have been separated because of the deportations. It's unjust that we can't go back to our country to bury our loved ones. It's unjust that we are the working force that sustains this country but have to live in the shadows. . . . We must work together.

I definitely share your thoughts about religion. It's not okay to read the Bible and talk about God to others while we don't do anything to help our

brothers and sisters in need. As children of God, we must work together to protect the needy. This is not about who is right about religion; this is about "loving your neighbor as yourself." If all churches would unite with responsibility and humanity, we could make a big difference. Teaching others equality, equity, love, and peace, we will do a lot more than we do now living with hypocrisy. Donald Trump all the time says "God bless America," but the only thing he shows is hate—hate for women, hate for minorities, hate for the disabled, hate for different races, hate for whatever is not like him. Religions have to unify for this movement because the only goal is to improve the lives of millions of God's children.

This is all for now, but I will keep carefully examining the ways to achieve our goals of human rights, freedom, and justice for our communities. I will keep praying to God so His love can overcome the barriers that keep us oppressed. **(Marisol Gonzalez)**

The letter you wrote while in Birmingham Jail moves me by how much love you have after there has been so much hate. I am struck by your quote, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you." I believe the dream that you had for this country is still alive and has shown improvements throughout the years. I am deeply saddened that even though changes were made, racism still remains today. This would not have been a part of your dream. We as a country need to remember your words of kindness, love, and truth. We as the people of this country need to do better, and we can start by forgiving others.

Another quote that struck me was, "We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands." I think we have lost that as a country, and we try to make decisions without looking to a higher source, meaning Christianity or any other religion.

We cannot fix a problem without fixing our thinking as well. Thank you for all that you have implanted into this world. We will come together as one again. (**Simone Bell-Perdue**)

I appreciate all the hard work you have done for the nation, especially for the African American people. You were arrested because you were participating in non-violent demonstrations; you took the risk of going to jail and gave your life for defending the struggles of African Americans.

One of the first quotes that caught my attention was, "When you take a cross-country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you." I relate to this sentence with the lives of undocumented immigrants. Just like your brothers struggled to find a motel to spend the night, many immigrants struggle because they don't have the proper documentation to find jobs. Not only that, they don't have many opportunities, such as building credit at a bank or any store. They work really hard while suffering from harassment and discrimination, but they can do nothing because they are scared of losing their job.

In the letter you wrote, "When you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading: White and Colored." This phrase reminded me that I have been discriminated against many times in different work places for many years. Most of the time someone starts discriminating against me because my language is not English, or because I work better and faster than other workers. Those people always waste time talking and talking while I work hard, but I cannot complain about it. Discrimination is a painful feeling that makes me feel depressed and stressed and lowers my self-esteem.

As President Trump implements racism and discrimination to the immigrant community, I am worried about my children in public places, such as



schools, parks, stores, libraries, etc. Many incidents have happened; for example, one day a white student asked my little boy, "When are you going back to Mexico?" This is very frustrating because little kids do not understand the situation, especially when my children are American citizens.

So, immigrants are suffering from the same struggles of racism and discrimination as your African American brothers. In addition, the dreams of many people that were waiting for a comprehensive reform vanished because President Trump is against immigration. (**José Mendoza**)

After reading your "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," it makes me angry and hopeful at the same time. Your letter provides me with a reason to continue to stand up to power, to the status quo that continues to try to shame my family, my sons, and my neighbors here in Madison, Wisconsin. I am not fearless like you, but I am empowered because of you. I am ashamed because in Wisconsin there are over 30 school districts that won't celebrate your birthday. The blood of the racist is still so fresh and alive.

First, let me thank you for having the courage and the tenacity to protest and to push back against such dangerous injustice. I am a better person because of you. I am a different person because of your actions, a prouder person because of your words, and a stronger person because of your fearlessness. I have always wondered why you

continued to be such a forceful figure even though you must have known you were in such danger. Were you not afraid? Did you feel you were immortal? I wonder those things about you when I read your letters or see you speak.

In your "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," there are some passages that excite me and feel so true to me: "We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed." Your argument is so true. We know that freedom is the main desire of our existence.

Even now, Dr. King, what you write is still so true in our lives. It breaks my heart to know that Trump is president, especially when I think of your statement: "When your first name becomes 'nigger' and your middle name becomes 'boy'" —or, in my case, "girl." Trump says things out of his mouth that no president of the United States should ever say. . . .

