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ORACLE

WOMEN OF COURAGE

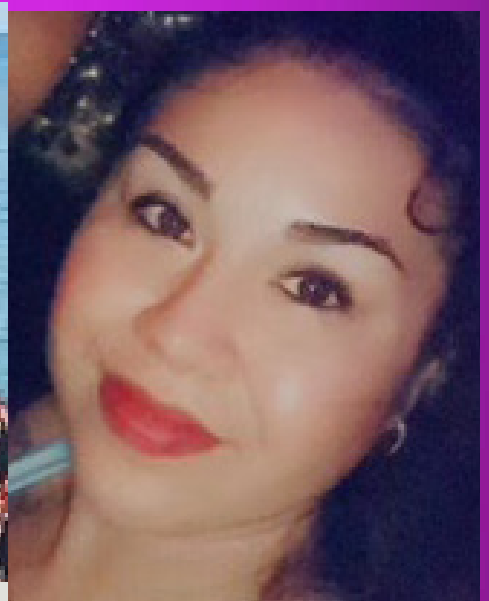


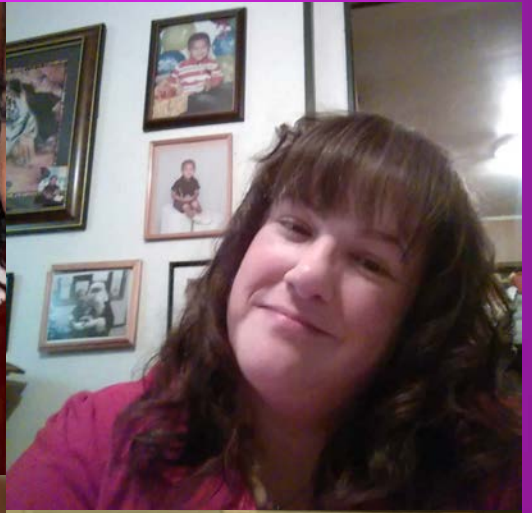
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THE LOVE OF A MOTHER

BY CYLINTHIA OLLE



The definition of courage (noun) is the ability to do something that frightens one. You can about guess: I choose my mother. If dictionaries had pictures, Raeanne Olle would be the perfect example of courage. Let me paint a small picture for you. Imagine

becoming a mother at just thirteen years old, managing that, all the while going to school and working. As most of us know, parenting is not easy when you are an adult. Can you imagine parenting at such a vulnerable age? Puberty, judgements, being hormonal, and emotions all out of order, you are at the most emotional and critical point in your life. You are struggling to love and support another human being, even though you yourself are still learning. I am going to present to you her struggles, her will, and her success.



I watched my mother struggle, fight, and grow. Of course, with the guidance of my grandmother, my mother guided me through life. I watched her complete high school, even take me to classes with her. I remember going into East High School with her. I watched her work day and night. I even watched her cry at the thought of not being enough for me. I saw the full struggles of being a single parent. She embraced every obstacle thrown at her. I watched her fall and get up gracefully every time. I admire her strength, her will, and her determination.

When my family grew a bit, I made sure to help my mom as much as I could. I did not always like it; I was angry a lot, missing having fun. But for some reason, when I got older and started having my own children, every negative feeling I had disappeared. Now becoming a mother on my own, I had an instant feeling of regret and empathy. I was empathetic of her decisions, mishaps, courage, strength, and optimism. I used to be so angry with the fact that



I had no choice, but now I understand “it takes a village.” My mom worked tirelessly day and night, mandatory overtime, barely having time to see us, adjusting to the expectations of society’s opinions of having children. She found time to still love us and love herself, all the while battling whatever demons she was living with. I never saw her quit. The best part was watching my mom get her degree.



She was so nervous to go to school after about two decades. I am so beyond proud of her. In about four weeks, my mother will be graduating in the top two of her class for medical assistant. Despite all her fears, she powered through and achieved a goal. She is the whole reason I am in Odyssey in the first place. I do not think she knows how closely I watch her, how much I aspire to be like her, all while learning from her mistakes as she makes them so I do not fall into the same generational curses.

My mother always taught me how to be everything I am and will become. It is because of her that I have strength, that I have the wit and smarts to be more and do more. My mother has fully prepared me for life even when she did not have it all together herself. She surpassed all the statistics, the obstacles, and the judgements. She is beautiful in every way. I can never thank her enough for simply being her.

ALWAYS KEEP PUSHING

BY HELENA LEE



When I see a woman of courage, I see my grandma. Even though we don't see eye to eye sometimes, when I envision strength, kindness, and joy, I see my grandma Georgia.

When my daddy got sick with lung cancer, I was only three years old. Soon, doing day to day activities became hard for him as his condition worsened. With my mother being out of the picture because of her drug use, my daddy's final wish was for me to go to a home where I can be safe and grow up. He found that safety in his sister Georgia. Her final promise to my dad before he died was to take care of me until I was 18. When I met her, I asked her what should I call her? She replied with "Grandma." Even though she was my aunt, she was the closest thing I had to a mother. She advocated for me throughout school, she made sure I was fed and clothed, and she loved me like one of her own children. Even when I was giving her hell (mostly 90 percent of the time), she never once gave up on me or the promise she made to my father. Throughout all the fighting, times she got called up to the school, times I ran away, she still truly cared.



My grandma always knew how to bring the family together through food and laughter. When you walk in the house you can always smell her southern cooking. She can make greens, mashed potatoes, sweet potato pie, pot roast, and peach cobbler. When the family comes over to get a taste of her cooking, the house goes a little quiet. All you can hear is the sound of slurps and mmhm in the room. My favorite dish is when she makes beans and cornbread because I can always swap up juices into the cornbread first and eat what's left over.

When I envision courage, I see my grandma using her courage even through the darkest of times. She has been through the passing of my grandpa on August 2014. This was a rough time for all of us because he left us with no life insurance because his condition was too much of a high risk. She had to pay for the funeral somewhat herself. That put a lot of stress on her, but with time she paid it all off and continued to have a smile on her face.

If I learn anything from my grandma, it would be that strength is what makes a person have courage. Sometimes you must go through the rain to rainbows, but you never give up. You always keep pushing.

TRAILBLAZER

BY ERICKA BOOEY



Shelia Stubbs is my woman of courage. I started attending End Time International Ministries in 2008 but did not meet Shelia Stubbs until after a couple of months of attending their Sunday worship services. One Sunday morning at worship service I saw a fragile Shelia Stubbs at church pushing a walker to a seat. I learned at that Sunday service that she had recently been released from the hospital from being in a car accident. Little did I know this fragile African American woman was the First Lady of the church. She has had such an explosive impact paving the way for African American women like myself to not be afraid to fight for what we believe. She is using her positions to work on equaling the playing field for African American women. Shelia Stubbs is brave, a leader, and a trailblazer.

