

ODYSSEY



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ODYSSEY REFLECTIONS



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MOVED BY MUSIC



Music has been beyond therapeutic for me. Each note, each cadence exudes a different emotion from my soul. Sometimes I cannot express what I want to express because my emotions are so convoluted that not even I can decipher the meaning, yet music has a way of unravelling the knots. It also helps me find the joy when I have lost it. It's the vibrations calling to something deep within me, as if each note corresponds to a place deep within me. It's why I listen to all forms of music. Different voices, different genres all paint in different shades, without which the picture would not be complete, and therefore neither would I.
(Jonathon Adeyanju)

Rap, hip hop, gospel: listening to music calms me down when I'm angry. I love to listen to music, especially rap. I love to play music when I'm down. It's the only thing to uplift me at any time!!
(Amanda Bell)

Music means the world to me. It's a way one can express one's feelings, and I enjoy all types of music. Blues, hip hop, Hispanic, R&B, jazz—all of these hit my soul, and I get goosebumps listening to music. I love to sing, as you guys now know, and I am always listening to some music throughout my days.
(Brandyn Bess)

I was blessed to have a grandmother who picked me up every Sunday for church. It was in church where I developed a love for gospel music. Every Sunday morning, worship service started with a deacon of the church singing a gospel hymn. He would start off slow and loud. His voice would be deep, what I believe was in a bass tone. He would linger with some words for longer than other words in the song. I especially liked when the choir sang.
(Ericka Boeey)

Music, the thing that could change your mood from mad to happy, or maybe happy to sad. Very loud, some quiet, but all very joyful, all types of music from hip hop to R&B. Maybe a little rock. My favorite is Lil' Uzi Vert. I think he mixes with hip hop and rock; some say he does it all. Music means life changer. I don't know who doesn't like music. Like I said, it can do anything for you, get you through the tough times and the good times.
(Jermaine Boeey)



To me, music means a lot. It's a voice that shows you how a person is feeling, thinking. I love listening to jazz, country, rhythm and blues, gospel, black gospel. Music helps people understand how we are feeling whether we are sad, mad, depressed. You will know when you can and can't speak to someone just by music. Music plays a big part in my parenting. It calms Jamarian, makes him smile, gets him moving his body. Even at your happiest, you can turn on a music station and your whole body language can change. Music is very powerful. **(Capri Booker)**

Music became very special to me as I got older and started to go through rough times and moments. It's like you can always find artists who make music for people out in the world going through similar things. The songs just make you know you are not alone, and if someone else can fight through it, so can you. I play music when I'm sad or happy. It puts me in a different world. **(Kayanna Branch)**

I listen to a lot of gospel music, and I used to do praise dance. I always represent music with an event. Like if I do a dance, then every time I hear that song, I think that's the song I did for a wedding, or that's the song I did when my mom passed. Since my mom passed, I've been listening to a gospel singer named Kamala Man, and her song is "Take Me to the King." It speaks to me because the lyrics of the song remind me of my mom. "Take me to the king, I'm tired"—this gives me memories of my mom because the doctors were trying to find out was going on, but she was tired. She seemed to be saying 'just take me, I'm ready to go.' Music is calming to me. **(Katrina Collins)**

Music is, most of the time, my sanity, my way to express myself when I cannot seem to find the correct way to describe what I'm feeling. I wish I was talented enough to sing or play an instrument because I feel like it would be an emotional outlet for me. Growing up, my family would play all kinds of music, jazz, blues, R&B, soul; almost any and every genre had a place in our home. Music has been a positive outlet for me for as long as I can remember. From early on as a kid, there's been something about the lyrics flowing so perfectly over the beat and not to mention those songs that make you feel something, whether it be sadness, joy, or a combination of the two. Music has always been a favorite of mine to get through tough times. **(Yasmine Dobbins)**

Music is everything to me. Without it, I don't know how I would make it through all life's obstacles. Turning on my favorite song or artist just helps me cope and escape being mad, sad, depressed, etc. Rap, hip hop, and R&B are my favorite genres by far. There's nothing like hard bass beats or slow loving beats and someone with a great voice singing over it. The artist I listen to says what I feel and has a better way of expressing emotions than I do. **(Ontario Frazier)**



Music comes in different genres. I tell myself that I'm open to any kind of music as long as it has a good beat. I do give a chance to songs that are in a different language as well, just because music is there to listen to and to feel. Music is supposed to make you feel happy, sad, angry, energetic, and much more. It's the language that everyone hears and feels no matter where they come from. **(Erendira Giron Cruz)**

I am a free spirit when it comes to music. I listen to any and everything, and music is a significant part of my life. I listen to music when I clean, get ready for my day, drive to work, and even when I put my daughter to sleep. It adds the ability to express my feelings and emotions in a different way. Without music, this world would be so emotionless and deprived of such an amazing way for one to interpret and express feelings and emotions. **(Cynthia Gonzalez)**

I don't have a preference on music when I listen to music. I tend to listen to the beat or sound behind the lyrics. Music makes me feel like I'm taking a break from the world, my mommy life. It's my time to say, "Talaisha, you have to keep going. You're doing a hell of a job." **(Talaisha Goodwan)**

I listen to music that has a meaning on how to get out of poverty. I desperately want a house for my daughter. I want a back yard for her to play in. I want to have a kitchen with an island on it. I also suffer with depression, so I try to listen to rap music. It makes me want to dance. It puts me in a better mood. I listen to gospel music when I need a favor from the higher power. If I want a better job, if I want a bill to be paid on time, I always listen to gospel. **(Cinderria Harwell)**

I personally love music. I listen to rap music, R&B, gospel music... I just love music! It can give its own vibe/feeling that just can't really be explained. Each song has its own tempo. I've grown up being woken up Saturday mornings by music. That would be a signal it's clean-up day. Music like the Cha Cha Slide played at parties, graduations, even weddings. Sad songs played at funerals. All of those examples express how music can translate a feeling

or a memory, even to help connect you to people, places, and things. **(Zaria Hunter)**

Music means the world to me. How does that one song go? Life without music...

Music is everything to me. I absolutely adore it. I don't think there has been a single day that I haven't listened to music in some shape or form. I listen to all kinds of music, from classical to rap, from oldies to just-released, from Spanish salsa to banda. I think there is not a single genre that I don't take pleasure in listening to. Music can help me get out of a low place, and it can help me celebrate the bass lines too. Music has always been a part of my life. My mother would sing to me as I was in her belly. You bond over music. It creates memories, and it changes perspectives. MUSIC IS LIFE. **(Yael Jimenez)**

I grew up with music. I must say my favorite is gospel. I love to clean to 90s R&B or old school. Michael Jackson is going to always be the best R&B singer of all times, but this era I would say Chris Brown. But back to my favorite: Gospel. I love gospel because believing and having a person who fought for us is positive admiration. To know you're praying to a higher being and all the blessings that you feel and receive is the greatest feeling. Sometimes you become overjoyed with the power of words and you may cry, scream, jump, run, shake—no telling what. Gospel is an energy that you have to believe and feel. **(Crystal Johnson)**





Music is like a stress relief for me. Every song has a mood and tells a story through a rhythm. I really like all kinds of music, but my favorite genre is 90s R&B and hip hop. I always had a deep connection with 90s songs because they tell full stories and you can visually see it through your mind. My favorite artist is Aaliyah. She was my favorite because she was always true to herself and was always making songs that were true to some of the situations I was going through. Music has always helped me get through a lot of hardships in life. I can always count on music to make me feel better. Music is kind of like my best friend in a way because it's always been there. You can always connect through music. Music can be very open-minded. **(Helena Lee)**

Music to me is everything. I love the feelings and emotions that arise from listening to music. Since I was a little girl, I always loved to sing and listen to music. There are so many different genres and different kinds of music. Music helps my soul.

When I'm feeling happy, sad, anxious, or relaxed, I feel like music is an escape. Honestly, I don't know what I would do without it. I truly enjoy music that's full of life and soul; every song has a story to tell. I admire artists and their hearts to share what they feel or want to express. **(Michelle Mack)**

Music is everything to me. I listen to it no matter what mood I'm in, but my mood definitely does determine the kind of music I listen to. When I'm happy, I'm probably listening to some rap or hip hop. When I'm sad, you'll catch me listening to some R&B. When I'm just relaxing, I more than likely have some slow jams playing and drinking wine. It puts me in a different space. Music allows me to separate myself from the world in that moment. I also use music to cheer me up when I'm down. There are certain songs that remind me of good memories which change my mood instantly. Music definitely plays a huge role in my life. **(Mariam Maiga)**

I listen to a lot of different kinds of music: gospel, R&B, rap, jazz, blues, classical, and rock. Music is calming and relaxing to me. Some music tells a story which I can relate to. Some music is just spiritually healing. **(Mashell McCarter)**

I'm always listening to music. Always. I'm old enough to be born when hip hop was, and that's where my heart is, but if it's good music, I will bump it. As a spoken word artist, I prefer my music saying something. I appreciate a well-delivered message in music. When things are falling apart, music holds me together. **(Reginald Moore)**

I love music. I listen to all different kinds of music. It kind of depends on my mood. Sometimes I listen to music to get my mind off things or just to make me feel better. If I'm feeling down, I usually turn on gospel music. It makes me feel better. **(LaRonda Morris)**



I love music. I come from a singing family. My mother and aunt grew up singing in church. My grandfather was a blues singer. He later became a pastor when he moved back down south to Mississippi. Ironically, my grandfather on my dad's side was a blues singer turned gospel singer, and also later became a pastor. Music has always been a part of everything. I remember my mother making my cousins and me clean up as kids, and we would turn everything into a song. We would sit in the room, make up songs, then bug all the adults to sit down and listen to what we made. I love R&B music the most because of the feeling it gives me when I hear it. Growing up through the 90s and early 2000s, I naturally drifted to raps and making beats. I love bass. Soul and bass, that's what I love about music. I have a theme song for each time in my life. **(Will Nunn)**

I listen to all kinds of music. Music is my go-to for any emotion. It's always been a part of my life. I played violin for four years, and I sang in a choir (I may not have been any good). I love the vibes music gives. As long as it's a good song, I can listen—except folk and heavy metal **(Cylinthia Olle)**

Ohhh, music means a lot to me. It's my escape route whenever or for whatever I'm feeling. My favorite genre would have to be old school. Just the way different sounds and melodies are put together makes me feel something inside of me, combined with the words that are spoken. Ever since I was born around old school music that my family played around me, it sort of raised me other than my parents. It shaped and molded my soul. **(Kimari Rogers)**

I like music, but not the actual song—it is more about the lyrics. I feel like there is something else hidden in the lyrics. Sometimes it's a poem or rhyme that tells everything. I do like Latin music because it has a lot of variety or beat. Some are just for listening while others are for dancing. However, I only listen to the music while I work out because it gives me more energy. **(Jessica Saldana Ortega)**

I mostly enjoy music that has a deep tone. I like tones that beautifully go up and down. I like to listen to music that has words I can relate to, but the artist is able to say them in the best way and make the words hit your spirit. I listen to different kinds of music depending on what mood I am in. If I am angry, the music is more upbeat, and the words may be stronger or harsh. I listen to soft music when I want to relax by artists who know how to flex their voice. When I am worried or sad, I listen to gospel to help me find the right words to lead me in prayer. Music is a lifesaver for me and also therapeutic. **(Naquila Taylor)**

When I was a teenager I used to listen to music for hours. If there was a song that reminded me of a boy, I would work so hard at remembering the words. I was not satisfied until I knew every word without skipping a beat. I don't know how many songs I know word-for-word, but I know it's a lot of them from the 80s. The great joy is that my children know most of these songs now. When they are around they will put these oldies (so they call them) on for me. Enjoying these memories with my kids is a wonderful feeling I wouldn't change for the world. **(Mechele Williams)**

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

*What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.
—Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*



I believe names are powerful. When we name something, we subconsciously imbue the object of our naming with our intent and will. The creative force of words is so real that things often are shaped by what we decide to call them. I

mean, what else would you call a zebra? It's almost like once a name is decreed, or rather declared, it becomes imprinted upon those who accept a name and those who use it, meaning that the creativity behind words and those names are magnificent in direct proportion to those who agree upon it.

I believe names illustrate the beautiful relationship of intent and experience and that one will eventually feed the other. My name means God's gift, and my mom named me this because that's what she truly felt. That's the expectation that's been hanging over my life. Living out my name and the decisions that I choose to make results in the beautiful expression of me, and maybe that symbolizes the meaning of my name.