You write, "When you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick, and even kill your black brothers and sisters." We are seeing this imagery in real time, on phones and on YouTube. It is still happening in our lives. My son has been locked up for being black. I, like you, want to ask the powerful and the authorities if my children were white and from Shorewood, would they be punished for the same actions my kids were? We in Madison are still part of a system full of people who need jobs and maintain jobs, from social workers to parole agents to police in our schools! There is still injustice, Dr. King. It doesn't involve public picnic hangings, but the injustice is still part of our daily lives.

Your use of rhetorical questions makes us all ask ourselves these questions. We can't really answer them, but we must ask them. They are questions of justice. I say many times, "But for what purpose?" Yes, I ask that often. For what purpose are there police in our schools? Police look at young African American students and think, "Perp!" So I agree with you!

I finish in tears when I think of your metaphorical statement, "and see the depressing clouds of inferiority begin to form in her little mental sky." Yes, Dr. King, even today your metaphor is still raw and real, and it happens to too many of our children. **(Ngina Ali)**

I just got done reading your "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." In this letter I see that you covered all parts of your audience. Here I am the audience of the future. Your letter appealed to me both on a personal level and an intellectual level.

Your references to your children and the emotional effects of discrimination on them tugged at my heartstrings and were very effective on an emotional level. This discussion framed the issue in very human and appealing terms. At the same time, your discussion of the issue by referring to history and great ancient philosophers considered the issue from a logical, rational, and historical perspective. Both of these strategies insured that your letter would appeal to all people by including a number of different perspectives.

Your letter was a crucial tool in the first step toward ending discrimination and providing equal opportunity. Now we need a present-day Martin Luther King to inspire our minority community to finish the journey to educational and financial equality. Today's studies show that there is still a big gap in economic and educational success between blacks and whites in this country. In my eyes, as a foreigner being from Trinidad and Tobago, it is very difficult for me to accept these statistics. Up to the age of 27 and until now, I have been used to educated and successful black men and women from my country, all of which were in the majority.

Your letter and movement will always be an inspiration to me. **(Joy Bally)**

Your letter is powerful, and your words had an impact on me. I felt that maybe I am part of that crowd that has been waiting too long for the "right

time.” Your letter provides a historical reminder of what we have been through as eyewitnesses caught up in the middle of it. Your words show us how to shine a light on the current state. We are from different races, ages, and cultures, and we are all part of the country. Your letter continues to resonate today because the issues you addressed are still with us. You give us the power to challenge our problems today. Thank you for the courage you give us to enter any public building without fear of being run out because our “kind” is not welcome.

Many overt forms of racism are gone, but more subtle forms are on the rise. On this Martin Luther King Day, when many in our nation are respecting a man who worked for equity and freedom for all who were oppressed, may we all decide to take a stand for justice and racial equality. (**Musab Naji**)

Thank you for your kindness, courage, leadership, and unforgettable speeches. The words you used in “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” were not only motivational but legendary.

What stood out most to me was when you wrote, “An appeal for law and order and common sense!” It gave me hope for unity and trust in our nation for colored people. The laws for desegregation are in good will and faith. Your leadership will forever change every community, person, and law, one step at a time. Thank you! (**Alyanna Cooper**)

I am writing to you from my home in Madison, Wisconsin, on this second day of February, 2017. I have read your long “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” . . . Your allusions to Socrates, Abraham Lincoln, and Jesus (who were all killed) were the most humorous parts of your writing. Did you not pay attention to how you were raised? Your father and grandfather taught you to obey the word of the old man in the sky just like their fathers and grandfathers taught them. . . . Show me what horrors your mighty God has ended through Jesus, and I will show you what you have put to an end. I have heard your song before and even remember

singing it myself a few times. All over the world is a song of freedom; whether I am this so-called white or so-called Negro you speak of is irrelevant. I am a person, a person who believes that fitting in with the bully is not progress. (**Johnnie Walton**)

I strongly agree with every word you said. It’s better to have a non-violent movement; coming in peacefully is the best way to be heard. Most people don’t have half the courage that you do. A lot of people lost their lives running from a fight you chose to walk into. The only weapons you had were the words from your mouth. I agree that negotiation is a better path. We are all in this together, so why not help lift each other so we all can be successful? We should not have to fight nor beg for the rights we are born with.

I thank God for sending you as a gadfly to help the sisters and brothers in Birmingham rise above the hate and cause awareness for equal rights and change. You stated that oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever; the urge for freedom will eventually come. The speech you gave was like a small, beautiful, life-changing meal.