What makes Shelia Stubbs brave is she decided to become an ordained preacher while knowing women historically have not been welcome to teach a man from the pulpit. There has been some debate about women in the pulpit. Shelia's bravery to decide to teach and preach helps me and other women not be afraid to follow in her footsteps. The Bible states a woman cannot teach nor have spiritual leadership over a man. It says this came from God through Apostle Paul. This can be found in the Bible, 1 Timothy 2:11-12. Baptist churches are known to still allow a woman to teach in the pulpit. Shelia Stubbs demands equality as an African American woman, even in the church pulpit. She is an exceptional preacher/teacher as well as her husband, Bishop Godfrey Stubbs.

What makes Shelia Stubbs a leader is that she holds various leadership roles as a Wisconsin politician. Shelia is a member of the Dane County Board of Supervisors and is the first African American woman to hold a seat as the vice chair. Shelia was appointed to the Wisconsin State Assembly in 2018, and she continues to work to equal the playing field for African American women. She sits and commits to a crazy number of committees. She also was the president of the NAACP branch in Madison. She brings knowledge, education, experience, fight, and a huge heart to these tables and more.





What makes Shelia Stubbs a trailblazer is the work she is doing around equality for African American women. Earlier this year Shelia proposed, and Governor Evers passed, the State of Wisconsin 2021-2022 Legislature 2021 Assembly Bill 121, The Freedom to Succeed law. People that braid hair in Wisconsin are now not required to get a cosmetology license to be able to braid hair and make money out of their houses. She commits to making change happen. Shelia Stubbs and her undeniable desire to see women of color to be seen as equals in society empowers our daughters, nieces, granddaughters, and other African American women to not be afraid to go for change and to be able to step out of our comfort zone.

Shelia Stubbs has shown she is not afraid to go up against tradition and is willing to work to break unnecessary barriers people face that create issues to them accomplishing their goals. She's knocking down walls and paving the way for me along with other African American women to accomplish our goals. She embraces diversity and is not afraid to sit at leadership tables as the only and first African American woman to sit at these tables. Her accomplishments should be taken very seriously, especially by African American women. Shelia Stubbs' voice is not only being heard, but there also are things happening behind her educated voice. When we talk about finding our voices, I hope I find my voice like Shelia Stubbs found her voice. She has displayed leadership and true bravery while being a trailblazer. That's what makes Shelia a courageous woman.



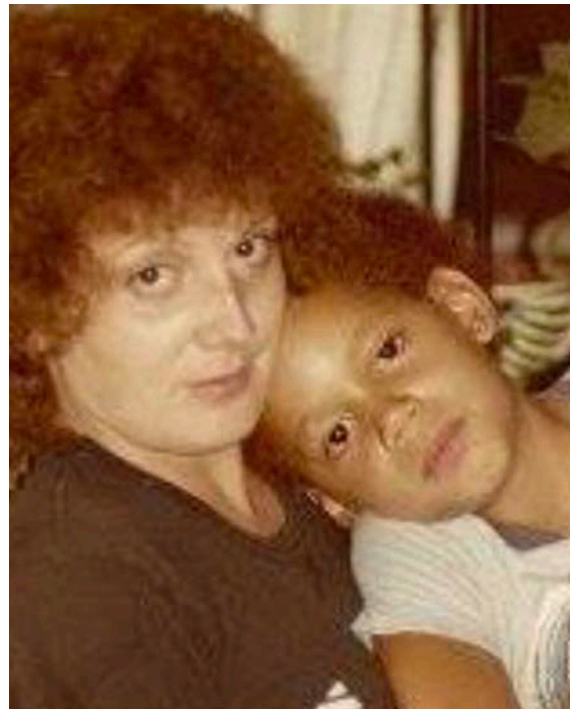
MI LUV MI MADA (I LOVE MY MOTHER)

BY ONTARIO FRAZIER



April 27th, 1990, I was born at St. Mary's Hospital. My mother was age 16, a fresh new parent who was juggling high school and working full-time at Prange Way (a retail store). I'm her oldest child of four and the only boy; I have three younger sisters who arrived in this world in 1996, 1999, and 2001. She did her best to provide for me and maintain good grades while working. She graduated from East High School in 1992, at this time working at K-Mart. My father was around but wasn't much help. They split shortly after I was born; he tried to put his hands on my mother, and she cut three of his fingers off; he was only around a few times. Shortly after finishing school, she was still working full-time, but something told her it wasn't enough. She felt like she needed to give us more, and that's when my mother's life changed: she picked up the habit of hustling, which she soon fell in love with—like most people who are in that lifestyle, fast cash was the way to go.

Since my earliest memories as a kid, I don't recall a time when my mother wasn't hustling, and I'm not talking petty hustling. She was fully invested in her empire that she would build over the next 16 to 17 years of my life, starting from the bottom. She started with nickel and dime bags, eventually to keys of coke (cocaine-dope). Being a female in a predominately men's line of work, she made her mark as a female who had the respect of peers, someone who had the drive and motivation. Some men found her intimidating; she was never scared to get her hands dirty. My mother started gaining weight slowly after she started this lifestyle; we eventually started eating good, as some would call it. In 2003, she had gastric bypass surgery, which would change her world for the worse--being on bed rest for about a month or two, trying to heal and get back to full strength while on heavy pain killers. This is around the time opioids had been introduced to the world and were making their mark in small states in the Midwest, wreaking havoc in communities in the US.



Depressed in bed and getting back to health in her new form, my mother was back on the go, back to living her life and catching back up on the money she missed while recovering, bright days and long nights. Needing something to keep her running, she started popping more opioids, ecstasy pills, and alcohol for the long nights. To keep the money coming in, she was out late around people who needed what she could supply. You need to be out with the latest and network with people to get the most money. We never saw any signs of her abusing the drugs to the point where my sisters or I were ever in danger or at risk to horrible things, or signs of her losing us to the state. Life was amazing. We had everything we needed and more, always shopping. I never wore the same thing twice, including shoes. My friends would always joke I got hundreds of dollars for taking out the trash or doing my chores. There were no bad days. I never saw my mother slack. She would still be a mother when she was home, cooking, cleaning, spending time with my sisters. We had family vacations, so I never saw a change in my

mother until about 2005 when the feds did a sweep and a lot of her peers and partners started to get sent away with 10+ year prison sentences. Depression set in even more because the mother I once had got paranoid, and the empire she had built was slowly starting to feel smaller due to the feds wrecking it. There were no more open houses with friends coming over or family vacations. My mom would shut the house down by 7 pm, with no one in or out unless it was approved by her.