(Jonathon Adeyanju)



Amanda is a Latin name which means lovable or worthy of love. It was recorded in 1212 in Warwickshire, England. In 1979 it broke top five names in the United States. Amanda is often used as a girl's name, and for a boy they would

be called Amandus. Honestly, I love the meaning of my name. It explains a lot about Amanda Bell.

(Amanda Bell)

Brandyn- Its literal meaning is "Broom Hill," and it has an English origin. The name was chosen by my mother because she liked the show 90210, and there was a doctor on the show with the name that



she liked, so she picked it for me. It is a unique spelling as my name is normally spelled with an O, E, A, but rarely a Y. I have only met one other person with their name spelled like mine. I personally like the name and would not want any other name if I

had the chance to pick.

Jerome- Its literal meaning is "Sacred name"; it has a Greek origin. The name was given to me by my father. It was one of my uncle's names, so he liked it and chose it as my middle name. I met the uncle a couple times, but he has since passed away. I personally like the name and would give it to my son as a middle name if I had a choice.

Bess- My last name is very important to me. My ancestors on my dad's side were slaves who eventually were freed by their owners. The name comes from an old Languedoc name, and it has a French origin. I have always loved my last name, so much that I got it tattooed on my left arm with a cross. I also had to fight in court to give my daughter my last name also because the mother of my child did not want her to have it.

(Brandyn Bess)





The name Ericka was chosen for me for a couple of reasons. The first reason this name was chosen for me is because I have a boy twin named Eric. We are very close and share a lot of similarities even though we are fraternal twins. The second reason the name Ericka was chosen for me is because my aunt named me and my twin. She said she named us after her favorite soap opera stars Erica Kane and her father Eric Kane from the daytime soap opera on ABC. And Mr. Eric Booley honestly thinks he's my father and not my BABY (I'm older by four minutes) brother. By being named after a rich and powerful character off TV, I always felt I'd be rich and powerful one day.

My mom didn't give either of my siblings a middle name. She said she it would have been hard to give us middle names that went together for a boy and girl. Middle names were not real popular in the seventies. I noticed my mom, aunt, and uncles did not have a middle name. If I had an opportunity to give me and my twin middle names, it would be one of those gender-neutral names like Justice or Kelly. We would share the same middle too.

The Booley name is my maternal grandfather's name. He ran away from home in Mississippi in the late 20s. He was only fourteen years old. He said he hopped a train to Chicago. He said his family was so poor that he was just another mouth for them to feed. I don't have any more background on the Booley name. Ancestries website is on my bucket list.

Stevens is not my or my twin's legal last name, but it is my dad's last name. I don't have a story behind not having Stevens for a last name like my two older brothers did. My two brothers had children out of wedlock, and the mothers did not give the children the Stevens last name. I thought to myself about five years back that when my brothers died that the Stevens name would fade away. Little did I know both my brothers' deaths were near. One brother died 12/2018 and the other brother died 02/2020. I wish I was given the Stevens last name. **(Ericka Booley)**



Jermaine: The meaning is a masculine-given name of Latin origin. Now I was given the name Jermaine after my dad. Jermaine is his middle name and Eric is his first name. I'm not really close to him at all. The only thing we share in common is my first name (Jermaine) and his middle name.

Eric: My middle name, Eric, comes from my dad. That's his first name, so my name is my dad's name, but backwards. I also have a couple family members named Eric, like my uncle Eric and my cousin Eric, but we call him Eman for short. So you have my uncle Eric, my dad Eric, and my cousin Eric.

Booley: I love this last name. It's rare, not common at all. My last name, Booley, comes from my great granddad. I never met him, but I learned he and his family were very poor, so poor that he ran away from home, got a ticket to Chicago at fourteen, and started a new life. I imagine it was pretty hard moving to a new city broke, young, and uneducated. P.S. I think I am the last born Booley in my family. **(Jermaine Booley)**





Capri-Latrice-Atlantis-
Anashae-Booker

Capri came from my mother believing Capri Island is beautiful and her wanting to visit. Latrice came from my mother's best friend she had since elementary school.

My mother told me she named me Atlantis because of the Isley Brothers' song "Voyage to Atlantis." [Atlantis was a fictional island in Plato.]

The name Anashae came from my aunt. She and my mother were pregnant at the same time. She lost her child, and my mother decided to put Anashae in my name to remember her sister's child forever. There are five of us with the name, so you can say it's a family name now. I actually was going to name my son Anashae but it couldn't happen because the doctors told me it's a boy. So one day hopefully I actually get to pass it on to a daughter or my son to his daughter if they love the name as much as I do.

My last name came from my sibling's dad because my mom was with him and also because she didn't want my father's family's last name to leave a mark on me. **(Capri Booker)**



My first name, Kayanna, was created by my mother. She didn't have a meaning for it. People sometimes say it wrong. I don't believe it fits me, but it has grown on me. I don't know many people with that name. Actually, I don't know anyone with it.

My middle name, Latrice, came from my auntie on my dad's side. That is her middle name and also one of my girl cousin's names. It's kind of a family tradition. I've always liked the name. I find it cute.

My last name, Branch, comes from my dad. It's the last name of my grandpa, who married my grandma and gave her and all her children that last name. **(Kayanna Branch)**

My mom told me that when she was pregnant with me, she heard a lady in the store call her daughter



Katrina and it had a ring to it. So she said, "Oh, can you tell me what you said?" And she said it again. She knew it was going to be her daughter's name. I don't know too much about my last name, Collins, or my dad's family history.

When Hurricane Katrina hit, I got a lot of jokes. "You're just like Katrina!" I was afraid I would be a mess like the hurricane.

My nickname was "Granny" because I was born with a patch of gray hair in the front of my head. I was called Granny when I was in high school.

My name seems unique to me. I never met another Katrina until I was an adult. **(Katrina Collins)**



The story behind my name was not always this cool, interesting story. My full name is Yasmine Renea Dobbins. My father and mother both helped come up with the invention of my name. My father took the credit for coming up with my first name; my mom wanted my name to be Jasmine originally, but my father quickly butted in and told my mom that it was too common of a name, and that his baby girl should be named something else. "Yas-meen," Yasmine, he said, was just the right amount of pizzazz and exclusiveness.

Growing up, I always loved my name because it's always been something special. I grew up never meeting anyone with my name, and that gave me a feeling that I can't describe. I was unique, my name was rare, but, best of all, it came from one of my most favorite people in the world (my dad).

My middle name was given to me by my mom; I truly think the underlying cause of that was because my mom never had a middle name, so giving me a name was almost liberating for her, and I think that's mostly where my name came from. My middle name is Renea, which means reborn, by my being her last kid and only daughter. I think that really resonated with her as she gave me my middle name. **(Yasmine Dobbins)**



Ontario – Beautiful Waters



I get big praise for my name. A lot of people think my name is unique. The first question I receive is, “Are you from Canada?” When someone cannot remember Ontario, they say

Orlando, which has become annoying over time, just because that’s a more common name they revert to, or some call me Canada. I never asked my family how the origin of my name started. I mostly just say my mother wanted something different. The best part of my name that has shaped me is when others learn my name and tell me an experience they have had with the city. All are good things about how beautiful the province is. **(Ontario Frazier)**



Erendira Giron Cruz. When you first look at it, it seems like a tongue twister. When I was younger, I didn’t think much of my name. Erendira being different, it was just Erendira. But when I came to the USA, oh boy, my view of my name became a nightmare. People would butcher the pronunciation. I was embarrassed of my name until one day, someone told me to look up my name and also told me that there was a book. I found the meaning of Erendira is an Aztec name that means princess and the one who smiles.

Giron is kind of a funny story. It comes from my dad’s side of the family. My dad’s last name is Fuentes Hernandez, but my grandpa’s last name is Fuentes Giron. When my dad got to marry my mom, my grandpa was drunk, and when he needed to

sign some papers for my dad, he put Giron instead of Fuentes, so my last name is different from my cousins.

Cruz is from my mother’s side of the family that has been passed down. There’s no funny story behind it.

Erendira is a name my dad found in a book dictionary, and it has a new meaning to me. Erendira Giron Cruz means resilience and dreamer (DACA).

(Erendira Giron Cruz)



As far as my name Cynthia goes, I’m only called that at school and work. It’s not a name I commonly get called outside of that. Mireya is my middle name; only my family calls me that, and when people from work or school find out my middle

name, it catches me off guard to be called by my middle name. As weird as it sounds, I have two last names. I usually only go by Gonzalez, but I also have Chavarra, which was my mom’s old last name.

(Cynthia Mireya Gonzalez Chavarra)



My name comes from a pattern that my mom promised to each child she would give birth to in her life. The pattern was all T names, which very much made it ten times harder to call the right kid the right name. My mother’s name is Telana, which I’m pretty sure goes with the “T” pattern. My name is mostly common in the African American origins of the world. My aunt, who was fighting breast cancer at the time, was the one who was able to choose my middle name as a symbol of connection just in case she passed on before the time of me being born.

My name gives off many vibes. Just by the saying of my name there are many comments, some nice and some very much judging the pronunciation of the name and the behavior of myself. My name is very unique to me, and I think because of it, it’s way easier not to fit in with the people who think there’s a perfect person. The last name, Goodwan, comes from a long line of Goodwans on my father’s side of the family. Soon I will be a Moreno, not a Goodwan like my family. **(Talaisha Goodwan)**



My name is Cinderria Harwell. My first name comes from my dad and my mom's name. My mom's name is Cinatra. Her name came from Frank Sinatra, the singer. My dad's name is Derrik. His name came from his dad, who was in the army and found his name while doing construction.

My last name came from my grandma's husband, my grandfather Lawrence. That was the name that was passed on from generation to generation. I also passed it onto my daughter to complete the generational name. **(Cinderria Harwell)**



My name has a lot of hidden meanings that live collected over the years, coincidentally coinciding with one another. The first is my mother admiring a beautiful young woman named Zaria. She was the main character of a 90s TV show

called The Parent Hood. The second is Zaria also translates to Zara in Arabic. It means the fairest maiden of the land. And the best for last—Zaria was the name of an ancient river, country, and queen of an African country now known as Zimbabwe. All of these meanings fit together and mean a lot to me!

(Zaria Hunter)



Yael Jimenez-Gonzalez is the name that my mother chose for me, as she browsed the name catalog at the hospital. The staff of the hospital in Mexico City had provided her one. I recall her saying she chose it because it was found in

the Bible. Exactly what it means, I am unsure of until this day. What I think is interesting about my name is that it starts with the letter "Y." I haven't

known many people whose first name also starts with that letter. Subsequently, I think it's kind of funny that it's followed up with one of the more common last names "Gonzalez." In terms of my last name, I find it curious that my mother chose it to be hyphenated, instead of choosing to make it a middle and last name.

Overall, I think the name Yael is unique, so much so that I don't believe I've had the pleasure of meeting another person with that name.

Looking back, I think having the name "Yael" has had somewhat of an impact in my life. When I was younger, I would constantly get bullied for having that name. People that couldn't pronounce it (especially in school) would call me "jail," "Yale," "yall," and the myriad of iterations didn't stop there. At first, I felt embarrassed, ashamed for having a name that wasn't easily pronounceable. I felt sadness that it couldn't be "normal."

As I grew up and endured, I came to realize my name was special, not so much for what it is in-and-of-itself, but for who it represented. It belonged to me, it is who I am, was, and will continue to be. I started feeling proud of my name during the last years of middle school, and I am thankful for being named as such. I am thankful for (inadvertently) my name giving me confidence and pride, and for teaching me how to deal with bullies, all things that I don't think I would've otherwise learned as quickly without it. Not to mention, I came to realize that there is no such thing as "normal."

In addition, I find it kind of funny that out of my siblings, I have one of the more different names. With my brother's name being Alex, and my sister's being Emily, you would think my name would be Jack or something. Jokes aside, I think I agree with Shakespeare, when he says "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." This means, lessons aside, if my name were to be anything else, I don't think it would've ultimately changed who I am as a person. The underlying person would still be me, just a different label. **(Yael Jimenez)**



C- Courageous
R- Responsible
Y- Youthful
S- Sincere
T- Thoughtful
A- Amazing
L- Loyal

T- Team Player

J- Joyful
O- Optimistic
H- Hustler
N- Neutral
S- Strong
O- Outgoing
N- Noble

Crystal to me means strong and noble. I work to excel at all I do and I'm genuine. I believe I'm a queen, and I carry myself with utmost respect. The significance my name has in my family is that I'm the third-oldest grandchild and that I may look or act fragile, but I'm not. They don't know why I was named Crystal; it was cute. LOL. The difference my name makes in my life is that it's easy to spell but people always want to spell it wrong. Yes, my name reflects my identity because there are not too many black girls named Crystal, or it's spelled differently. I laugh because I can't imagine having a grandkid and they say Granny Crystal. **(Crystal Johnson)**



My first name, Helena, was given to me by my mother because she wanted to name me by my auntie Helene. My auntie Helene and my mom were very close and basically attached at the hip. When envisioning myself being successful,

I want to follow her footsteps. Just like the meaning of my first name, I consider myself a shining light. I'm always the one to make some laugh and someone smile.