If only the world had more people like you. If only everyone would listen to the things you had to say. If only the brothers and sisters would join together to fight together, America could be a better place. I thank you for showing us that you can fight a fight without weapons and still win. I hope later in life the brothers and sisters will continue fighting with their words instead of guns and other weapons. I hope we will still march and chant when we want to see justice. (**Shanon Holmes**)

I wanted to respond to the very powerful piece addressed to the critical clergyman of Alabama. I found your writing to be intriguing yet insightfully direct. Apart from being well written, it provided great examples of both past and present injustice. The biblical references were necessary and of equal importance, considering the audience were men of God like you.

I learned several key pieces of historical information by simply indulging in the eloquent letter. I was not aware of the immense planning stages conducted prior to any action being taken, such as the four basic steps referenced for non-violent campaigns. Upon further research, I discovered Rosa Parks's bus arrest was actually a carefully calculated and planned form of direct action. Many historical moments during the Civil Rights movement were not spontaneous but quite the opposite.



filled with blood and abuse.

The passages that describe angry, violent dogs biting unarmed, non-violent black men produced vivid imagery of colorless footage of police attacks during peaceful protests. I envision black children practically drowning from high-pressure water hoses taking their breath away and large German shepherds instructed to attack and essentially maul black men and women. These attacks ended only as chunks of human flesh littered the bloodstained streets.

I enjoyed the parallelism demonstrated in the extremist references. It really made me think about the great things each reference did all while being labeled "extreme." I say it is an honor to be labeled an extremist amongst many other great historical figures. History has proven that results can never be achieved if we sit around and "wait," as so many have asked us to do. An extremist for love is what you have chosen to be. Segregation cannot be overcome by simply waiting, and it cannot be overcome without love.

There were several concepts you mentioned that I believe to coexist in 2017. I can't help but notice that individuals who peacefully protest in support of Black Lives Matter are arrested, abused, and approached by policemen in riot gear, yet the women's march in Washington, D.C. was a celebrated protest by both sides of opposition. The women's march was never reported or viewed as aggressive or violent. It mirrors white protestors allowed to attack, spit, and swear at young black children integrating white schools, while non-violent civil rights protests are

This lets me know that even in 2017 we still have a long road ahead of us. I want to thank you for laying the foundation needed to begin the journey to obtain equal rights for all men, women, and children. I don't believe equality has been achieved yet. For the sake of my children and my children's children, I believe that one day they will no longer be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. (**Cherri Sorrells**)

What you wrote was unbearable but all true. You seemed to fight through the pain and still speak/write in such a caring and respectful manner. You truly love all, and you know that this will all end. You have hope. The image I had while I was reading this letter was of whites disrespecting blacks and how segregation was back then. You were the most sincere person writing this letter, but you let them know the truth behind the "black's" mind. "Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear-drenched communities." This was a perfect way to end your letter. You don't demand anything, you simply tell them how you feel.

It touched me when you talked about your daughter growing up with instant, natural hatred towards whites due to being mistreated and segregated. It is sad because the blacks did not choose all of this, yet it still is affecting them. I agree with you, Dr. King, and I hope it all changes as well. During this time of the century, racism still exists. People still grow up and live with these assumptions and thoughts

towards other races. I feel as if it will only get worse, especially with our new president! (**D'onna Atkinson**)

I want to personally thank you for persistently fighting the good fight for social justice. Through your non-violent demonstrations, you have gotten several community leaders and others to form resistance to the unfair treatment and inequalities of authorities and white people in general. You were jailed because your methods were seen as threatening to the "white only" agenda set forth. Authorities saw the demonstrations as unnecessary resistance and believed that we should sit around and wait for change to come. Clearly that is a crock. They had no intention of making changes.

You saw that, believed in change, and knew exactly how to convince the people to follow you. Some minor changes have taken place, but a lot of work is left to be done. Again, I applaud you for helping get the ball rolling. Your work has not been in vain. Thank you for your service. (**Spencer Gamble**)

I want to start by saying that I had never read your "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" before this, and I was very impressed by it. Not only did you argue your perspective and beliefs very well, but you did it in a way that struck at my emotions at the same time. It often seems to me that people who are arguing points do it either logically or emotionally; however, you walked a fine line between them that placed your arguments at an even higher level.