2006, I'm 16 years old after a very bad previous year life. Life somewhat got back to normal even though my academic progress started to slip. I had entered the family business. This is around the time I started seeing the pills and drugs catch up with her and my loved ones. I was a young man in the family business, so that means I had to pull my weight around the house and see what the lifestyle had to offer. This is when my regular Tuesday homework night turned into: get dressed, we are going out to the bar/club. This is when I got a chance to see the effects of what ecstasy and alcohol can do to people. My mom and family would take two to three triple stack pills, which are the strongest pill in that category. We'd just be walking zombies, having black out moments, basically floating through the night, spending 3 to 400 dollars a night without a care in the world, not sleeping for days on end. Life was just a blur for her and my loved ones.

In September 2006, life finally caught my mother. One reckless night of pill popping and drunk nights, a guy she was friends with put everything in jeopardy by having an argument with another gentleman. This led to a fight in downtown Madison by the Capitol—which, if you are from Madison, WI, you know the Capitol has a very heavy police presence, which my mother had done a great job of avoiding until this night. She tried to help her friend and flee the scene, but an innocent bystander caught her license plates and the direction she was headed; she was stopped shortly a few blocks away. Lights flashing, guns drawn, and the right to search the car, she was busted with a jar of triple stack ecstasy pills, the money she made while being out that night (about \$4500), and a DUI. Everything finally hit home, and she had to sit down and face the life she was running from since I was two years old. When dealing with the



feds and the local drug task force, who try to crumble everything in your life when they catch you, my mother decided to hang her jersey up and slowly remove herself from that lifestyle while fighting her case. S**t hit the fan. When you are constantly watched, it feels like you are trapped in your home due to the police surveillance and unmarked undercover cars constantly outside. You get angry at the world and mostly at yourself instead of seeking help. She turned to opioids as the next best thing.

Opioids, the next adventure in my mother's life that would go on for the next 15 years, only increased and decreased depending on her mood or how life was going. Me being naive and being blind to the signs of my mother being hooked on pills, I stood by her side countless times defending her against family and others. I was there night and day defending her honor. I mean, do you blame me? It was my mother, mom, OG, etc. Blinded by love, I just continued

this. She needed money, I got it for her; she needed help, I was there, blocking my own life self-success/ blessing. I missed out on things I wanted to do by always being accessible to her.

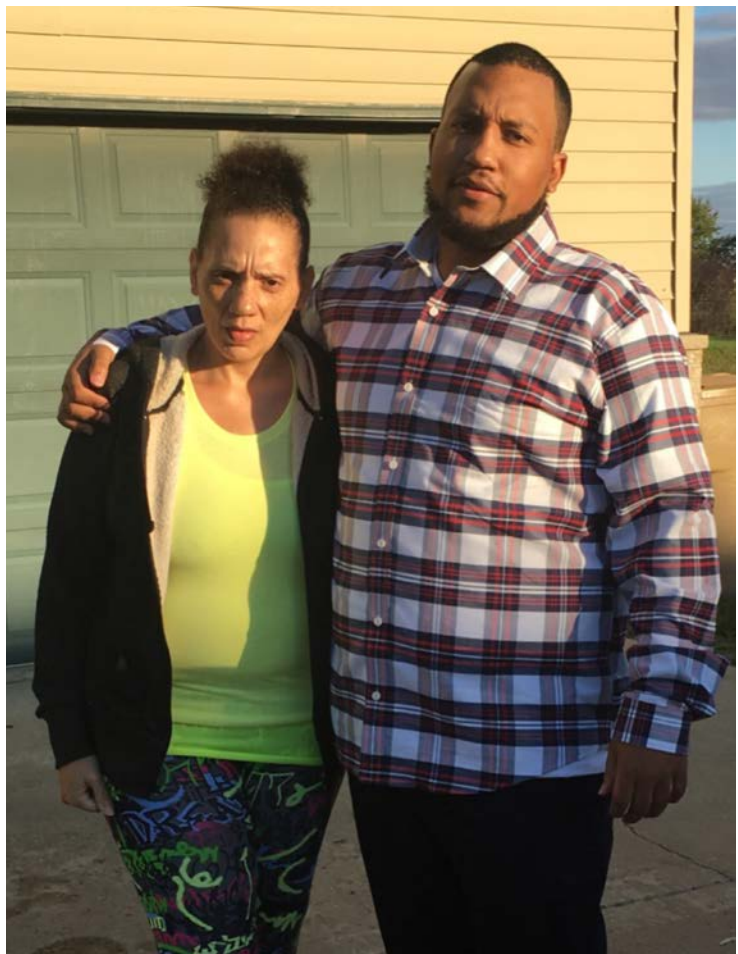
In 2019, it got to be enough. I was in a depressed state of helping everyone else but myself. I reached my breaking point and finally stood up to my mother, and I mean it got bad. Yelling, cussing, I broke down and told her enough was enough, after taking money out of my kids' mouth to help! Even after being kicked out of numerous places due to not paying rent and her addiction getting the best of her, I broke and cut her off for two years. Cold turkey, I just blocked my mom out of my life, the woman who gave birth to me, put clothes on my back; she was just out of my life and my children's life. It was hard, but I knew it needed to be done. It was so hard, especially when my children would ask about Grandma, or my sisters would call me and tell me horrible things about my mother. It hurt me deeply, but eventually I got numb to the situation.

I slowly got my life on track. I had some peace within myself and some demons were off my shoulders recently, so I finally felt it was the time to help. Something came over me like God told me it was time; I'm not religious by any means, so I pondered the idea for about two months, like should I help or should I not? My sister told me it got worse: my mother was evicted out of yet another place. We had a family meeting and let everyone else say their piece. I went last and finally just told her she is going to be put in a "box" if she doesn't stop; until then, I would not let her see my children unless she was clean. She has eight grandchildren who are growing fast, and she will not see them graduate middle school if she does not seek help or admit that she has a pill addiction.

She finally broke down in tears admitting that her addiction got the best of her as a woman, mother, grandmother, and person. That day, she finally felt like my mother again who had shown COURAGE throughout my whole life by stepping up. This was three and a half months ago from the present time. I'm writing this paper for her. She is currently living with me to remain sober and going to treatment daily to get her life back on track. She was currently hired at Amazon doing online orders for guests/shoppers. Shannon (my mother's name), I love you and while I type this, I'm holding tears back because you are sitting in the other room while I write this paper. I'm so proud of the changes you have made while living with me. I have to show tough love to keep strong, or act nonchalant, or seem like I don't notice your progress, but I really do support you and cheer for you to win. Keep prospering in life; continue to be the woman I hold close to my heart. I'm always here if you need anything.