My middle name, Willie Mae, was given to me by father. He wanted me to carry the weight of his great-grandmother's name because she was

a powerful influence in my father's life. Having this middle name has given me a sense of love from my father and has made me closer to his Southern roots. The meaning of my middle name is "determined." The definition of this resonates with me because I'm always determined to put my best foot forward in life and never stop trying. I always want the best for myself.

The meaning of my last name can mean a couple of things, but the meaning that stuck out to me is the Celtic meaning: healer. I believe that my purpose on this earth is to heal someone's or something's life no matter if it's with laughter, giving advice, or just being there. I always want to see people heal from their past pains and traumas. I think that's why I'm so interested in the medical field because I always want to help someone in need, no matter what it may be. **(Helena Lee)**



Michelle stands for someone full of life, uplifting, inspiring, and even charming.

My name comes from my father, whose name is Michael. Derived from Hebrew, the name Michael means "who is like God."

My name to me means a woman of power, one who nurtures, and one who knows when to fight; one who is loving, kind, and wears many different hats. It could be the President's wife, an actress, or perhaps a singer. She's close to God and loves the beauty that life gives.

Family generations: Lee is a family name that has been passed down through generations. In Hebrew, it means weary, biblically meaning healer. Mack is a family name that has been passed down for generations on my mother's side of the family.

Family nicknames include Mickey, Shelly (don't call me this), and Bell-city.

My name hasn't impacted me as far as my identity goes. I believe that I'm simply here in spirit. **(Michelle Mack)**



My name and nickname came from my grandma (mom's mom). I never got to meet her, but from the stories I've heard, she was incredible. I've always felt the pressure of being her "namesake," and a few times I remember getting motivation from it, like "I can't fail my grandma!" Even though we didn't meet face-to-face before she passed because she lived in Africa, I've still always felt a connection to her. I know having her name that I can't fail.

(Mariam Maiga)



My name is Mashell. A submission from Jamaica says the name Mashell means "a benevolent person, which is very edified and intelligent." My middle name, Denise, is a female given name. The name Denise is said to be of French origin. Dionysus is the Greek god of wine, and the name Denise means to be devoted to Bacchus.

My mom gave me the name Mashell because it was different, but I believe my Lord and Savior who knows my beginning and my end gave me my name. My name to me means that I am strong, intelligent, devoted, loyal, and peaceful.

(Mashell McCarter)



Reginald Rausea Moore is my name. There's actually a lot to unpack here. Okay, my dad is Reginald Jerome Casey. His brother is Dvane Rausea Casey, so it's a combo of Dad and uncle's names. Moore is my great aunt and uncle's last name who adopted my sister and me as infants. I've always gone by my middle name, and two of my three sons also have Rausea as their middle names.

I've never met another Rausea, and most people that know me have long forgotten Reggie is my real name. **(Reginald Moore)**

I'm not really sure if my name means anything significant. The most interesting thing about my name is that my sisters' names and my name all



rhyme. The difference my name made in my life is that people get always seem to get it mixed up with another one of my sisters.



My two sisters' names rhyme with mine: LaTonda, LaShonda, and me, LaRonda. We all have a different middle name, and no, they don't rhyme (surprisingly). I'm really not sure where our names come from or if they really mean anything special. I do know one of my mom's friends came up with our first names, and she and my dad came up with our middle names. My nickname is Ron, and don't ask me where that name came from because I have no idea.

(LaRonda Morris)



My name, Will, means power over the mind—the power to overcome; the power to rebuild and rise from the ashes.

My middle name is Lucky. This is passed down to me from my grandfather and my dad.

My last name is Nunn. I take that as bar none, like I'm the best.

My name has shaped me to who I am today because I am a total embodiment of having the will to overcome everything. "Where there is a will, there is a way." I always find a way, even when there seems to be none. **(Will Nunn III)**



or “gusano” [skinny, short, worm]. Unflattering as they may be, these names identify not just my physicality but also a long and perhaps confusing Mexican heritage.

Gabriel is because it is my father’s name. Benny Gabriel is because of the bachata singer. I was named after a musician, so musician I became. Funny, no?

As I began conjuring a new name, the soul sang back “Guide in Summer Storm.” The moniker was both a testament to my first international journey, as well as my venture out of adolescence.

It’s writ into my career; I facilitate youth space.

And I organize political collectives into brighter tomorrows.



Cylinthia Denise Olle. I don’t know much about my name except I was named after a lady named Cylinthia and her daughter Denise. My last name is German; I don’t know much history there, either. My nickname is Lint-lint. It was just a way to

shorten and cuten up my name. I was also called Fatmama. I was chubby and loved food. I was ALWAYS eating. No significant impacts, no identity. I’m just Cylinthia, an open-minded, intelligent, hard-working, determined mother who is trying to pursue her dreams and provide stability for her children. **(Cylinthia Olle)**



Benny Gabriel (Benji) Ramirez Gomez

The magic of naming has always called to me. I’ve undergone a silent but significant process of naming myself that I’ve yet to comprehend in its entirety.

The name chosen for me was Benny Gabriel Ramirez Gomez. It’s a name I only hear coming from the mouths of kin, if I ever hear it at all. More often than not, I’m referred to as “flaco,” “enano,”

The spell of my name is not yet finished.
(Benji Ramirez Gomez)



My mother’s name is Kimberly. My name is Kimari, and the first syllable of my name is renamed after my mother. This syllable is K-I-M, which is in both our names. I referred to Google and found the origin of my name is African. Also, according to Google, my name means moonlight, rule, and settlement. The United States and Netherlands agreed that the name “Kimari” means moonlight. Also, according to a user from Jamaica, the origin of “Kimari” means rule and settlement.

My nickname is Shay. The nickname “Shay” has great significance in my family because everyone has used it ever since I was born. My nickname is spoken out of great significance of love that my family has for me. Why my family came up with the nickname “Shay” – until this day I do not know. The difference this nickname has made in my life is that it brings me so much joy and happiness every time they call me Shay. The way it has shaped my identity is it gives me confidence along with my birth name. The identity is still relevant, almost like the two names go hand in hand. **(Kimari Rogers)**



JESSICA

Jessica, the name that was
 Given to me on December eighteenth
 Seven days before Christmas.
 The time passed by and in two thousand seven
 I was turning eighteen.
 Jessica, it is my name
 The only girl in the family
 Like the only lily
 In the big green field

Jessica, it is my name
 My parents chose for me
 I will never know why
 But it is what defines me.
 I'm a strong woman
 And more powerful
 Than men. **(Jessica Saldana Ortega)**



My name makes me feel unique. I
 have never met another
 Naquila--maybe
 something close, but
 never the same. Naquila
 was inspired by tequila,
 not a bestselling story,

but my mom's favorite drink at the
 time: a "tequila sunrise." Ironically,
 I've never been a morning person;
 however, I look at the bigger picture,
 Mom's favorite drink and it's strong.
 When I was growing up, my mom
 always affirmed to me I was the
 strongest child.

Later in life, I grew to know I was
 strong. I went through things that felt
 like self-war, but still, I manage to mask
 it all. Talk about COVID, a mask as a
 new norm doesn't seem to bother me

at all. I feel like I've been wearing a mask for a long
 time coming. Today is just a new war. So, in a way,
 my mom prepared me for today when I was born.
 She named me after tequila and assured me I was
 strong, all because my name is Naquila.

(Naquila Taylor)



My name has roots from the French
 and Hebrew. It is the female version
 of Michael, also meaning "gift from
 God" or "who is like God." I knew
 it meant Michael because I was
 named after my father. I suspect
 they wanted a boy. Either way, I'm

glad to be here because my father never had any
 more children.

When I'm trying to explain how my name is said,
 I say Mechele. I mean, it's spelled just like it
 sounds. I will also reference it to the Beatles song
 "Michelle." Yet people get it wrong all the time. It
 was even spelled wrong on my birth certificate. In
 2009, I had to pay to get it changed.

I am grateful for my name, very proud to be the
 one to carry it for my father. May he rest in peace.
(Mechele Williams)



AUERBACH LOVE STORY

Before Bob Auerbach visited class this month, Odyssey students read and responded to two Wisconsin State Journal features about Bob and Wanda Auerbach—the celebration of their 50th anniversary in 2000 and a story about Bob’s life as a widower as well as his 90th birthday benefit for the UW Odyssey Project in 2019.

The story of Wanda and Bob is sweet and powerful. They both came from two different backgrounds. Growing up, both had difficult lives that made it hard to accomplish their studies, but they made it happen.

Their stories remind me of me. My parents came to the USA to give us a better future. Our lives in Mexico seemed okay when I was young, but I didn’t know how my parents really were struggling. As an adult and a DACA recipient, I’m struggling to continue my studies, and reading stories like the ones of Wanda and Bob makes me think I can do it. **(Erendira Giron Cruz)**

After reading the two stories, I have this feeling of courage. Mr. and Mrs. Auerbach faced a lot during their time, such as discrimination, poverty, and hardships, and still had the courage to keep pushing through to achieve their goals. I felt like their love is what made them strong. They found the beauty in the smallest things, such as a love letter. They could lose it all and it wouldn’t matter because they had each other’s love, trust, and friendship. I notice they went through a lot of hardships separately, but they didn’t let that define who they are negatively. Mr. and Mrs. Auerbach always learned how to turn a negative into a positive. **(Helena Lee)**

First, I would like to send many blessings and well wishes for turning 90 years old. I would certainly



hope and pray I am blessed to conquer so many years. I definitely am a hopeless romantic, so I can completely understand your view on grief for a loved one. Everyone has their own process, and it is amazing to use that to bring joy to others and, may I add, inspirational. I cannot imagine being a child during a time like the Holocaust, but I believe your life was purposeful. I can’t wait to meet you and hear your music!

(Naquila Taylor)

My thought after reading the two stories is that their love is so inspiring. I believe that their marriage is the type of love/marriage that every woman deserves. As a couple, they were supportive of each other and both were committed to each other. I admire them and how they fought to be together. **(Jessica Saldana Ortega)**

This was a beautiful story. It wasn’t long and drawn out, straight to the point. The part that hit my heart the most was in “passing it on.” When Bob said that people told him, “Oh, time heals wounds,” I really felt Bob’s reply. The way it was written was so genuine and pure, and I loved the fact that they didn’t let discrimination of Bob being Jewish affect their relationship. Thank you, Bob, for your donations and your precious time. You have brought a lot of happiness and strength to a lot of people’s lives. **(Crystal Johnson)**



It's such a beautiful thing in old age how they still loved each other deeply and truly. Despite what tribulations they went through together, their love for each other was greater than any of the tribulations that came along. What made their love strong was the fact that he treated and thought of her as equal and just as intelligent as he was. It was wonderful and powerful that their marriage thrived on absolute equality and respect. All and all, they were so giving and pure-hearted that they believed in the power of education to break the cycle of generational poverty. **(Kimari Rogers)**

Reading these two stories gave me great insight into my own relationship and past relationships. There were a lot of things that stood out to me. The first was the cost of the wedding. In my first marriage, we married strictly for love, nothing about any financial obligations. With that being said, my wedding cost was far less than five hundred dollars.

Respect and love were very valid points to me, that they were always equal. That needs to be a strong foundation in my long-term relationship. I say from a saddened heart that has not always been true. I know we both deserve to have respect and love. Without these two things, I cannot see a permanent future.

Sixty-two years, wow. I thought about how long I have been in my relationship and thought how many marriages don't stand the test of time. People don't believe in "through thick and thin and 'til death do us part." It seems to be much easier to divorce than weather the storm. I didn't make the right choices when I married, but I refuse to make the same choices when or if I remarry. I want to be an equal with my husband, to have respect and love. Then I pray we remain husband and wife forever, even through death, a blessing we can pass onto our children and grandchildren so our story can be told for decades. **(Mechele Williams)**

Well, for me, there were huge parallels in regard to their relationship and how they felt about one another. The chief sentiment my significant other and I always had for each other was always feeling lucky to have discovered each other, so when I read that line, it really hit home. Yet the line that touched me the deepest was Bob's response to "time heals all wounds." The woman I was in love with and in a relationship with since the age of thirteen was separated from me for fifteen years due to my incarceration. Bob lost his wife to death and I was still able to see my love, but time definitely didn't heal the wound of separation. It made us miss each other even more.