Another aspect of your letter that I was very impressed with was that throughout you wrote in a tone of respect and kindness while also standing strong in your beliefs. The beginning of your letter set the stage for this very well when explaining that you "seldom pause to answer criticism," yet you do it for them since you believe them to be smart and genuine men. In the beginning you also go into sufficient detail to explain all of the reasons for your actions, which shows you read their statement fully and are responding to their concerns. Towards the

beginning of the letter, I was also struck by your statement that, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." I felt like this statement was very strong, and it also is something that any reader can relate to and agree with.

Another aspect of your letter that made it so successful in my opinion was that you talked to your audience. You wrote the letter for fellow clergymen, and you used many religious stories and beliefs to help argue your point. It shows that you have respect for your audience, and it also shows your knowledge in this area. One of the goals I felt that you tried to get across in your letter was that you were just as knowledgeable and qualified in your role as a clergymen as the people you were writing the letter to. I think the religious stories that discuss the early Christians being outsiders also really spoke to your argument. This seemed like a point that you were arguing that your audience could not disagree with, sort of like a logical check-mate, while simultaneously speaking to the audience's emotions.

I also was interested in the discussion of the police behavior to yourself and your fellow protestors. I thought it was very interesting that what you were arguing about has many similarities to what some groups, such as Black Lives Matter, are arguing today. It is odd to think that so much progress has been made, which your actions and movement were essential to, but at the same time, in some areas very little progress has been made.

Finally, I want to say that I feel like your letter was very effective apart from being excellently written. Personally, your argument worked on me. I think if everyone in the world had to read your letter, it would affect and change some of the things that are going on for the better. You wrote an excellent letter that hit on emotional, logical, personal, and religious points to fully argue your point. Actually, I do not think anyone could write an argument back to your letter. It was my pleasure to read your letter. (**Ahmad Nahas**)

As I read your letter, my feelings of empathy and indignation are strong indeed. Your statement demonstrates your commitment to treating others with respect and dignity. I wish you were out of the Birmingham Jail and still alive because, first, you were put in jail unjustly and, second, because we need leaders like you. We need you in our society to fight the new President and its administration in the United States.

I personally identify myself with everything you expressed in your letter because I have felt discrimination by being a woman of color or speaking another language. I am an immigrant myself who came to this country with my mother 18 years ago looking for a better life. Today, immigrants, hard-working people like us, are called "illegals, wetbacks, criminals, drug dealers, and rapists" (the list gets bigger and bigger every time) by people who do not show empathy to African Americans, Mexicans, Muslims, not to mention the LGBTQ community.

We must be united no matter the color of our skin, the language we speak, or the way we pray. This is the time to "call for unity" in support of civil rights and look for a peaceful world regardless of our faith. We urge people for hope over fear, diversity over division. Every person deserves dignity and respect. We need political leaders and leaders of civil rights movements like you who demonstrate the power of nonviolent action. I agree with you when you say, "We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must

be demanded by the oppressed." I say this because of what we are experiencing now in this country with the new President. This is a country of freedom. Today the new administration does not support our human rights. We, the people of this country, find ourselves protesting for what is right.

Dr. King, we must practice civil disobedience like Socrates did because "an unjust law is no law at all." We need to fight against hate. We need to organize to get our constitutional rights. Let's follow Thomas Jefferson's legacy written in the Declaration of Independence when he said that "all men are created equal." Let's fight the oppressor to reach our goal of America's freedom.

Your letter inspires me to demonstrate empathy to those enduring struggles, to be a catalyst for justice, and to recognize the good in our world.

(Grisel Tapia Claudio)

I am relieved that you, although busy in your attempts to bring an end to segregation, took time out to address these clergymen of Alabama and their public letter urging you to stop in your pursuit of justice. I hope that your decision to respond didn't bring about any fears or doubts that your attempts weren't properly formatted. I personally believe that you've put forth your best effort and have followed all the basic steps for a non-violent campaign. However, you are dealing with individuals that have turned a blind eye, deaf ear, and cold shoulder to the fact that segregation laws are ineffective and are the culprit that provokes violence.

Your attempts to fight against injustice are only viewed as ineffective by those that refuse to see the truth and change. As you stated, the only harm that has been presented during your protests and marches has been done by those that are supposed to be upholding the law, as well as making laws that are morally just and all-inclusive. It amazes me that they call you an outside agitator and feel as if you shouldn't be concerned with issues of injustice outside of your own state, instead of realizing that



their segregation laws would deem you as an outsider no matter where you live. and non-violent tension.