Love,

Ontario



GRANDMA'S GIRL

BY AMANDA BELL



My grandma is a woman of courage because of raising four children on her own and taking on the responsibility of raising her grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Marilyn (my grandmother) was born on June 1, 1952 in Chicago, Illinois. She grew up in the Robert Taylor Homes with my mom and her other three children. She graduated from DuSable High School. Later she met my granddaddy Raymond, and they had four beautiful children. My grandma became a housewife and began taking classes and Kennedy King Community College.



In 1984, my grams moved to Madison, Wisconsin with her four children and got a job as a caregiver. She provided the best care to all of her residents. From that position, she discovered that taking care of the elderly was her gift from God. I, too, enjoy working with the elderly and giving back to my community. Could you imagine that the woman you look up to would be someone who was born with the same gifts as you and would eventually be an angel watching over you? When I lived with my grandma coming up, she always taught me right from wrong and taught me how to be the best woman I could ever be. I always knew to respect my elders and be a giver to the ones who could benefit from my love and eagerness to help others. The older I get, the more I realize how much I am like my beautiful grandmother Marilyn Bell.



In the early 80s, my grandma accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as her lord and savior. As a child, I was raised up in church and learned to always put God first in my life. Both my mom and grandma always knew I was special in my own way. They knew I wasn't like the other females in my family. I was given the nickname "Ran Ran Pumpkin San" by my grandma. When she passed away April 10, 2019, I lost half of my heart. It broke me, but my grams taught me to be a strong, beautiful granddaughter, daughter, mother, sister, and cousin.

My grandma raised me for most of my life. She showed me how to be strong and positive even through the hard times. Her death changed my life in ways I would have never expected. Knowing that she is no longer suffering from her diagnosis of breast cancer, lupus, kidney failure, and other health issues takes a weight off my heart. I know what goals I set for myself, and I just want to continue making her proud. I want to be a woman of courage to my children just like she was to me. "Troubles don't last always" is one thing my grams always taught me.

A WOMAN OF COURAGE TASTING THE AMERICAN DREAM

BY CYNTHIA GONZALEZ



My mother made the hard choice to migrate to the United States when she was 19 years old: young, fresh out of high school, and just starting to pursue her dream of becoming a military nurse for the Mexican army. Six months into her training, she was met with the difficult decision to migrate from Torreón, Coahuila all the way to Madison, WI, where she would start her new journey. Coming to a country where she did not know anyone, did not speak the language, and, on top of this, had left everything she ever knew behind, including family, work, and an education, took a great deal to obtain—this can really bring someone's spirits down, but not my mother's. She came to this country to do what every immigrant comes here to do, to work hard and get a taste of the American Dream, to be able to say, "I did it with just ten dollars in my pocket and the clothes on my back."

Ever since I can remember, I always saw my mother as a very promising, driven young woman, with nothing stopping her from carrying out the things she has wanted to do—not kids, not marriage, and not work. I could always tell my mom had a craving and passion for education in Mexico, being a promising student at the top of her class. It saddens me that she had to give all of that up to be able to supply an enriching life for my siblings and me. But my mother's arduous work did not go in vain. She went to school as soon as she came to the United States and started with her GED, or as she likes to call it "Good enough diploma," since high school diplomas in Mexico weren't compatible here. A few failed attempts and a few English classes later, she managed to pass with excellence, later taking on classes for CNA, which progressed into LPN courses. Any class my mother could do, she would do it. From math, welding, CDL (commercial driver's license), to anything you could think of, she has probably taken the course for it. I still give my dad a tough time for divorcing my mother, but that's in the past, and both are living happy and healthy lives.

It was always beaten into my head that the only way out of poverty is by having some sort of education, by going to school and setting your mind up successfully, and eventually obtaining a respectable job. My mother, Laura, was exceptionally good at being money smart and savvy with her earnings. She always said, "What we want and what we need are two different things, and you have to be aware of the two, otherwise you will always be broke." One of many of my mother's accomplishments was to break generational poverty, starting with credit! I, being 18 and stupid, did not choose to listen to my mother, thinking I knew it all and could do it all. I ended up sinking myself in credit card debt, not a lot, but for an 18-year-old going to school and living on her own, two grand was a lot! I ignored it for a while, a few years passed, and I started becoming paranoid about my credit. So, I decided to investigate and my heart sank. My credit had never been that low in my life, so I did what every other person would do, and that's cry, accept, and then call my mom, because who else was I going to tell? I probably got the biggest lecture of my life. I was scared of my mother even through the phone. But still, my mother loved me so much that after the lecture, she made me put on my big girl pants and call and get it resolved and pay off my debt because it really wasn't going anywhere. Thanks to my mother and the mistakes of my past,

I learned my lesson and my credit is better than it has ever been before.

Life wasn't always easy, especially being a single parent. There were times where I could tell my mother was stressed out, but she always put on the best poker face she had, maybe not to worry us or maybe to tell herself that everything would be okay. There was a time when I was around nine years old, old enough to understand what was going on, and my little brother was about seven, still young and naive. We were taking our usual grocery trip with my mother. She always had a list of the things we needed, not the things we wanted, as she always said. One thing always on the list was animal crackers with the pink and white icing because they were cheap, edible, and usually in larger quantities. I remember my brother grabbing a box of some decadent cookies asking my mom if we could please get those instead, and he went ahead to say, "We always get animal crackers, and they are nasty. Why can't we get these instead?" I knew that comment hurt my mother's feelings; what she was doing wasn't meant to hold us back from sweets. It was what she thought we liked and what we could afford, but she proceeded to say okay, and until this day I remember that moment. It was a pivotal moment because every grocery trip after that my mom let my brother pick one box of cookies, and that was the last time we had animal crackers.



Everything my mother has done in this lifetime has changed me more than she can imagine. If there is anyone I want to be just like, it is my mother. When I was younger, being told I looked like my mother was such an insult, but now it's the greatest compliment I can get. The definition of courage can mean different things to different people. For instance, it can mean mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty. But to me the definition of courage is my mother. She is the protagonist in my story.