(Jonathon Adeyanju)

Being a hopeless romantic in this age sucks, and yet I still believe in love and finding a life partner, though nowadays it is such a rare sight. I applaud your father and mother for finding each other and sticking it out for 62 loving years. I pray I can get married one day and live a lifetime journey with my wife, but the odds of that happening nowadays are slim to none. People nowadays don't know how to fight through the pain and trials of being in love. They are more in lust than love, meaning "they'd rather choose what they like and feel in the moment," and when that moment of lust wears away, boom! Onto the next one. I really respect Bob for the way he viewed his wife, as an equal. I believe that is how it should be, and I would ask him, do you believe she made you a better man? And when did you realize that she was the one? **(Brandyn Bess)**



If I could ask Bob a question, it would be where did you develop your attitude towards your partner during a time the women were not viewed equal? Bob's parents were lawyers, so I assume Bob attained his attitude towards women from his upbringing. I wondered, does his background of being from Germany but settled in New York City have anything to do with his attitude towards women? Bob saw his wife as an equal during a time when men didn't look at women as equals.

Bob's experience being able to access free education has brought him to make a huge donation to the Odyssey Project. It's outstanding that Bob is able and willing to make this donation. Bob donated \$100,000 in the lovely name of his wife. Bob said in the writing that time hasn't healed his pain of losing Wanda. That made me sad because I lost my brother/best friend and I depend on time to ease some of this pain I feel from losing him. **(Ericka Booe)**

I feel like you should be able to love who you want to, no questions asked. Why should it matter who you love? It shouldn't matter. Other people

shouldn't have any input on anybody else's life, let alone their love life. People should just mind their own love life and not put energy into other people's lives. **(LaRonda Morris)**

I like that Mr. and Mrs. Auerbach didn't let people stop them from getting married. They had true love. They both grew together in their educational journey. I like that they stayed together from poor to wealthy. In today's marriages, if you don't have any money, that would be the grounds for a divorce. It was sad that Mrs. Auerbach passed. That saddened my heart. I just want them to live forever because they seem so happy together. I am glad that Mr. Auerbach took his time and volunteered. To me, I think that made him stronger. I know that it is a hard thing to lose a loved one. **(Katrina Collins)**

Mr. Bob's quote "I miss her more, not less" hits home. I lost my best friend to suicide in 2009, and every year since has been hard to help me gain friendship or even open up to people. Every year, I do miss him more. Is it due to some of our great memories starting to fade, or is it the fact it has been twelve years since this person who had a big impact on my life is no longer here? So I would ask Bob what things help him keep her memory and face fresh in his mind. **(Ontario Frazier)**





and hardships, and still had the courage to keep pushing through to achieve their goals. I felt like their love is what made them strong. They found the beauty in the smallest things, such as a love letter. They could lose it all and it wouldn't matter because they had each other's love, trust, and friendship. I notice they went through a lot of hardships separately, but they didn't let that define who they are negatively. Mr. and Mrs. Auerbach always learned how to turn a negative into a positive. **(Helena Lee)**

I'm absolutely amazed at the hearts of these two souls. It's truly inspirational to hear about the lifestyles that Bob and Wanda experienced. It's also interesting to hear about how these two met and instantly knew that they were one. I'm a big believer in meeting souls and having instant connection. I believe also that whatever you believe and put out into the universe will come back to you. It's really a blessing to be a part of this community and see how these spirits continue to live out their legacy.

I'll tell you, they are very strong people. All odds were against them and they still found a way. It reminds me of when Giselle and I first started dating. Her family was not a big fan of us becoming serious. They did not think we would work. She's Mexican and I'm African American. We were opposites of each other, but we knew we belonged together, and five years later we're going strong. How did they keep such a positive mindset? **(Jermaine Booe)**

As questions for Bob, how did you overcome the adversity during challenging times? Did you come from a family of love? What were your religious beliefs? What did you feel after meeting Wanda? How did you know that it was true love? **(Michelle Mack)**

After reading Bob's story, it's inspiring that his life changed overnight, but he still went on to do great things. When I did the math on how long they were married, it gives me hope on love. You don't really see too many people married for that long anymore, especially happily. I would ask him if there's anything in his life's past he would change if he could. **(Mariam Maiga)**

After reading the two stories, I have this feeling of courage. Mr. and Mrs. Auerbach faced a lot during their time, such as discrimination, poverty,





My thoughts after reading were everywhere because a household that went through so much still tried. How come in the world we live in so many people go through stuff but people will see that and not help them, although they know how? Bob Auerbach is exactly like me, helping people with problems we've been through to make the process easier for them. We'd rather not watch people struggle if we have something that can help them all.

What would you tell someone whose son was abused at six months old? The mother (me) was only 18 and had to plan a funeral for her child because everyone gave him six months to live. But she fought. Can you compare someone dying to someone forever changed, lost in a way, never the same? **(Capri Booker)**

Do you think it was easier to date and be married in a time where technology was not at your fingertips? Personally, I think technology killed relationships. It seems like it's normal to casually date nowadays. If Bob was a German Jew, did Wanda [a Tennessee Methodist] convert? What made them want to move to Madison? **(Cynthia Gonzalez)**

How was Bob Auerbach able to overcome being captured by the Nazis? This question relates to survival because I was in a human trafficking situation. It was sort of like a cult because I couldn't leave. I want to know how Bob Auerbach was able to overcome nightmares because that's the only thing my mind can't overcome. So my body is free, but my mind is not free. **(Cinderria Harwell)**

It sounds corny, but if you work at LOVE the same way you work at your passion, that's how it works. You have to pour value into your loved ones so they can in turn LOVE you for it. It's a cycle, but you have to do your part with eagerness. **(Reginald Moore)**



MOMENTS OF COURAGE

courage: the ability to do something that frightens one; strength in the face of pain or grief; having the heart to face danger and hardship; from Latin cor “heart”



I was 19 years old, and the judge told me and my co-defendants to rise as the verdicts were being read. What ensued was six guilty verdicts. I looked behind me where my family and loved ones were seated. The looks on their faces were those of pure devastation, but even more so, a worried look that wondered how my twin and I were taking it. As the bailiff led me away, I knew it was of the utmost importance to be brave. I knew my courage would impart courage to my loved ones who were worried about me. What I didn't know was that four months later, I would have to repeat the entire process of my sentencing—where I was sentenced to 15 years in prison. **(Jonathon Adeyanju)**



After losing my Grams in 2019, it really put a dent in my heart. It took me so long to let all my emotions, hurt, and pain out because I couldn't take it that my favorite lady had left me all alone in this cold world. Her death showed me that I need to be

humbler and more patient in life and never take things for granted. I miss her, but I have always been a fighter and a strong, beautiful mother like my grandma would want me to be. She always told me I was her prettiest granddaughter LOL. I miss her so much. Her death has made me become a true fighter and taught me to have faith in God. **(Amanda Bell)**



Imagine a young mixed boy aged 12, and he is standing on a bright stage all alone. There are eyes staring at him, so many eyes. Imagine this boy being told he must recite a monologue in front of these eyes. The boy shakes with fear, so much that you can literally feel how scared he is with your eyes. Imagine the boy crying because he is so shaken. He can barely utter a word, and he wants to just run away. Imagine a girl standing up, walking up to the boy on stage, and giving him a hug. “It is going to be okay, you got this!” the girl says, and the boy takes a real deep breath. Imagine the boy after all this, speaking, with a quiver in his voice, but speaking nonetheless. Imagine the boy finishing the monologue to cheers from his classmates! “You did it!” I was that boy and I had courage.



This is myself, Brandyn Jerome Bess, age 12, my first monologue in Theatre 1. I was so scared to present; I was a shy kid growing up, and it was hard for me to be open to others. One day I said to myself, after years of being bullied and made fun of by others, no more will I let what someone else thinks of me affect me and make it so I am not true to myself. So, I joined theatre, and it helped me become the Brandyn I always wanted to be. **(Brandyn Bess)**



Recently, I lost my two big brothers to congestive heart failure. I grew up the only daughter of Hiawatha Booley with three brothers.

My oldest brother was nine years older than me. The next brother was one year older than me. Then, there was my twin brother; I am four minutes older than him. Our mother has lived with congestive heart failure for 17 years.



only 47, the hospital tried everything they could do. My brother was resuscitated, but it was the start of two weeks of torture for myself. I looked at it like it was a blessing that he didn't die Thanksgiving night and lived another two weeks before he really died, but I would have to display a crazy amount of courage to get through this situation.

I had a close but unique relationship with my two oldest brothers. My oldest brother spent eight years in prison for an assault charge. He dealt with drug addiction on and off through his 55 years on this earth. He was diagnosed with heart failure at the age of 40. My second brother was my best friend. My second brother was also highly overweight all 47 years he lived on this earth. He was diagnosed with congestive heart failure a month after our oldest brother at the age of 32.

My second brother's heart was doing so bad from the infection that they kept a crash cart stored in his hospital room. His heart was stopping almost every other day for those two weeks. That crash cart creeped me out so bad. I would have to go visit every day, and that took mad courage for me to watch him go through death. I was alone visiting him at the hospital on December 10, 2018 when his heart stopped for the last time.

Things got rough on us when my second brother caught an infection and was hospitalized. His heart stopped Thanksgiving night, 2018. With him being

While my second brother was going through his last two weeks of life, my oldest brother was being given the news from his doctors that he was in his final stage of congestive heart failure. Because he was not highly overweight and still considered a young man, the doctors gave him two different but huge heart procedures. He died from the second procedure February 6, 2020. I was visiting when he suddenly stopped breathing.



I don't know why God chose me to be the eyes that see so much pain, but I honestly feel there is a reason. God granted me the courage to go through what I've gone through. "He never gives us too much to bear" are words that inspire me to continue to be there for others even through the rough times.

Writing these paragraphs that took me back to this time took courage. **(Ericka Booley)**



Courage: it could be a lot of things because the world is kind of a scary place. We've got bugs, movies, and even the dark can be scary. All those things take courage to get past. Now for me, it took a lot of courage to apply and to interview for school.

For me, it was kind of like the time I asked a girl out, or like your first basketball/football game. Yes, I was happy, but nervous. From the interview to September 8th [first Odyssey class], it was like the weight of the world was on my shoulders. You ever break something of your friend's or your mom's? Imagine that, times ten—like your heart dropped from your chest to your butt. I wanted to turn around and leave, but everyone was so nice and understanding. **(Jermaine Booe)**



When my son was in the hospital and I had to make some very strong decisions, I had to show courage. I had to show courage towards officers, CPS workers, doctors, and even my own family members—basically everyone. One of my family members basically said it was my

fault because my son was abused. I had to kick them out of the hospital because everyone was attacking me. **(Capri Booker)**



It took me a lot of courage to apply for this program. I had so many negative thoughts. "I'm not good enough," "I'm pregnant," "How will I pass with a baby?" "Am I smart enough?" but I turned that worry into courage and believed in myself.

I knew I owed it to my daughter to give her a bright future and someone to look up to.

(Kayanna Branch)



I was in the tutoring with Kevin and my heart was racing because I am nervous about reading out loud. Kevin said, "Each one of us is going to take a paragraph to read," and I said "Kevin, this is bothering me." But I read. My heart was really racing and I felt anxious. But then I did it and that was encouraging to me. My body was anxious but I am proud that I got through it. I was glad I got it over with. I had been trying to breathe and get back to a regular pulse.

(Katrina Collins)



I can go on and on about the many stories where I believe I have showed courage. A lot of the stories are not easy to read and might trigger other people if they themselves have experienced a similar situation. One of the times I feel like I demonstrated strength was after the loss of one of my children (pre-birth). The whole story itself is like a crazy mess of how I found out I was pregnant, to the wild emotions you feel: panicked, anxious, regretful (at least for me), unprepared, to actually accepting the fact I was going to be a parent.

Well, the whole thought of that reality came crashing down and I was faced with two choices—induce pregnancy and give birth to a stillborn, or carry the baby to term and deliver the baby as a stillbirth. I chose to induce and just get it all over

with at once. A very painful decision to make, but I knew I could not handle all the attention I would have gotten, all the, “Oh, you’re pregnant? What are you having?” talks, as I would struggle to hold back the huge rage of tears that were to come. No, I couldn’t carry a baby, my baby, for a whole nine months, loving her, caring for her, just for my ending to not be a happy one! No!