If law enforcement would have paid more attention to your peaceful demonstrations and self-purification methods to train yourself and others to remain non-violent no matter how violent authorities would become, then perhaps they would have examined themselves and realized that their responses to your demonstrations had stemmed from pure hatred and evil. Maybe they would have been able to come up with a non-violent way to respond to the matters that they could not understand.

They underhandedly went back on their agreement for a moratorium, however, not realizing that the agreement within itself was proof that your methods had been effective enough at some point to even have them consider having a period of time where segregation would be prohibited.

When these clergymen decided to withdraw their support from you, even though they agreed that segregation was/is immoral, it seems they did not understand that just being in agreement is not enough to bring about change. . . . What better time than the present when you've postponed it for so long? "Justice too long delayed is justice denied."

I appreciate everything that you've done in efforts to bring about change. Placing your life on the line and even being willing to be placed in jail means a lot to me. You've impacted the civil rights movement in such a tremendous way. If those of us that come after you will keep in mind that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," then I'm sure that we will bring about great changes as well. (**Avé Thorpe**)

I would like to applaud your dedication and strong commitment to fight injustice even while confined in jail in very uncomfortable situations. I find it very impressive that you are able to passionately put together a compelling request for your critics to see reality and to encourage the constructive use of time

I especially enjoyed and can relate to the passage where you said "lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection." As a black female Muslim immigrant living in Midwest America, I can very much relate to you on a minor level. It looked as if we had come so far and achieved so much as people, but we are being pushed backwards through time. We are completely losing our grip on the idea of people being equal. All of a sudden diversity is a big threat for many around here. Unfortunately, most of the people threatened by diversity found a voice in the current president, who speaks the unspoken out loud.

Racism and bigotry are becoming normal again. Gender equality is fading away because women are spoken to just any way, and our most personal choices are being challenged.

Being a Muslim immigrant, I feel like my identity is threatened and my ability to practice my religion in this country freely is compromised because we are branded as a threat to society.

I am raising my son to accept everyone and treat all people the same, but will this work when a stage has been created to emphasize difference? Hopefully we can look back on all of this as history soon enough, for we have come so far with the courage of people like you. (**Sukai Yarbo**)



MEN OF COURAGE

Against All Odds

By Asha Green

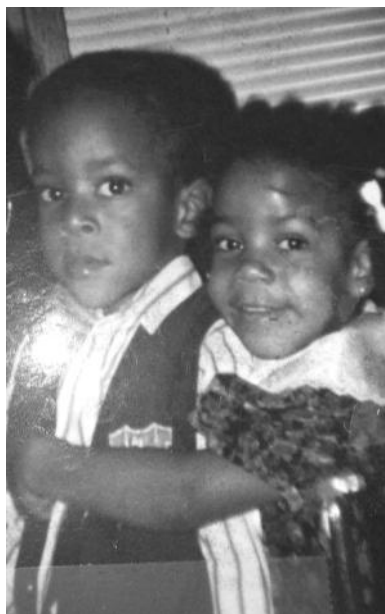
"Please understand I have a disability, not a disease. You can't catch it. I may walk, talk, and move differently than you do, but on the inside I'm not so different."

Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder which inhibits the normal growth and development of a child or an adult within a social environment. Statistics say that children and adults with autism find it difficult to socially

communicate with "normal people" and that they will need help their entire lives. I beg to differ: my brother Davon is a living testimony!

My second oldest brother, Davon, was diagnosed with autism at the age of two. My mother was so confused and thought it was something she did. She didn't know what to do. She was advised by social workers and medical professionals to put him on medication because he was too hyper and to send him to a school with children who also have special needs. My mother found her own way to keep her son educated and among everyone else. He, too, has a life that matters!

When Davon was two and a half, my mother put him in a birth-to-three program, and he began to flourish. My mother made sure to keep him occupied at all times both in and out of school. He always knew he was different from the rest of us, but he didn't complain. He was a quiet child, but you couldn't put anything past him. He got into things that he was not supposed to get into, just like the rest of us, and was not treated any differently for his actions. My mother never showed any favoritism among all of her children.



We were all treated equally.

Davon was not a shy kid; he was very outspoken and playful when he was around other kids. The best thing my mom could have done was to get him active in school at an early age. This in return helped him with his social skills.

By the time I made it to high school with Davon, he was pretty popular, believe it or not. You know, you look at the movies and see kids being picked on because they are different. There were a few occasions when I had to step in and get physical with a few

people, but for the most part Davon had tons of friends who genuinely cared for him and looked out for him. All throughout school Davon had his own aide for assistance, but they always gave him his space.