DEAR MA

BY ERENDIRA GIRON CRUZ



Ma, I thought writing a letter to you would be easier than writing an essay about how amazing of a person you are. I have seen you grow into this woman who has built courage through the circumstances life has given you. We as a family aren't very good with words, so hopefully this letter will make you realize how much of an amazing person you are. By being your daughter, I have learnt and seen how resilient, how forgiving, and how generous you are as a human being.

Ma, I know as a family we went through so much, and when I mean so much, it is like life threw a bunch of rocks our way but no matter the size of it we made it through. When we crossed the border to come to the United States, we got separated from you. My sisters and I were by ourselves while we stayed in some stranger's house and waited for you to come to us. You were in the desert, dehydrated, walking in the burning sun with no shade to cover you and barely having food. I don't know how you did it, but you made it, you came to us. My sisters and I were so happy to see you, like our world was fully completed in that moment when you walked through those doors. Another event that happened in our life that made you resilient is when my older sister got involved in gangs. Because my older sister was related to gangs, that specific event changed all of our lives. That awful day, my sister was related to a gang shooting where one person lost his life, and my sister was charged with being an accomplice. Bang! That turned all our world upside down. You moved earth and water to get my sister a good lawyer to reduce her 20-year sentence to four years in jail and seven years of probation. You sold anything and everything just for that. Through that I saw how resilient you are, not giving up and moving anything that comes your way; you ground your feet and, yes, not every human can be strong. I saw the dark side of depression drained your energy, but you got back up and move on forward.



Ma, you are forgiving; you might be the most forgiving human being that I know. After what happened with my sister, you were still by her side the whole attorney process. You didn't leave her. I admire that about you. I know a lot of people whose parents would have given up on them. Sometimes those parents don't want to know anything about their children, but you did. You still provided for my older sister in Mexico when she got deported after she went to jail and was there for four years. You were still there, sending her money, giving her things so she wouldn't be bored, and for her to be comfortable in the circumstances she was in. I also know that a lot of parents don't do that. A lot of parents give nothing or little to their children who are in jail. You forgave her, and that makes you not only a forgiving human being but a kind one. Even though people do take advantage of you because you are so kind and even if they do you dirty, you still forgive them and move on like nothing happened. Even when I'm telling you that you shouldn't and to screw them, I get it. Like the saying, you said, "*Dios te paga por todo lo que hagas*" (God pays you for everything you do). Just watching you forgive people that in my books shouldn't have your forgiveness makes me see how beautiful of a human being you are. But forgiveness isn't complete until you are willing to give to the less fortunate.



Ma, I just want to let you know that you are one of the most generous human beings I know. I know our family is always struggling financially, and I feel that after what happened to my older sister, our family dynamic hasn't been the same. But even when life threw rocks at us and our family was broken for a couple of months, maybe a year, you still were there for people who needed help. If one of my aunts couldn't provide food for their family, you would go out of the way and go to the food pantries and get them food. If a coworker of yours needed clothing, you would ask my little sister and me to go through our closet and find anything that we don't need or use to give it to you. You send clothing and money to our family in Mexico. Do I think it is a good idea? No, I don't think so, since I know you are struggling here in the United States, but hey, what can I say when you have a good heart? You gave a lot to my sister and any living soul, and I know you'll do anything in your power to help anyone who needs anything because you are one of a kind. Even if you are struggling, you try to help others.



Ma, all those qualities of you being resilient, forgiving, and generous are what makes you a woman of courage, and those are qualities that not everyone has. Hopefully by watching you being this great woman of courage and taking those qualities with me, I can be a woman of courage. You have taught me a lot just by watching your actions.

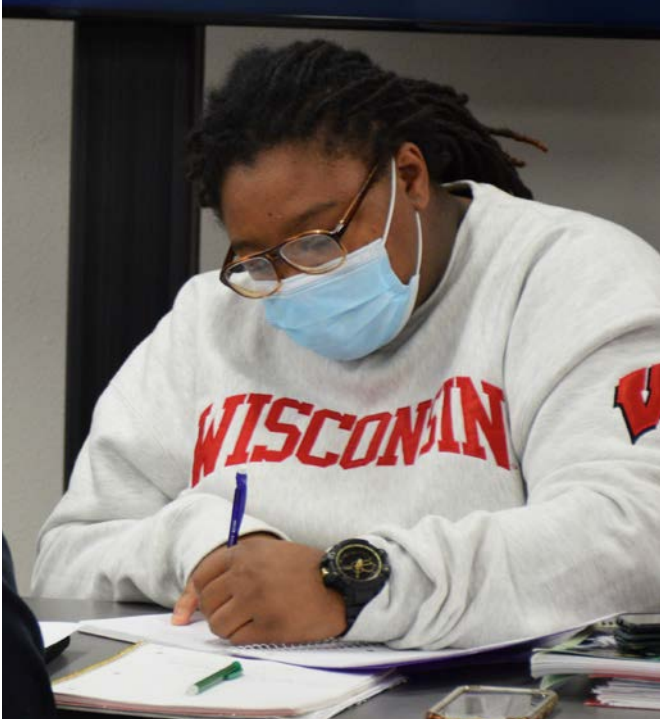
ANXIETY VS A COURAGEOUS BATTLE

BY KIMARI ROGERS



As a single parent of two children, your life can be somewhat challenging. Being a single mother, there are certain responsibilities that you cannot walk away from. While unemployed, my auntie still manages to put food on the table and clothes on her children's backs, as well as other necessities. I look up to her because she's a good mother and she puts her children first, while still battling her own personal issues. In combination with these challenges, mental health can be an even bigger monster. One of the largest and broadest scales of mental health is anxiety. My auntie fights this battle almost every day of her life. In addition to anxiety, she also suffers from depression and other struggles that may come along with everyday life.





Over the years as a child, I always knew and observed that my auntie was a high-spirited person. Her character has always been fun loving and joyous. Oddly, I noticed that in her thirties, her personality and character didn't change, but her response and reactions to things changed. To my knowledge, she was diagnosed right around this period of time. For instance, a bad reaction was one night when she had a panic attack in the car with my grandmother. My grandmother couldn't figure out why the car wouldn't move and my auntie was on the passenger side. It turned out the emergency brake was on, which did not allow the car to move. But my auntie started shaking and stormed out of the car and caught an Uber home. As a family member observing her panic attacks, I saw they were to the highest degree and extended to something as simple as not wanting to gain her driver's license and operate a vehicle. When I heard from other family members of her diagnosis and what she went through, it broke

my heart because some of the worst things happen to the best people. It bothered me to know that she suffered and cried alone. Just because she fought to remain happy didn't mean she didn't have sad days. Amazingly, because of her drive and ambition to be happy, the good always outweighed the bad. From the past to the present, her spirit was never broken, even though she cried when facing anxiety and stressful situations.