Whew! So many emotions behind that decision, but it was my decision and I made it. Sometimes I wonder if it was the right thing to do, or whether it was a selfish one. It really took courage for me to stand up and tell my mother about it, and I feel like it took courage for me to get up day after day following something as traumatic as the birth of your dead child. I try to use that fearless approach at everything I do now and try to be a better person every day. **(Yasmine Dobbins)**

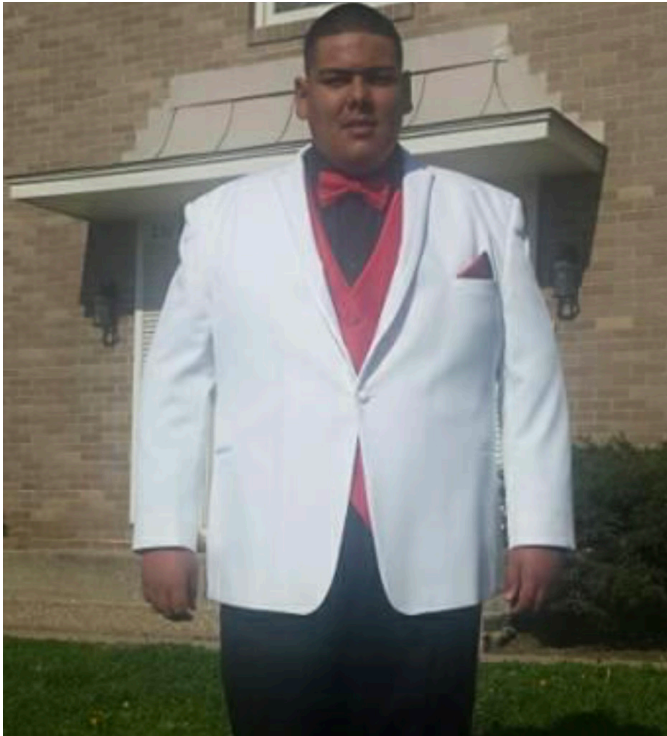


Life in general, everything I’m working towards, and being a Black man in the world today takes courage. Police and other Black men are taking ourselves out; every day I leave my house it is a gamble.

Courage is going to school, trying to break my generational curses, and just overcoming barriers of being Black in general. **(Ontario Frazier)**



A time I felt that I had courage was when I was at work and this customer called, and when he didn’t like that his application might take a while, he was not having it. He was rude, made me feel little, and I couldn’t say anything back. It took a lot of courage to have self-control and not curse him out. Even if he made me cry and I didn’t want to be at work, it was the courage I took upon myself to stay and go through the day, even if I felt embarrassed that everyone saw or heard me cry. It’s okay. I sucked it up and moved on. **(Erendira Giron Cruz)**



About ten months ago, my younger brother was fighting a really bad drug addiction. Pills took the best of him that night. I was six months pregnant at the time. My belly was pretty small at the time still, but enough to get in the way. My

brother's and my rooms were adjacent to each other. I could hear him fumbling around in his room; the walls were thin enough. A few days before this incident I remember finding pieces of tinfoil with black stuff on it. Not really knowing much about drugs, I brushed it off. Maybe it was from the stuff my mom cooked the night before?

It was about 8 PM when my little brother and I decided to watch a movie. We decided to ask our brother if he wanted to join since him being at home so early was rare.

My 12-year-old brother was the first to discover my brother's lifeless body. He froze and couldn't say a word. I remember saying "What?" at least ten times.

I knew CPR. With no hesitation I started chest compressions just like in training: 30 chest pumps to two breaths. I did CPR for at least five minutes. It

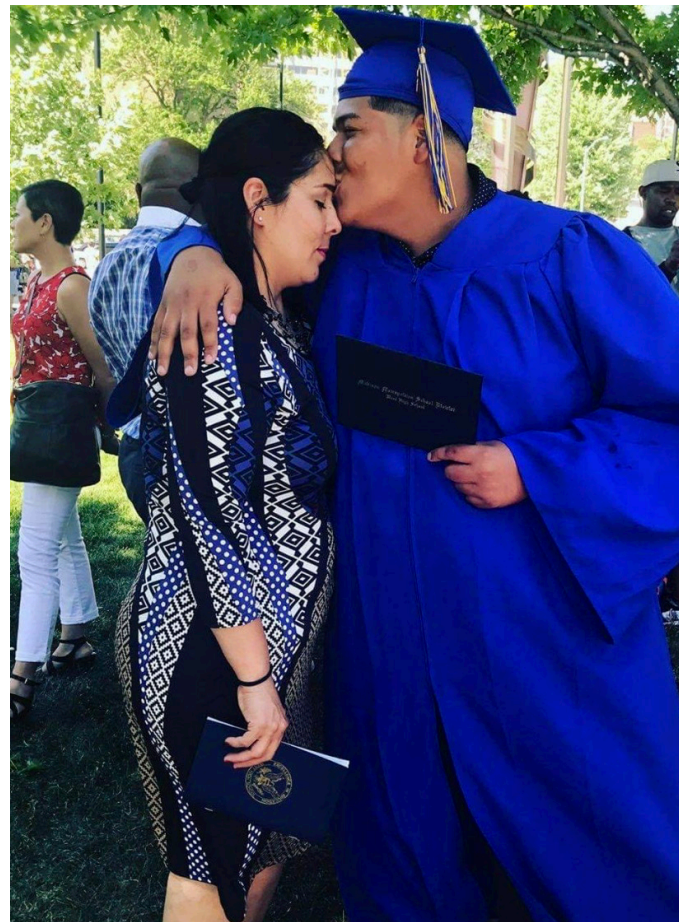
felt eternal. I remember my brother having Narcan lying around. I shoved it up his nose and he woke up, wide-eyed, confused, surrounded by EMTs, police, ambulances. The adrenaline was rushing through my body so much that Laïla wasn't as active as normal. She knew I was stressed.

My brother was alive. I could breathe again.

Later that night, still being shocked with everything that happened, I sat in my life-long companion's room and cried because imagining my life without my brother was devastating enough, now with the image of the real thing happening.

As I was walking out of the room, I saw a bag under his bed. I grabbed it and in it were two pills, little circles, blue, I believe. Percocet is what almost took my brother's life.

I'm glad to say he is doing much better now and working on getting his life back to how it used to be. **(Cynthia Gonzalez)**





say prostitutes deserve what happens to them, otherwise they shouldn't be out there doing what they're doing.

Courageous. One day I was taking my daughter to school. It was dark and I was flashing back to the night. Then, she ran away from me. I was able to calm down and not flash back. Also, in the morning the wind blows super hard, allowing me not to flash back. **(Cinderria Harwell)**



When it comes to being a parent, there is never a time where you will be ready. I had my first daughter at 19, and by my 20th birthday I was pregnant with my son. At the time I was going to school, just moved to my second apartment, and had a child already going to be one year old. All my friends told me, "It's going to be hard," "You're too young for two kids." Even though I was extremely nervous and afraid of the fact that I would be 21 years old with a newborn and a two-year-old, I put my mind and body to the test. I continued school throughout my pregnancy, completing a full semester at MATC, moving into a two-bedroom apartment with enough room for more than just us all before giving birth to my son late July. I still think about how I had so much courage to push myself to the extent of being a mother and going for a degree at the same time. I salute myself. **(Talaisha Goodwan)**



I displayed courage when I went out of my house. I hate going outside for any reason. One time, I went outside and I was raped. I couldn't call the police because I was making money on the streets. They always



There were a lot of times in my life I had to be courageous. Waking up every day and wanting to keep going towards my goals is courageous. Knowing all of the hurdles—I've overcome depression, family issues, homelessness—yet still pushing forward every day takes a lot of courage to me! **(Zaria Hunter)**



I displayed courage when I decided to move from Chicago, where I'm originally from, and where my mom and all my family are to take a chance and give courage to a new way of life. I only knew one person here in Madison, WI, but I wanted a better life

for my daughter and myself. I knew I had to fight and struggle to get what I needed and to get where I was trying to be.

I jumped in my 2009 Dodge Avenger with my daughter and headed to the address that I'd never heard of, miles away from Chicago. I was nervous but I was optimistic. I lived with my friend, in shelters, in my car, until my apartment became available. It has been a bumpy road since, but it was worth it. I have more now than I did when I was in Chicago.

(Crystal Johnson)



Three days before my 18th birthday, I became homeless because my grandma kicked me out of the house. It was the middle of first quarter, and I had no choice but to stay at Briar Patch youth services before I aged out. It was a cold Friday on my birthday; I had

no school because it was teacher development day and I had to leave Briar Patch by 12pm. Without any place to stay, I became homeless, and I had no choice but to live from friend-to-friend's house until I could figure out the plan.

Even though I was homeless, I went to school every day and tried my best to give it my all. I didn't graduate with perfect grades, but at least I passed with all Cs. I tried going to college, but being homeless always put me in a survival mode where I couldn't focus on my class work because I had no place to stay. From the time I was 18 until now I was homeless off and on, sleeping on friends' and family's couches and working doubles just to save money for an apartment. I think those were the darkest times of my life because I was all alone. But I kept pushing and moving forward because I had no choice but to go up.

One day I came across these apartments called Arbor Lakes. After four long years I finally found a place to call home, a place where I can come home to after a long day of work and not worry about having to find another place to go. **(Helena Lee)**



I believe that the most courageous time in my life is when I decided to give my life over to God. I was afraid, but I knew that I needed to trust that he was/is going to work everything out. I was at a point in my life where I knew that something needed to

change. I felt like God was calling me to something higher. In March of 2018, after attending church and studying the Bible, I was baptized. I felt so much love, but I still was unsure of so many things. In the last three years, my life has changed drastically. I've faced challenges in my family dynamics and economically. Although these challenges have arisen, I'm so fortunate and blessed in so many ways. I've received so many unexplainable blessings from out of nowhere and from complete strangers.

When COVID hit I was furloughed and put on unemployment for two months. During that time, I got closer to God and my children. Again, I felt fortunate, regardless of the conditions we were all facing.

As I returned to the work field, I was able to work re-deployed as a screener. I was moved from several locations, filling in where I was needed. My most recent job as a screener has allowed me to meet amazing people that I never would've crossed paths with if this pandemic never happened. I've been able to laugh, cry, and continue to walk in faith. I've worked tremendously on the deep roots within myself, and I honestly don't think I would've been able to without the direction of employment I've been in. I'm very grateful to have met Umaima, a former Odyssey student [graduate of Odyssey 2016, UW 2019]. If I wouldn't have shared my faith and beliefs, I wouldn't be here today. That is what I feel courage is all about: the strength to keep going even when you feel like giving up.

(Michelle Mack)





I'd say I showed courage when my mom moved away and I chose to stay in Madison, especially after I got pregnant. I think that took courage because I was so used to my mom being one call away, so when she left, I definitely felt alone.

Still, I stayed strong and did what I needed for my daughter and me on my own. There were many times I wanted to pack up and leave, but I never did. I think my daughter gave me and continues to give me that strength. **(Mariam Maiga)**



Last year, I decided to stop working and live off my writing. I've been a published author for ten years and randomly would publish books, but the idea of writing at a pace that could sustain me and pay my bills was different and frightening.

Twelve books and twelve months later, I'm barely keeping my head above water, but I haven't had to apply for a job just yet. I've at least proven to myself it's possible. **(Reginald Moore)**



The first night walking into the Odyssey classroom, I was so nervous, my heart was beating fast, and I didn't know what to expect. I haven't been in a classroom setting in a long time, so I knew that was going to be something I had to get

used to. I also wanted to know if the other people were going to like me or if I was going to be judged on the things I was not good at. **(LaRonda Morris)**



I'm a survivor of many things. I have been sexually violated. I showed courage by facing my perpetrator. I held him accountable. That was one of the hardest things I've had to do.

I'm also a survivor from self-harm. I've had three attempts from 12-21 years old. It took a lot of courage to identify and get help. I was drowning in confusion and lack of knowledge, but I finally got help and overcame the obstacle.

My son is autistic! I had the courage to reach out for knowledge and help. It's hard! In the Black community, we have invisible rules; unfortunately, mental health is a thing swept under the rug, so to speak up and out, to educate and educate for my son was new and full of courage. **(Cylinthia Olle)**



I embarked on an act of courage when I ran for office Spring of 2021. I announced the campaign in front of a crowd attending the Defend Democracy Rally. By filing my candidacy, I was stepping foot into a whole new world that was

unknown to me. I was committing to becoming a "public figure," to be stopped on the street by total strangers to discuss the health of the city. I felt incredibly vulnerable sharing my visions for my hometown, but ultimately was rewarded with a community that shares those same visions.