At the age of 16 Davon got his first job! It was the happiest I have ever seen him. He told me, "I got a job, Asha. I'm a man now." Davon began managing his own money with his bank account, and he went out and bought all of his own clothes and personal hygiene products. It looked as if Davon was living a normal life, just like the rest of us. Some said he didn't look like he had a disability. My response was to ask what a disability looks like. Disability has no certain look, age, race, or color.

Throughout Davon's young adulthood, he managed to keep a steady job. My mother wanted to shelter Davon from the world and its drama as much as possible. On December 24, 2012, Davon was still living with my mother and had not made it home from work. I got a heart wrenching phone call, my mother on the other end crying saying that Davon was in jail! My heart dropped. I yelled from the other end of the phone, "What the hell is going on?"

What the hell did he do?" I found out my brother was accused of stalking a woman that rode the same bus and worked in the same building that he worked in. Now, I'm not saying that my brother is a saint, and he can be a little overbearing at times, but he only wants to be normal, like you and I are. The woman filed a restraining order on him. I had no idea this ever happened. I thought the worst. How could someone mistake his kindness for the actions of a predator? I was furious. If only she would have taken time to listen to him speak, this wouldn't have happened. Instead, she saw a tall black man and feared for her safety. Bullshit! Davon would never hurt a fly. Needless to say, Davon was released from jail the next day. He held his ground and accepted his responsibility.

In the summer of 2016 Davon moved out into his own apartment. I don't know anyone as strong as my brother. Not only have all odds been stacked against him since conception because he's a black man, but he is also a black man with disabilities who lives a normal life in society just like you and I do. When all odds are stacked against him, he counts his blessings and remains humble. In my eyes, my brother Davon is my man of courage.

Autism causes stress, anxiety, depression, isolation, and money, marital, and family problems.

Autism is a constant worry and is the unknown. What can we do to change this? Be strong, stay positive, stick together, support each other, love each other, and fight for what we believe in.



My Real Hero By Musab Naji

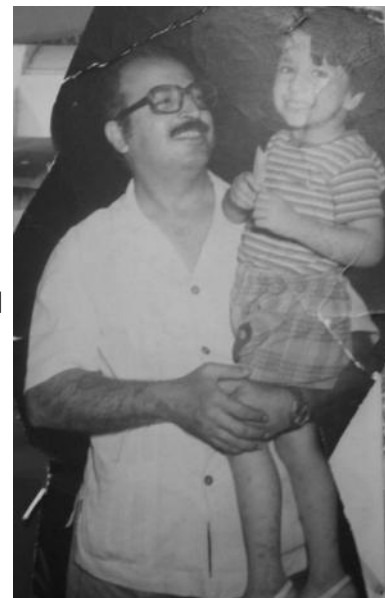
"A good father believes that he does wisely to encourage enterprise, productive skill, prudent self-denial, and judicious expenditure on the part of his son."

—William Graham Sumner

My father was Mohammed Saed, and he showed courage in many ways. He held his family and protected them while helping anyone in need. He faced difficulties and never gave up. My father was a well-known dermatologist and a great father. He is my real hero because he remains the most special person in my life.

I admire the courage I saw in my dad. He taught me how to believe in the power of courage just by being himself. My dad used his strength and courage to fight for his children, his wife, and his community. My dad always showed us that we were important to him by caring about every single thing about us. He spent his day in the clinic, but when he came back home, he sat with us and asked each one of us about what happened during our day. He was taking on the challenge of being a great dad.

My dad gave his time freely for the benefit of others. He was willing to cross continents because others needed his help. He was never thinking of what they would give him in return. I am sure he never said "no" to anyone that asked him for help. He helped people by creating awareness about the difference between pain and suffering and helping them let go of what they needed to release. I remember when his patients complained about the





expensive medications; as a result, he would cede his wage to allow payment for the medications. However, sometimes some patients still did not have the money to buy their medications, so he gave them money of his own to pay for the medications. My dad had a big impact on people, and they still remember him even though he has passed away.

My dad has always been in my life, from the day I was born to the present moment. Even though my dad is no longer alive physically, he is still mentally in my life. He is a teacher, a guide, and a source of strength and support. He showed me the stars and taught me how to reach them. He gave me the greatest gift anyone could give another person: he believed in me. At the same time, my dad had an impact on all of the people around him. Nobody forgot what he did for others. To them, he was a great doctor, an honest man, and a helper when they needed help. My father was an influential person that helped people any way that he could.