One of the things that comes along with her anxiety is depression. When depression takes its course on her, I notice it creeping in after anxiety has stricken. I can only imagine her in a four-walled room, fighting it alone. My auntie loves our family dearly and would do anything for us. Rarely would she refuse to attend family gatherings; at that point, I knew depression had settled in. All by herself she sought past the darkness, and her courage and strong spirit did not allow her to stay in that sunken place.

How would a human being cope with anxiety, depression, and putting food on the table, all while being unemployed? She made a way out of no way for her children because she had the will to survive. The stressors of life came against her in many different ways. It is astounding how she did not let herself go when dealing with battles such as these. She remained self-conscious and aware of her beauty inside. Letting yourself go results in an individual becoming lost, especially in a cruel world that's against good people like my auntie. Because of my auntie's courage, she stood tall in this forceful atmosphere of cruelty.

What makes her even stronger is conscientiously having the courage to fight through these battles every day and moment of her life. Because of her courage, the fight each day ends with victory. Her happy face never fades in the face of adversity. Her spirit is not broken because of the negativity surrounding her. Out of all my family members, she is my greatest inspiration because of her kindness. She is strong, and in her weakness, she prevails. She is an outstanding role model of strength and courage to me because most people are not strong in their weakness. With my own battles, I can turn to her as an example of courage to carry on. From the outside looking in, looking at her face today, being how strong and courageous she is, you would never know what she went through.

KADI

BY MARIAM MAIGA



When I think of courage, one main woman stands out. This woman was there for me every step of the way until she could no more. That woman is my Aunt Kadi. She was about 5'5, brown skin, with the warmest, biggest smile I've ever seen. As a kid my favorite place was her house even though she lived an hour away. We spent all our breaks at her house. She would go above and beyond to make sure we were happy, even if that meant "celebrating" things that the rest of our family would never do. She made sure not just my siblings and me but also her daughter had a memorable childhood. She protected us from things she knew we weren't ready to deal with.

I loved when we had school vacations and got to go spend them in Rockford, IL with my aunt. Christmas especially was my favorite. Back at home you wouldn't be able to tell it was Christmas from looking in my house: no tree, no presents, nothing. It was not because I didn't have wonderful parents but because we were Muslim and didn't believe in Christmas. My aunt's house was the complete opposite. She had decorations outside the house, a tree with beautiful ornaments inside, and of course under the tree were presents labeled for us! It was the best feeling ever. I still remember how that excited feeling used to feel as a kid. It was so special because it was our "own" little Christmas, and we didn't feel left out from what all our other friends were doing. As a child I may not have realized how much she went out her way to do this every year for us, but now I am forever grateful for all those good memories she created for me, my siblings, and her daughter.

The thing about her daughter was she was biologically another family member's child, but due to unfortunate circumstances she was placed in my aunt's care. My aunt made sure her daughter had the best of the best from her education to enrolling her in dance and ballet at a young age. This played a big role in how my cousin grew up and how talented she is artistically! Presented with a tough decision, my aunt made it work and made the absolute best out of it. Watching how hard she went for her child encouraged me at a young age to ensure whenever I did have a child to make sure she gets the best of the best.





For a while I could notice that something was off with my aunt. I didn't really pay it too much mind at first, but then it became too obvious that something was wrong. After I asked my mom and really pressured her to tell me what was going on, my mom encouraged me to ask my aunt. It was then when I found out she was sick. Very sick. She had cervical cancer—something I never thought would affect anyone in my family, let alone one of the most loving people I knew. I found out she had known a while about being sick but kept it from us in hopes of sparing our feelings. That was the most selfless thing I had seen--to act like you're okay while silently fighting this monster in your body. She needed to win this fight. She had to win this fight and she did. But then it came back a short while after, and again she hid it from us. I will never forget the morning I found out she was no longer with us. A piece of my heart left when she did.

I really wish my aunt was here to see my daughter. I wish they would have met. My daughter's middle name is named after her: Kadijah. This is a name that will always mean so much to me, not only because my aunt showed courage in many ways but also because she was a fighter. She fought to make sure we had the best childhood. She fought to make sure her daughter had the best upbringing she could provide. She fought to stay with her family until she couldn't anymore. She was always fighting for her family, and that is how I will always remember her.



THROUGH HELL AND BACK

BY MASHELL MCCARTER



My woman of courage is about a lady who went through hell and back but still managed to see the beauty in others. My mother dear had been abused her whole life, escaping her abuser as a child but not as an adult. She weathered the storm, still having a vision for her most prized possessions in life, her three children. She conquered a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer by preparing the future for her family when she was gone.

My mom came from the small town of New Madrid, Missouri. Her life began on November 29, 1948. Her mother was a quiet but firm, God-fearing woman who went to church all the time. Her father was just the opposite. All I know about him was he was a Native American who was seven feet tall and a lot of people feared him. It was public knowledge of how he abused his family, and when he passed away, no one shed a tear. I was four when he passed away. Therefore, her mother produced a plan for her brother to sneak her out of town and raise her in Chicago. She was eleven years old when this took place. She struggled to fit in with this new family, soon meeting my father. The uncle that was supposed to protect her abused her. She got pregnant at the age of fifteen with my older brother. She moved in with my dad where there was further abuse—black eyes, a broken cheekbone, and a broken nose. I can remember one morning waking up looking for my mom and following her blood out the door. I was frightened because all I saw were big puddles of blood outside our front door and I did not know where she was; my mother used to run away but had nowhere to run to. This went on until my mother was in her fifties.

Growing up in this type of environment was crazy, but my mom always said you can take a day and cry about your situation, but the next day you need to do something about it. I think her “something” was taking us to the library and telling us how important education was, instilling work ethics in us at an early age, telling us to never depend on anybody, only the man above. She enjoyed reading the newspapers with us and having discussions with us about what we read and how we felt about it. My mother and I used to read an advice column, “Dear Ann Landers,” in the Chicago Sun Times newspaper, every day. She never finished school. Though she tried going back later in life, depression consumed her life. She gave us her time; she centered her life around us. She fed anybody who was hungry; she even fed the stray animals. She broke up fights in our neighborhood. She was the soul to our family.