(Benji Ramirez Gomez)





Just this past weekend, I had a frightening, life-fearing experience. For the weekend, I decided to travel by bus to visit my family in Milwaukee. I've ridden the bus many times before, but this particular time I felt anxiety come over my entire body as I stepped foot on the bus. This anxiety heightened my fears as the bus began to pull off and began to rattle and shake because of the engine. As I sat in my seat, still fearful, with no seatbelt, every turn the gigantic bus made I began to grip the seat in front of me very tightly. I sat in my seat consciously knowing that I was not in control of what would happen next. I took a deep breath and told myself everything would be fine.

(Kimari Rogers)



A time in my life when I had displayed courage was when I had to make the choice to attend school with little English. Despite my fears, I did it.

Another time was in my class because I had to give a speech in only English. I was scared, but my classmates congratulated me because I did a good job and they learned a lot from my presentation. **(Jessica Saldana Ortega)**



I displayed courage the day I had my son. I needed an emergency C-section because his heart rate was dropping and I was only given ten minutes to prepare and make a decision. Although I may not have had much of a choice, I did not

panic, and I did what I had to do to save his life. I stayed calm knowing recovery would be hell and also it was COVID, so I had to go in that big scary surgery room all alone. The nurses did a good job helping me keep calm by pointing out my arm tattoo and saying, "If you can get that, you can definitely do this." Ultimately, the healing of the surgery was way worse than a tattoo, but her saying that helped me find the courage to get through the surgery. **(Naquila Taylor)**



Leaving him running. No thought about it, not a minute, I ran. In the dark of night, I ran. Tunnel vision is what I had. I had to make it through this drug-infested, glass-all-over-the-ground lay of the land. Yet, everything was a blur. All I could see

were the small doorbells to the left in a numeric line. I had to get to there. I felt nothing, as if I wasn't even there. In a solitude of empty space. No noises, no visions, just empty.

Then, as soon as it all began, it stopped. The palms of my hands hurt. I felt my heart beating out of my chest, pounding heavily like the weight of bricks. Thousands of wet droplets consumed my face, slipping in my mouth. Looking down, I saw my breast was exposed. I didn't even have time to think about that. There was a tiny pain taking over my body. Please don't let me fall until I get in this building. My only thought was to get in this building. Standing there so lost, buzzing loudly as if they were pressed to my ear. Grab the door handle, that's all I could tell myself, grab it.

When I got in the building, the door slammed so hard it shook the walls like an earthquake, rattling everything. Pure exhaustion as I hit the first stair with my body. I was safe, well, I hoped, and yet I felt at my worst. I had left my children in the house with my abuser.

This story could go on and on, but my courage was the minute I ran out my front door. **(Mechele Williams)**

FEELING DIFFERENT, LIKE WILLIAM BLAKE

Odyssey students sampled the revolutionary poetry, philosophy, and painting of William Blake and read about how he felt different from others of his era. Then they were asked to write in class for a few minutes about a time in their life when they felt different from others.



I remember showing up to my tenth-grade class a couple minutes early as usual. Only this time, my teacher was standing outside the doorway to greet me. I gave my routine head nod to acknowledge that I saw her, and then she stopped me. Her first words

were, “You’re at the wrong class.” I thought it was a joke. Then she went on to explain that she had me switched to an Advanced English class because she felt I could earn an “A” in her class without trying. Oddly, I felt betrayed.

The only thing left to do was head to my new class. Once I made it there, I took stock of the room and immediately felt uncomfortable. No one looked like me. I was the “gangbanger.” I didn’t belong in Advanced English – everyone looked like they knew they belonged. I did not. **(Jonathon Adeyanju)**



Every day, I feel different, only because no other parents have been through what I have with Jamarion. Everyone looks at me as if I’m an unfit mom because of Jamarion being abused. Doctors’ looks are judgmental, and the words are as

well. No matter how much Jamarion improves, they still see him as that dying patient. Also, because I don’t work, I’m seen as lazy, as if I haven’t always been a hard worker. No one can tend to Jamarion as I can. Being a stay-at-home mom isn’t because I’m lazy but because my child is depending on me. In the middle of outside, we get stares because he needs meds and/or feeding with a G-tube. That’s a little on how we both don’t fit in with society.

(Capri Booker)

I felt different after giving birth to my first child. It was a shocked emotional feeling, a feeling I never



felt. It was like my life took a 360 change for the better. It took me three days to finally realize “yes, this is my baby.” I’ve felt love, but this love was different. This whole experience was something I never thought I would go through. They

told me once that I have infertility problems, but God had other plans for me. I know that my feelings will continue to grow as times goes on. This feeling will forever be different, so different that it is sometimes hard to explain. It’s still all so new to me, but I will make this different feeling life-changing.

(Kayanna Branch)



The situation where I feel different is when I’m at work. I work at an elementary school as a playground assistant. I have bronchitis, so wearing a mask during COVID is difficult and it’s hard to breathe.

The reason I feel different at work is because of stereotyping because I’m the only person of color on my team. When I have to take days off (like for the death of a family member), my fellow employees think I’m taking off because of fun and that my absence is unnecessary. I feel I can’t do anything for leisure or to take off just because I want to because they will never think I have a serious reason for an absence even when I do. They are like “Oh, Katrina is just trying to miss” rather than “Oh, her mom died and she has to go out of state and plan the funeral.” I could only take a week off when my mom died because I was afraid I would lose my job. And when I got back from my mom’s funeral, a co-worker asked me, “How was your vacation?” When Katrina does something, it’s all about fun, but when others take off it’s all serious and needed. I have to prove myself. I can’t have any wiggle room. **(Katrina Collins)**



Growing up, you'd be surprised about the crazy things that kids would tease you about. My crazy insane story would be about the time I was teased about my bellybutton, out of all things, and my hair. My bellybutton was something that, growing up, I

hated. I was upset I was not 'normal' like everyone else. As I stared down my shirt, you would see a small but noticeable lump where my belly button resides. All I ever wanted was for my shirt to lie flat and be unnoticeable to the rest of my peers.

My hair has been a long-time battle that I have been fighting between love and hate. One moment, I love my hair because I am fortunate enough to have hair (alopecia was a horrible hair condition that haunted the women on my mother's side of the family), but then I would quickly resent my hair because it was thick and very hard to manage. I never really cared or struggled with the length, just the styles I could wear. **(Yasmine Dobbins)**



A time I felt different or still feel different is right now, at this moment of my life. I just moved to a new job, and I'm almost two months in but I still feel like I don't belong. I still feel different, like everyone still listens to me when I'm on the phone with a client. I know there will be a moment when every time I'm sitting at my desk, I will feel like I'm home, in a good place; that every time I'm sitting at my desk, I feel like I'm in a good place and I'm home with my other family. **(Eréndira Giron Cruz)**



The last time I did my attempt at college, I was attending Madison College. When everyone in the room went around and said something about themselves, the usual things to share were major, age, and some sort of hobby. When it got to my turn, I found myself not wanting to share my age because of the simple fact that I was surrounded by fresh-out-of-high-school 18-year-olds. Although I did end up sharing my age (22), no one really seemed to care. We were all there for one reason, and that was to get an education. I wasn't the best at computers as well and didn't want to ask for help, until I gave in and asked one my classmates. She is now 21 and ended up being one of my best friends in my short time at MATC. **(Cynthia Gonzalez)**





Most of my current friends aren't parents yet. When we have girls' nights, it consists of drinks and loud music, but I'm always the one denying the alcoholic beverages because I will nurse my son the next morning, or constantly going to the restroom to answer calls from the sitter, waking up at 6 AM to go home to my babies. I still feel different every girls' night. **(Talaisha Goodwan)**



When I was in high school, it was a very traumatizing time. I was privileged, so I was teased because I had a ride to school. I was teased because I talked proper. I was teased because I was fighting to graduate.

My only friends were my teachers. I was called an Oreo because I didn't face the same obstacles a quote-on-quote "Black" would face. I didn't take the bus so I didn't know about the corner store, the neighborhood junkie, the gangs. So when free period came they would engage in those conversations. Due to the fact that I was sheltered, I was often called lame, nerd, and, lastly, a peon. These names were so hurtful, I ran home. Well, excuse me, I was driven home, and I questioned why! Why did you make me sheltered? I had begun to hate myself until I had a child of my own whom I will shelter! **(Cinderria Harwell)**



There were a lot of times I didn't feel like I fit in. I had a hard time fitting in in middle school. Kids can be tough to deal with. Classmates were bullying, being mean. I had the biggest challenge going to Glacier Creek Middle School. It was a predominantly white school. Coming from Chicago, being mostly black, I found there was a very big transition meeting friends, etc. Even connecting with my family can be a challenge, but I push through and enjoy just being myself. **(Zaria Hunter)**

I used to work for Verona Area School District. The school I was at was a mixture of students, but it wasn't a mixture of teachers. So when we had



meetings or trainings, I was the only brown-skinned person. With most of the school population being black, I was always the go-to person on what they should do or how do I feel. And I hated that because we all don't think the same and you can't just go off one person's opinion. **(Crystal Johnson)**



All my life, I never felt like I fit in anywhere. Family, friends, places, and things never last for a while. I tend to stay to myself because I always end up hurting people. I'm used to not being able to fit in. What I'm not used to is having anyone to depend on. I always have myself. Nobody ever helped me, so it's kind of hard to ask for help. **(Helena Lee)**



I often feel like I'm misunderstood and don't really fit in. I'm learning to build relationships with others and the importance in that. Being around others who are different can be challenging and sometimes I feel like I'm unheard. You can learn a lot by just being around a person and listening to them. My family and I didn't really communicate well growing up, and that has caused me to be emotionally unstable at times. I hope to learn, grow, and teach with others. **(Michelle Mack)**



Sometimes when I'm around my cousins, I feel like I do not fit in—not because they don't love me, but just because we grew up different. Of all my cousins, my siblings and I were the only ones who did not spend a portion of our childhoods

in Africa. I would say they definitely have a better understanding of the culture and beliefs, so sometimes when they talk about certain stuff, I don't really get it, or when they speak French, I can understand a lot of what's being said, but I just can't speak it. **(Mariam Maiga)**



I feel different because I'm shy and not outspoken. Not having a voice, I miss a lot and sometimes people think that's a lack of intelligence. I need to step out of my shell and learn how to have a voice or get the courage. **(Mashell McCarter)**



So I am from the hood. Therefore, I've been a stereotype or statistic. Mostly grew up around felons and criminals. I have also been the felon and criminal. Birds of a feather.

When I started taking writing seriously, it put me in rooms I never had access to before. Often, in those rooms, I feel I don't fit in. Mostly I feel uncomfortable FOR them and the misconceptions that THEY harbor. **(Reginald Moore)**



I just started a new job, and the people I work with don't look like me. I kind of stick out like a sore thumb. **(LaRonda Morris)**



There was time when I was 24, I lost everything. I lost my job, was going through a court case, and my mother left her husband. She came to stay with me. Shortly after, my mom convinced me to give up my apartment and help her get back on her feet. My sister and I agreed to get on a lease to help my mom get a bigger place.

Everything was good for a few months. Then boom, the slippery slope started. I lost everything. I was 24. My mom told me to move out because I couldn't pay my part of the rent. I instantly went into a dark place. I was so used to handling everything and being on top of my obligations. My girlfriend invited me to come live with her. I accepted, although it was uncomfortable for me. We got into many arguments; shortly afterward, I moved out of her house. I chose to be homeless. I packed my stuff up and lived out of my car. I had just gotten a job; luckily, they offered overtime. I worked doubles every day: 6am-2pm, then 4pm-midnight. I retreated to my house car every night at midnight. I drove around to kill time before my next shift. I did this every day.



I saved up two checks and began to fill out apartment applications. I got accepted to an apartment, but it wasn't going to be ready for one month. I had only four more weeks to be homeless. I was embarrassed but I was humbled. I also learned how to focus on the bigger picture and do the small things every day to get to that point.

When I moved into my new apartment, I appreciated it more; I appreciated losing everything and going to that dark place. I was forced to rebuild. **(Will Nunn III)**



I never “fit” in. Don’t get me wrong; I was “popular,” I was loved. However, I was ALWAYS different. I never “went with the flow.” I never “kept up with the Joneses.” I always did my own thing. I always had my own mind. When I was a child, I was

out of place because I was always more mature in the mind than where I was “supposed” to be. I was always considered “fast-or-grown.” I always spoke my mind, and I always asked questions. The best part was out-smarting adults and knowing it. When I noticed that I was a tad bit smarter than an average girl, it went to my head and I got cocky. I then got in life’s own way of teaching things. I’m still the same, just a little humbler and more knowledgeable. **(Cylinthia Olle)**



I have felt different from others since I was little. I was living with my family in México. At the time there, if you were a girl or a woman, you were less than nothing. Literally, if a family had only boys, that family was the best of the best. However, I was born in a family of three boys and me, the only girl. My mom and dad always treated me different and I believe it’s because I was a girl. **(Jessica Saldana Ortega)**



Having grown up in a Mexican household in Southern Wisconsin, I never quite connected with my peers in school. Both Monona Grove and Waunakee School districts are PWIs: Predominantly White Institutions.