The Courage to Stay Alive **By Johnnie Walton**

My nephew Tray has courage. His birth name is Travion Marshawn. The reason I chose Tray is because on the morning before Christmas, he went

into a fire to save his family. Tray is only 14 years old. One of my older brothers called me on the day this all happened and gave me the news. His exact words were, "Sherri's house caught on fire. Three kids are dead, and Tray is burned and being rushed from Rockford, Illinois to the UW burn unit in Madison, Wisconsin." The smoke had done damage to his lungs, and he was burned on his chest, arms, and hands. The ends of his hair were even melted together.

I was the first person at the hospital, since I live in Madison. The mother never showed up and wasn't seen until the day of the funeral. I found out that she wasn't at home during the fire either. It didn't surprise me. The dad is my brother, and I know that he hasn't been around to be a real dad since 2006. The doctors told me that they were about to take Tray off the sedatives and that he should be waking up in a couple hours. At that time, I left to go pick up



my children from Illinois. The entire drive I kept thinking about how easy it is for us to be taken away from each other. I was also worried about the damage the fire had caused and could cause to my nephew's mind.

When I came back into the hospital room and Tray saw me, he stretched out his arms and cried, "Uncle Johnnie!" While I held my nephew as gently as I could, he cried and told me the story of his Christmas Eve. He told me how he had gotten tired after getting two of his brothers out of the house. He told me that he heard Mikey calling out, "Bro! Bro!" but when he got to him, he wasn't moving. He thought that Star and Damien were already out. He said that the firefighter wouldn't go in the house to get Mikey. All he remembered after that is being put into an ambulance and waking up strapped to a bed.



He didn't know that two of his brothers and his only sister had died.

I spoke a few words at the funeral and told my nephew that he is a hero in my eyes. I told him that my children were now his brothers and sisters. Whether it's a Walton, Easter, Tindall, Gidron, Dandridge, or Tillmon, we will all be happy

to be his brothers and sisters.

A Hard-Working Man

By Jose Mendoza

My dad is a man of courage because he has worked so hard since he was a little kid. He was the oldest of ten children. As a child, he spent most of his childhood taking care of milking the cattle rather than playing with the other kids. He used to get up early in the morning to help his father milk the cows by hand. After that labor, he had to go fix the broken fencing, cutting trees using an axe or machete.

When my dad reached his adult life, he married my mom. She was from a different town. After they had my brother and sister, my dad felt the necessity of finding

another way of living. That's when they moved to my mom's little town and started a small business in grinding corn.

My dad is a well-known person in my little town. He is very friendly. At some times in his life, he was an alcoholic. He had many problems with my mom. My dad is brave because after many years

of being an alcoholic, he quit. Now he is in charge of the small town as a rural judge.

My dad did not have the opportunity to go to school, but he was interested in our education. He encouraged us to attend school every day. Even though he needed a lot of help from us, he would work by himself and have us pursue our education.

My dad is a man of courage because he taught me good values and morals. He taught me to be a hard-working, honest, and responsible man. He showed me how to be strong and brave.

Always Family: My Grandfather

By Grisel Tapia Claudio

My man of courage is my grandfather. His name was Eduardo Serafin Claudio Reyes. He passed away at age 94 on October 14, 2014. He was a one-of-a-kind person that gave me all his love, showed me strong values, and taught me to have compassion towards people in need. He also helped his community in any way he could without expecting anything in return. I still remember him sitting in the living room with his eyes closed and doing what he loved to do: listening to the baseball game on the radio. He seemed to enjoy every word he was hearing. I will never forget this picture of him in my mind.



I lived with both of my grandparents in Mexico for two years. I lived with them after my mom made a very hard decision, to leave me at age 12, while she was looking for the American Dream. My mom, a single mother, came to the United States looking for a better life for both of us. It wasn't easy for me, and I had to mature at a young age. I had to live for one year by myself.

During the time I lived with my grandfather, he showed me what a father's love is like. He took care of me,

made sure I had enough to eat, and always helped me to do well in school. He also taught me strong values, such as to respect my parents and elders, not to take anything that didn't belong to me, and to be silent whenever I didn't have anything nice to say. I thank him for all of his advice. I am grateful to him for everything I learned from him.



Since my grandpa wanted to go to school but couldn't attend because his family was too big and also because there was no school for him to go to, he donated a good-sized property a long time ago so that a school could be built for his village. Today the school is an elementary school. This type of action says a lot about the person he was.