One morning, my dad called me and told me my mother was in the hospital and they wanted me to complete my workweek and come home. At that point I knew something was wrong. I spoke to my mother every



day; that week, I only spoke to her once. Saturday morning, I was in Chicago at the hospital by my mother's side, listening to her tell me she was dying. I went numb. THIS HAD TO BE A BAD JOKE. I scared her; all I remember was her telling me she was okay. Her doctor came in to explain things to me, and he told me she was going to surgery. They let me hold her hand all the way to the surgery room. My mother was courageous. She started preparing for her death, telling us or me what she wanted for us in the future. At this point, my life was changing. My mother and father had already chosen me to be the one to take her role in life. I was already her.

My mom passed away; I began to take on the world and everyone's problem. I got a better job after she passed away, but there was something missing. I wanted to complete our goal in life, finishing school. I went back and got my HSED in 2020 and enrolled in college. I do not know where this journey is going to lead me, but she



is inside of me rooting for me. When I graduate from Odyssey, Emma and I will be accepting that diploma. When I finish my college journey, Emma and I will be walking across the stage to get my degrees. What I am learning is I need to put Mashell first; she taught me how to never give up!! Thank you, mother dear. On October 6, 2018, I lost my best friend, my mother. Seeing her suffering caused my father to lose his memory, and he was never the same. She asked me to take care of the man that abused her. She knew he had dementia before she died, and she asked me to take care of him. I am doing what she asked me to do, her last request. I am going to show him love, not what he showed her: pure wickedness.

GIFT OF COURAGE

BY MECHELE WILLIAMS



If I had 30 roses, I would hand them out to the 29 classmates that I have, and the last rose I would hand-deliver to my mother, Marla Talley. All the Odyssey students have shown me what real courage is through their own eyes. My mother's courage is based on her bravery, her love, and her heart. She will not be telling her story of courage. I'm going to tell you about her through my eyes. Courage is in the eye of the beholder.



It's 1974; she's twenty-one, just finishing college, a white female and pregnant by a black man. Knowing this was not going to go well with her parents, she dreaded to tell them. Outraged at the news that she had just spoken out of her mouth, her parents come up with a plan: she will not be keeping this baby. So, before I was born, there was an adoption set in place. I was to be hand-delivered to them right after my birth. This was a decision that my mom could not accept. Going against the authority of her father, which was something you never did, she married my father. This would allow her to keep me. She would not have to return to her parents' fortress. She had sealed her deal with my father, a devil in disguise. Don't get me wrong; he was charming, sweet, and kind—when he wasn't drinking. That was very seldom. There were many nights of fights and violence against my mother, but there is one that stands out. That night, there were two small stacks of change, one for my father's liquor, and one for a single pack of beans for my dinner. Angry and loud, barking orders at my mother, my father wanted to know where the dime was that he needed to have enough for that drink he wanted so bad. My mother said she didn't have it; all she had was money for the beans. He ordered her to give him a dime; she refused. She knew doing this would cause me hunger, and that was not acceptable for her. That thought would only last a minute since my father had taken a high-heeled shoe and had split her head open. That's how much that dime meant to both.



The torture and torment didn't stop, day after day, night after night. That year seemed like a lifetime. My father started telling my mother that I looked like her, and all she could envision then was that he would start to take that anger he had out on me, due to the fact he felt I looked like her. My mother had decided that for my safety, she would have to leave. The fear of this would hover over her like lightning about to strike. She knew in the depths of her soul that if my father caught her planning or leaving, he would kill her. My grandfather on my father's side would be watching me when my mother went to work. She knew that was the only place she would have the ability to make her plan work. There was a set time that my grandfather would take a short nap and allow me to sit on the floor and play; this is when she would make her move. She walks around the house, making sure not to be seen.



Peeking into the kitchen window in the back of the house, she makes sure no one is in sight. Her heart is racing; she feels as if she will pass out, but she knows she must do it now, right now. She starts to move as smoothly as a snake, making no noise; quickly, like a snake striking its prey, she moves through the window and snatches me up, then right out the window she goes again. There was nothing to show that she or anyone had been there except a missing one-year-old. A moment that she will never get over is the pain she caused my grandfather by kidnapping me, knowing this was going to break his soul.

Unconditional love in the purest form is what my mother holds in her heart. With a brute as a father and a husband who is a spawn from the devil, her love has never reflected the actions that were brought against her. My sister and I thought we had it all. We were rich in every way. There was no yelling in the home from my mother. Her passiveness was frustrating at times. You could not ruffle her feathers at all.

You would look like the fool as she sat calm and patient. There was never a negative word that would cross her lips. Not a sour look, not a wrinkled mouth, nothing. It was like her heart was filled with the sweet sounds of the heaven's choirs, bringing her an inner peace that consumed her every thought in every moment. The kindness she carried went way above and beyond my sister and me. She has the incredible gift to give even when she has nothing. She will not tell you no; she will make a way to make it happen, including but not limited to helping all seven of my children, giving to the donation tree at the mall for the holidays, and putting her own spin on things by making a stuffed animal called hug-a-buddies and giving them to the children's hospital. Her heart is as large as the world, never expecting anything in return. Her hardship has not embittered her soul. Her fight and love are more powerful than an earthquake that splits the earth wide open.

The fight is a powerful thing. Her father is living at the ripe age of 96. He can live on his own in his own home. You would think that time has changed him, that he would have adapted, but this is not the case. He still has an entire brute in him. He has never been physical with my mother, but his words cut right to the bone. The things he says run through your head, never ending. My mother had to listen to these words for 47 years—heartbreaking, to say the least. Yet her fight to be that better person has prevailed. There is no bitter word to her father. There is no disrespect. She holds her head high when she sits with him every Thanksgiving at the church for dinner. She doesn't gather with us until she has had that Thanksgiving dinner with her father. The people closest to her could not break her. She stands in this world with the courage we long for.

A gift that is wrapped perfectly, paper flawless, bow pristine: you long to see what treasure lies beneath that elegant delight. It only takes a moment for thousands of ideas to run through your mind. The suspense is growing inside of you. You just can't wait another moment to come face to face with this treasure. Well, I have seen that treasure, and I call her "Mom."



COURAGE AT ITS FINEST

BY REGINALD MOORE



I woke up in the hospital with 14 stitches from having my head busted in a neighborhood brawl. I was 15, full of anger and abandonment issues. I was expecting my evil-ass foster parent to come pick me up, but instead I watched as a black lady with the calmest voice explained she was my dad's mom and I would be coming to live with her.

I'd never met her or any of my dad's side of the family. Between foster homes and my mom's aunt adopting me at the age of two, I had started to believe that I didn't even have family. Imagine my surprise when Grandma showed up. She had already cut through all the red tape, and just like that, I had my family.