I didn’t connect with the content in my classes; it was revisionist history that centered on a European perspective. Furthermore, I never saw myself nor my people in the lectures.

I felt alienated from my peers because I felt like I was living in a different world. I felt too big for the world around me. I felt like a walking lesson plan for my peers. **(Benji Ramirez Gomez)**



This is something that I live with every day. I’m a 46-year-old female with multiple heart conditions. I have a disability tag in my car window. People look at me and assume there is nothing wrong with me. I can understand this because I used to be the same, looking at people, making the assumption there was nothing wrong with them. I can say that my experience with my heart has changed my outlook greatly.

There are times I feel I have to prove to others that I’m sick. I was placed with a heart monitor. For some reason, I felt like I had to show it so people would understand. It’s like the old saying, “out of sight, out of mind.” **(Mechele Williams)**

MEET OUR ALUMNI

We have over 500 alumni of the UW Odyssey Project and are so proud of all of them! We encourage new students to get to know as many alumni as they can. As part of their homework, Class of 2022 students read about Char Braxton '06, Brian Benford '07, Josephine Lorya '08, and Corey Saffold '06 in the cover story "Finding a Voice Against All Odds" in On Wisconsin Magazine, Spring 2021, as well as essays and poems by Rene Robinson, Odyssey '08 and Friends of UW Odyssey Project Board member.

Char Braxton

She's very brave. A wonderful writer and an activist against sex abuse. **(Jonathon Adeyanju)**

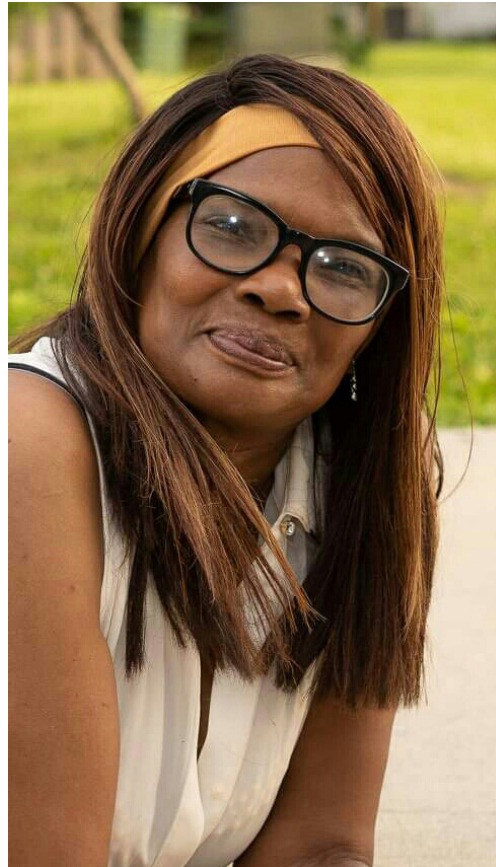
Char's high school counselor did not believe she was good enough for college; well, she proved him wrong. She found the Odyssey flyer in the Goodman library and graduated from Odyssey in 2006. Char is currently studying at Madison College with hopes to transfer to UW-Madison to pursue a double major in Chinese and creative writing.

(Brandyn Bess)

I absolutely loved reading Char's story. She includes such important information, like Odyssey students finding their voices, and this space being a safe space. Char has some big stuff on the horizon. She plans to teach in China and would like to create a cultural exchange program with the Odyssey Project. How important is that? **(Ericka Booe)**

Don't listen to the people who don't believe in you. One day, you're being told you can't; the next day, you find out you can. **(Jermaine Booe)**

Traumatized by her high school guidance counselor telling her that she wasn't "college material" and determined not to give up on her dream, Char stumbled upon a flyer at the Goodman South



Madison library where she loved to read. The flyer gave her exactly what she needed: a path to college. Odyssey made Char feel "like a human being, that she existed on Earth, and that she had a purpose." She also felt more protected, that she could express herself without verbal harm. She states that although we all come from different walks of life, classmates blend together like a pot of Gumbo. Everyone included is shown that they are important. Don't let these hurdles prevent you from finishing your dreams.

(Yasmine Dobbins)

I have had people tell me the same thing as Char, so I know the feeling of being scared, but I'm very glad she found the flyer, continued her education, and beat the odds. **(Ontario Frazier)**

Char Braxton, it seems like destiny put Odyssey in her way when she went to the library. Char is a strong woman who did everything she could do to advance in her studies. **(Erendira Giron Cruz)**

Char was only a 17 or 18-year-old when her own counselor told her that she was basically not good enough for college, but she didn't give up. She did Odyssey and is continuing her education. **(Cynthia Gonzalez)**

Char's guidance counselor told her she "wasn't college material." When she first graduated she didn't have a thought of college because of the comment until she saw the flyer for the Odyssey Project. Char was the victim of sexual assault from her stepfather. She wrote a poem in class that she now reads to women groups and medical students at UW-Madison. **(Talaisha Goodwan)**

She felt terrible after being told she wasn't college material. **(Cinderria Harwell)**

Char had to overcome what her counselor told her, and by joining Odyssey, she did that! **(Zaria Hunter)**

I learned from Char Braxton's story not to give up. Even when someone may feel as though you're not good enough to keep trying, prove them wrong and be patient because opportunities will come along if you're hopeful and willing to take advantage. **(Crystal Johnson)**



This story of Char's life shows me that no matter what others say or do to you, you can be who you want to be. Don't ever let the doubts and fears of others' opinions stop you. **(Michelle Mack)**

She found out about Odyssey from a flyer in the library. **(Mariam Maiga)**

I learned from Char that people didn't always believe in her and held low expectations. Odyssey helped her realize humanity in itself. **(Reginald Moore)**

There are going to be people in your life who are going to tell you things that you don't want to hear. It's your job to prove them wrong. **(LaRonda Morris)**

Even with the world against her, she never gave up. That's comforting and sad. It gives me courage but for someone to try to break your dreams is horrible. **(Cylinthia Olle)**

Char Braxton came to the class because she found the flyer in the Goodman Library. **(Benji Ramirez Gomez)**

Her high school counselor said that she was not college material, but she did not give up on her dream to go to college. **(Kimari Rogers)**

She learned about the Odyssey Project in the library. Her counselor told her that she would never attend college. She didn't give up. I learned from Char that sharing experiences will help you to heal. Her poem is amazing. She speaks up and confronts sexual abuse and systemic racism. **(Jessica Saldana Ortega)**

I learned that Odyssey helped Char find her purpose and helped her accomplish more goals in life. She too was inspired by the support system of Odyssey. **(Naquila Taylor)**

Char Braxton was heartbroken when the school guidance counselor told her she wasn't college material. She also has a passion for reading. **(Mechele Williams)**

Brian Benford

He has a huge heart for the well-being of the community. He genuinely cares. He's a fighter beating the odds in more ways than one. **(Jonathon Adeyanju)**

In 2020 Brian ran for the Wisconsin state senate. Although he did not win, he continues to use his voice to fight for the people. He is currently starting a new term as a Madison alderman. Brian fights to end racial disparity gaps in Madison and Wisconsin a whole. He currently also works with UW-Odyssey as its success coach. **(Brandyn Bess)**

Brian overcame a lot. Learning that Brian completed Odyssey despite a cancer diagnosis was huge, and hearing about how Odyssey supported Brian made me feel so warm inside. From the support Jermaine and I have received so far, I can see Brian getting a huge amount of support. I'm glad Emily's parents went through what they went through. If her parents didn't go through their struggles, then who would have developed the passion to create a program with free education you receive for the barriers you may face? Emily's vision is why I am here. **(Ericka Booeey)**

You can't quit. When you think it's over with, it's not. Odyssey's got your back. They won't quit on you and won't let you quit on yourself. **(Jermaine Booeey)**

Brian learned about the Odyssey Project in 2006 and joined and graduated in 2007. Brian is a family man of four kids and really wanted to instill in his children that educational pathways are important to reaching your full potential. Brian completed the Odyssey program and went on to pursue his bachelor's and master's degrees at the UW. While he was nearing the completion of his bachelor's degree, Brian was diagnosed with cancer, but he did not give up because of the unwavering support from Odyssey. Brian decided to give back to Odyssey by working full time as its Success Coach,



ensuring help to meet everyone's needs. He also ran for Wisconsin State Senate in 2020. **(Yasmine Dobbins)**

Mister Brian really broke the mold. He graduated in his 60s, a year of age not many can do or say that. Odyssey opened doors for him he may not have thought he had the keys to. **(Ontario Frazier)**

What I learned from Brian's case is that even if life is giving you punches, move forward. Having the courage to move forward takes a lot. **(Erendira Giron Cruz)**

Brian has four kids, he graduated from UW with his bachelor's degree, and he was also later diagnosed with cancer. **(Cynthia Gonzalez)**

Brian wasn't able to complete his degree because of the fact he had four children and was raising four children on a low income. During the course of the Odyssey Project Brian was diagnosed with cancer. **(Talaisha Goodwan)**

Brian Benford knew since he was fortunate to join the Odyssey Project and a hundred people were denied that he had to try his best. **(Cinderria Harwell)**

Brian suffered from deep personal issues such as health and finances, yet he still completed the program and more. **(Zaria Hunter)**

I learned that the UW Odyssey Project's been around for 19 years and was launched by Emily Auerbach, a UW English professor. Odyssey has graduated nearly 500 students and about 200 children. I love the part that Brian remembers vividly how Emily remembered all 30 names, and how he realized that Odyssey wasn't just a class. Brian felt like I felt to live in Madison, where it has one of the greatest colleges. Not finishing college because of life's challenges was a shortcoming of all the other things he has done. He's telling and pushing his kids but had not led by example, so he felt that UW Odyssey would open that door. **(Crystal Johnson)**

Hearing Brian's challenges as a father and through his health issues really impacted me a lot. Knowing that Odyssey helped him through those challenges is so impactful. I think there's a huge message saying, "Don't give up," and the support that comes with that. **(Michelle Mack)**

Brian had cancer and the Odyssey program helped with school costs. **(Mariam Maiga)**

Brian realized at an older age the benefits of furthering education as an example to the family he was head of. He was a walking example of practice what you preach as a dad. **(Reginald Moore)**

Life is going to give you lemons; you make lemonade. No matter what life gives you, you make the most of it. No matter what, you don't give up. **(LaRonda Morris)**

He taught me about faith. He knew he could be something better. He set a goal and went for it! **(Cylinthia Olle)**

Odyssey made him feel like a human being. He worked so hard to get his bachelor's degree even when he was diagnosed with cancer. **(Jessica Saldana Ortega)**

Brian was already serving as an alder before he started Odyssey. **(Benji Ramirez Gomez)**



He felt honored to open doors of public policy in Madison, Wisconsin as an alderman. It was a challenge for him to complete his bachelor's degree because of his parental responsibilities. **(Kimari Rogers)**

Brian, like me, was unsure at first if going back to school was feasible, but he took that step and had a good support system (i.e. "Oh no, we're not giving up on you.>"). **(Naquila Taylor)**

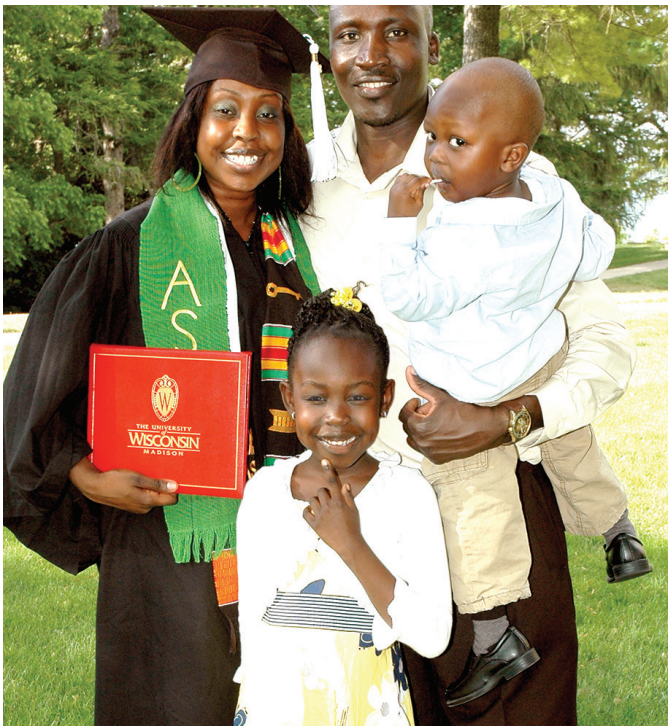
Brian Benford was serving as a Madison alder person in 2006. He was honored to serve the city. As a father of four, he found it hard to finish his bachelor's degree. When he was able to return to finish his bachelor's degree, at the end of that process, he was diagnosed with cancer. **(Mechele Williams)**