The last time I saw my grandpa was 13 years ago. He was a very hard-working man. He worked in what he knew to do best in his fields, and he didn't stop working until three years before his death. It was extremely hard for me not to be able to see him for the last time and to say goodbye to him before he passed away.

Today, his legacy has remained in me, and now I transmit it to my children. I tell my children what my grandpa used to tell me: "veanse siempre como una familia." In English, that's "always see each other as family." Grandpa Sera, I will love you forever.

My Hero from History **By Lawana Diagne**

Nobel Peace Prize winner Dr. King asked, "Are you able to accept blows without retaliation?" The various acts of kindness during the Civil

Rights movement make Dr. King my hero. The freedom marches, boycotts, leadership, ministry, and movements of non-violent demonstrations made me the woman I am today. Beside my birth father, Dr. King is my man of courage.

In February, 1965, Dr. King led the march about 50 miles from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, leading more than 600 people across the bridge into history, just so I can utilize my right to vote. It took courage to endure Bloody Sunday. The pain and murder of young, non-violent African Americans who were sacrificed didn't go in vain. Dr. King never stopped peaceful and courageous marches.

The boycotting of the Birmingham Bus Company (in which 99% of African Americans refused to ride the buses, leading to the final outcome of segregated busing being declared unconstitutional) was due to Dr. King's courage in standing up for injustice. That began a revolution for a full year.

The Civil Rights movement demonstrated Martin Luther King's abilities once again to lead. It took a great deal of courage, and today we are able as African Americans, minorities, women, and others to vote freely. When I think of a true man of courage, I think of Dr. King. He gave his life for the movement. Today I take great pride honoring Dr. King and his legacy of civil rights and non-violence.



WOMEN'S MARCH ON MADISON



Hi, my name is Griselda Tapia Claudio. I am a proudly Mexican woman, immigrant, student, mother of three wonderful children, wife, leader and activist in my community!

Thanks to the efforts and work of my mother, a single immigrant mother who arrived to this country 20 years ago from Mexico, looking for the American Dream, looking for a better life. It wasn't easy for me when I came as a teenager to this country. I had to learn a new language, a new culture and new rules. But we were very fortunate to receive the warm welcoming of the Madison community.

Today, I am proud to be here representing Voces de la Frontera, Wisconsin's leading immigrant, student and worker rights organization!

Last February, Voces de la Frontera led an action called the Day Without Latinos and Immigrants, a work stoppage and mass march of tens of thousands on this very Capitol.

We were able to stop racist, anti-immigrant state legislation! Tens of thousands of workers and students went on strike, and hundreds of businesses closed in solidarity.

And we won!

I am here to tell you that when we the people take bold, sustained action to defend our collective rights, we cannot be defeated!

This new president may be the most dangerous for women in modern times. He is particularly dangerous for immigrant and Latina women.





He has said he will eliminate the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which has allowed almost 800,000 young people to continue their education, support their families, and contribute to the economy by working legally. If he sends our young people back into the shadows, the effect on millions of families will be devastating.

The new president plans to do nothing to address the needs of Latina women. Immigrant women often do difficult, physically demanding work, for long hours, low wages, and no benefits. They are more vulnerable to abusive employers, to wage theft, violence, or even sexual assault.

Latina women are too often unable to afford adequate medical care or therapy.

The trauma of deportation is more likely to affect us. I have seen women and families driven into poverty and even homelessness by the

deportation of a father.

Too many immigrant women survivors of domestic violence cannot come forward from fear of deportation. We are deeply committed to defending and expanding the U Visa, and the Violence Against Women Act, which protect women and children in this life or death situation.

Voces de la Frontera proposes a bold solution to Trump: Organize!

We have been forming the Coalition for an Inclusive Wisconsin, which is bringing together different communities affected by the new administration to defend all our rights.

We are organizing to support legislation to return Driver's Licenses to immigrants in Wisconsin, so that all Latinos can go to work and pick up their children from school without fear of being stopped and separated from their families and communities.

Voces has also been organizing to pass a sanctuary county resolution in Milwaukee County.

Together, let's organize our schools to be safe for all students, and for our places of worship to be sanctuaries for families threatened by deportation. Let's organize in our workplaces and neighborhoods to prepare for bold actions like the Day without Latinos and Immigrants.

Maybe next time, we will have to organize a Day Without Women – a women's strike -- to defend our dignity and rights as women.

Every person should be treated with respect and dignity.

And remember: No Human Being is illegal!!

Join us!! Thank you!!