Josephine Lorya

She's from South Sudan. She's a mother of four. She's also very inquisitive, and she too has overcome obstacles and barriers by ultimately earning her master's degree. **(Jonathon Adeyanju)**

Josephine was raised in Nairobi, Kenya, but she was born in South Sudan, into the Otuho tribe. She came to the U.S. in 1996 as a refugee and learned of the Odyssey class while braiding hair in a Madison salon. She has worked tirelessly to earn her bachelor's and master's degrees. **(Brandyn Bess)**

This was a special article to read for me. I met Josephine and I really liked her. We met as coworkers at Dane County Human Services. Being the only two black women employed through the Northside office we instantly befriended each other. I was suddenly sent to the Park Street office and never saw Josephine again—until now, reading that Josephine is a lot more accomplished than I thought, and reading what she went through and how her hardships brought her so far. What really felt similar with Josephine's and Char's stories is how they tell us how a role-model/leader in their life basically told them they couldn't do it. Both ladies did it. **(Ericka Booeey)**



It does not matter where you're from or how you start, just make sure to get your foot in the door. **(Jermaine Booeey)**

She was raised in Nairobi, Kenya, after fleeing war in South Sudan, where she was born into the Otuho tribe. She came to the US as a refugee in 1996 and heard about the Odyssey Project while braiding hair at a Madison Salon when she discussed about wanting to go back to school. Josephine was also told by a high school guidance counselor that she wouldn't get into a Division 1 college. Once in the Odyssey program, it taught her the importance to question everything. Emily taught her to speak up and "use your voice" through voting. Speak out against all injustices. **(Yasmine Dobbins)**

UW-Madison was just a dream. This hit home. I understand this. Growing up in Madison, a kid like me would never think about even applying for the school for a number of reasons. Even driving by the school gives me joy and makes me dream. **(Ontario Frazier)**

Josephine is a strong woman coming from a country that was/is at war. Josephine evolved into a person who questions everything and has confidence in herself to go to higher places. **(Erendira Giron Cruz)**



She was from Kenya and came to the US as a refugee. She learned about Odyssey and that gave her the tools to be able to pursue a higher education. **(Cynthia Gonzalez)**

Josephine comes from South Sudan, which she fled during war, residing in Nairobi, Kenya. She first heard about Odyssey through a client whose hair she was braiding. Josephine also was one who heard from a guidance counselor she “wouldn’t get into a Division 1 college.” **(Talaisha Goodwan)**

Lorya fled to the United States and overheard about the Odyssey Project at a salon where she worked. She gained the skills to be successful. **(Cinderria Harwell)**

Josephine overcame being an African refugee, fleeing from her country due to war. **(Zaria Hunter)**

Josephine, raised in Nairobi, Kenya, fled from a war in South Sudan and came to Madison, WI in 1996. While braiding hair, she expressed that she wanted to go back to school and someone told her about Odyssey. It was a dream to her. She was told she wouldn’t get into a division 1 college, but education was the key to success and she was going. **(Crystal Johnson)**

I learned that just because you come from scarcity doesn’t mean that there aren’t resources. Speak

up, use your voice, and don’t be afraid to ask for what you need. Odyssey helps you do these things. **(Michelle Mack)**

Josephine found out about Odyssey while braiding hair. Education was important to her and Odyssey helped her achieve that. **(Mariam Maiga)**

In a world she’d never seen, she adapted and recognized furthering her education was the key, regardless of if she could afford it or not. **(Reginald Moore)**

Never give up on your dreams no matter what; dreams do come true. Be your own biggest cheerleader. Believe in yourself. **(LaRonda Moore)**

Wow! A refugee who’s been through so much, taking a chance and winging it. **(Cylinthia Olle)**

She was raised in Kenya and came to the US in 1996. At the beginning, UW-Madison was only a dream that later became real. **(Jessica Saldana Ortega)**

Josephine was born in Nairobi, Kenya, and studied until receiving a master’s in social work. **(Benji Ramirez Gomez)**

She believes in speaking out against injustices. She believes in the characteristic of having humanity in each person. **(Kimari Rogers)**

I learned in Odyssey she was inspired to use her voice more and how important that was because like me, she was also an introvert. Also, Odyssey was like a dream come true for her. **(Naquila Taylor)**

Josephine Lorya graduated from Odyssey in 2008. She was raised in Nairobi, Kenya. Upon coming to the US in 1996, she was a refugee. She had dreams of going to UW-Madison because of her belief education was the key to success. **(Mechele Williams)**

Corey Saffold

I learned he cares about prison reformation, and that's how he learned embracing his voice could impact that movement. **(Jonathon Adeyanju)**

Corey constantly fights for justice for black men and black people in general; he uses his voice and words to make a change for the better. He submitted an essay he wrote called "Education Must Trump Prison Time" to the Wisconsin State Journal prior to his graduation from Odyssey in 2006. Corey currently is the director of safety and security for the Verona Area School District and he is also pursuing his bachelor's in Criminology at UW-Whitewater, with plans to attend law school. **(Brandyn Bess)**



I learned Corey is a writer. Corey will be the person that sees that the Odyssey Project is expanded across the state. Corey wrote an article that was impressive. It was impressive to the point that he was convinced to submit it to the Wisconsin State Journal to be published. **(Ericka Booe)**

You have a voice that was made for people to hear. Don't be scared to use your voice. Closed mouths don't get fed. **(Jermaine Booe)**

The Odyssey course really showed Corey how important humanity was regardless if your focus was to become a mechanic or nurse because it helps you find your voice. Corey states how an education in humanities gives you a more broad recognition for diversity for others and their admission to think differently. Saffold really noticed the effect of his words while being in Odyssey, submitting a powerful piece to the Wisconsin State Journal about the state's constant war to break people of color down. He received a big response from people, which showed him he was significant. **(Yasmine Dobbins)**

This article has power. The fact is that one sentence gave me chills. Being a black man that graduated from a trade school and knowing more people like me who did not graduate... it hits home. **(Ontario Frazier)**



Corey's story is amazing. For him to write a powerful article and have so many people [read it], as well as powerful people, it takes a little support to help you reach big things **(Erendira Giron Cruz)**

Corey was the police officer at West High School when I was a freshman. **(Cynthia Gonzalez)**

Corey found his voice through the Odyssey Project. He really started to realize his voice and the power his words had when he submitted his article "Education Must Trump Prison Time" to Wisconsin State Journal and received more response than he expected and from some important people throughout the system. **(Talaisha Goodwan)**

Corey found his voice by reading Plato, Shakespeare, Thoreau, and Martin Luther King. **(Cinderria Harwell)**

Corey wrote an article comparing the correlation to incarceration rates to graduating black men in Madison. This pattern helped him find his voice. **(Zaria Hunter)**

Corey tells us to have confidence in ourselves and what we voice and write. I like when he said to put my voice into writing. It makes me think that we don't have to always scream and yell to get our point across. **(Crystal Johnson)**

Odyssey helps to address the real societal issues arising in our country daily. We have a voice that can be used to bring awareness and changes that are necessary. **(Michelle Mack)**

Corey said, "A humanities education gives you appreciation for diversity for other people, and appreciation to think differently." That stood out to me. **(Mariam Maiga)**

Corey realized that his potential, especially in writing and getting his point across with words, was much bigger than he'd ever thought, through Odyssey. **(Reginald Moore)**

Find your voice and use it. **(LaRonda Morris)**

"A humanities education gives you appreciation for diversity, for other people, and appreciation to think differently, to think broadly." He makes me feel like I made a good choice applying for this program. **(Cylinthia Olle)**

Corey published a piece in the Wisconsin State Journal titled "Education Must Trump Prison Time." **(Benji Ramirez Gomez)**

Corey says Odyssey helped him find his voice. He believes a humanities education gives you an appreciation for diversity. **(Kimari Rogers)**



He was able to overcome many barriers physically and mentally through education in the Odyssey Project, such as having served time in jail. The cherry on top was getting an article published in the WI journal, which really affirmed his voice mattered. **(Naquila Taylor)**

Corey Saffold was encouraged to submit an article he wrote to the Wisconsin State Journal newspaper. He graduated from Odyssey in 2006. With the replies he got from his article, he states that it let him know he had a very significant voice. **(Mechele Williams)**

René Robinson

I learned that she overcame the barriers inherent in living in South Side Chicago, that no matter how tumultuous her path was, she never adopted the victim's mentality. I learned she is tenacious. **(Jonathon Adeyanju)**

I met René before Odyssey through my mother because if you did not know, she runs an entire apartment complex. René is motivation to me and to others around herself. After I got in trouble for smoking on her property, she chewed me out so good. I deserved it, though; I listened to her story about how she had a rough upbringing. I soaked it all in: her story about drugs, bad decisions, having babies at a young age; I felt her pain and her struggle deeply, but I also felt her power and her strength. She is a fighter and a survivor, and I applaud René and hope I speak with her more often. **(Brandyn Bess)**

René tells us how society taught us how to think and what to think. She talks about how limited we are, and that we think one-sidedly. Odyssey will change that. **(Ericka Booe)**

No matter how hard life knocks you down, get up, brush yourself off, and keep going. **(Jermaine Booe)**

René was born in Chicago, IL and was the eleventh of fourteen children born in her family. Being in the Odyssey Project has been the best decision in her life, as well as moving to Madison. It made her believe in herself after failing to meet her own expectations previously. **(Yasmine Dobbins)**

René is an inspiring person who went through so much, but that didn't stop her from continuing to move forward with her studies. **(Erendira Giron Cruz)**

She was a girl growing up in Chicago whose family was poor and often didn't make the best choices. She is now doing better. **(Cynthia Gonzalez)**



René was one of fourteen children. She didn't make such good decisions in life, resulting in early motherhood at the age of 16 and marriage by 17. She went through physical abuse before moving to Madison WI. When she was accepted into Odyssey, she noticed people in life were just like her. At the graduation of Odyssey she read a poem she wrote about the value of lifelong learning. **(Talaisha Goodwan)**

I can actually feel what she's saying. We have so much in common: making bad decisions was one of my best traits, and going down a path that was easy to adjust to. Odyssey gave her strength and a chance to believe in herself and to go down a better and more successful path. **(Crystal Johnson)**

No matter where you come from or how bad you think you have messed up, there's still a chance. You're always a choice away from changing your life. **(Michelle Mack)**

I learned no matter where you come from or your background or any despairs that you've got going on in your life, don't give up. Very inspiring read.

(LaRonda Morris)

René taught me how to be grateful and humble. Yes, I was poor, but my parents and family always made a way.

(Cylinthia Olle)

I learned that she changed the TV for studying and she learned how to use the computer, also that she came from a family with fourteen children, and she never gives up. **(Jessica Saldana Ortega)**

René grew up in "the low end" of Chicago, but she moved to Madison for a new start where she was able to find a nourishing community. **(Benji Ramirez Gomez)**

She is number eleven of fourteen children in her family. In her family, education was a requirement, but she didn't meet the expectation.

(Kimari Rogers)

René was raised and grew up in poor circumstances. She learned what we call "homemade" lessons by growing up in good and bad times such as poverty or unsafe



neighborhoods. Odyssey helped act as a mentor to René by what she describes as, "I think I can, I think I can" in her Oracle. Slowly but surely, she got herself together and is now living in better circumstances. All of the alumni taught me that yes, there may be ups and downs during all of our processes, but with Odyssey, we have a good support system that we can rely on. At the end of our hard work and dedication, it will pay off.

(Naquila Taylor)



René Robinson once lived in a three-bedroom, one-bathroom apartment with nine other people. She explains herself as being poor. In her family, there were fourteen children, all longing for attention. After she married with two children she felt it was a blessing. Coming to Odyssey was one of the best decisions she ever made. She states it was a "mind-opening experience," the study of characteristics of various people and the differences and relationships between them.

(Mechele Williams)