It would be another four years before my father would be released from prison. From age 15 to 19, I was taught morals and virtues I had no idea existed. Meanwhile, the bond between myself and my dad's side of the family grew strong. I now recognized what love meant for the first time in my life.



But I was still a bad kid. It took Grandma patience and prayer to get me headed in the right direction. I resisted and defied her rules until I finally realized this wonderful woman had my best interest at heart.

What's more courageous than welcoming a complete stranger into your home? Yeah, I'm her grandson, but I wasn't a cute toddler. I was a hardheaded teenager with no home training. The courage to see through all that and treat me as a family member transformed me for good. Everything good in me was instilled in me during those four years between 15 to 19 when my grandmother, Otha Grady, courageously brought me into her home and, most importantly, into her heart—courage at its finest.

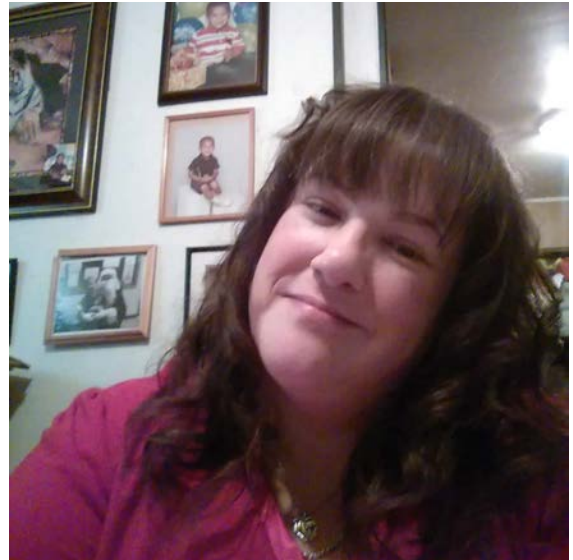
LESSONS & BLESSINGS: INSIGHTS OUT OF THE DARK

BY MICHELLE MACK



Did you know that most people who sexually abuse children are our friends, partners, family members, and community members? About 93 percent of children who are victims of sexual abuse know their abuser. Fewer than 10 percent of sexually abused children are abused by a stranger. I believe that it takes a lot of strength, faith, and courage

to fight through the deep wounds of this kind of sorrow. My mother at a young age was abused by her father, and I want to share her life and how she has shown her courage through her own struggles. She is a woman who has overcome deep trauma and abuse, who wears her heart on her sleeve, and who continually strives to change.



Growing up, my mother was involved with a toxic and abusive relationship. My mother had her first son at the age of 20, and shortly after, my younger brother and myself. My mother decided to marry her first husband when she was about 30 years old. Prior to marriage, I recall that there was infidelity and the usage of stimulant drugs. At that time, she started to experience a lot of physical and mental abuse from her husband. He would come home and accuse her of sleeping around, and then beat and choke her. I recall several times when she would be screaming because he had threatened to kill her. After about a year, my mother started working at a bus company and was getting on her feet. She started

to progress and was loaned a house from her father. She felt like this was her chance to break through, despite the circumstances. She began to make slow changes and then eventually was able to get her husband to move out, filing for divorce. My mother continued to provide for us despite her severe depression and everything else that was going on. She then a few years later was remarried.



My mother always welcomes in those around her—some for the good and some for the bad, but all out of love. My mother just had a thing for giving her heart out. After she divorced her second husband, she circled around men. She finally found what she thought was love, meeting a man online and across seas who seemed friendly and was something like a Prince Charming. They talked almost every day, and he would send her gifts. Eventually this would turn

into a sales endeavor, little did she know. This kind, sincere, and gentle man would begin to send her gifts to help her pay her bills, and in return he would request a small lump sum. She went along with his plan, and everything seemed to go really well for the time being. As time went by, almost two years later, my mother received an abrupt awakening. "FBI, open up." That was the terrifying sound that stood outside our door, and one that we'll never forget. My mother was charged with fraud and was sentenced to two and a half years in Federal Prison, 2012.

Being free is such a beautiful thing, and sometimes a hard concept to grasp. What is normal, versus what is not normal? It kind of feels like a fantasy in a sense, well, for most. Upon my mother being released in 2014-2015, she was ecstatic to be coming home; we all were. I noticed that there was something different about my mom; it's like she was a person I never met before. She seemed distant, ghost-like, and focused on the wrong things. Shortly after being released, my mother started to engage with different men, ones without stature. I remember being so spiteful towards my mom and these men. She would have random men staying at our house who would just use her to their full advantage.

One particular individual was a man who would be the kingpin of all, Phipps. My mom started dating Phipps out of Milwaukee, meeting him on Facebook through a mutual friend. He had a lot of street knowledge and knew how to word things. My mom was released on probation upon returning home and had very clear expectations. As my mom started to engage with Phipps, he would soon have her transporting himself and his materials. Eventually she ended up getting pulled over and was then flagged down as a suspect riding with a former convict. She soon faced further charges due to her violations of probation. She was sent back to the federal prison for the remainder of her time to serve. My mother then was released and started to attend counseling, going back to school and trying to find employment. Things were again shifting, until she started to engage with old friends. My mother was struggling to make ends meet, so she started to hustle on the side. She was then involved with a heart-wrenching death that would lead her into another time away from those she loved. She is currently serving time in Wisconsin at a correctional institution and is awaiting release. My mother is continuing to grow and is working on her relationship with God. She is involved in ongoing devotionals and even helping to lead them. She is also taking math and clergy courses and striving towards a business degree.

I'm so grateful for the lessons that my mother has revealed for me. She has taught me that I should never doubt myself or my worth. She has shown me, even in her missteps, that you're always one choice away from changing your life. She has shown me that love is a powerful force, but to protect your heart. My mom has left a deep mark on me and has helped me to reflect and be a better woman. If there's one thing that I would want to let my mom know, it's that I appreciate her. She hasn't given up, or lost hope. She continues to fight life's battles and still finds a way to love beyond the pain. Thank you, mom, for paving the ground and for using your broken pieces to help others. I love you!

Your daughter, Michelle



MEXICAN CINDERELLA

BY JESSICA SALDANA ORTEGA



On September 15, 1960, Nelia was born on a small farm in Mexico. She was born into a family of four, with a mom, dad, and big sister. Her parents used to love each other; the family was happy because they had two daughters. At that time, the men used to work the land, and the women used to be at home

taking care of the children and making sure the house was clean and the food ready for their husbands. This little girl overcame many traumatic situations, including abandonment, child abuse, and domestic violence that made her not believe in goodness.



First, Nelia was 12 months old and still needing to be breastfed when her mom abandoned her. Her mom fell in love with another man, and she ran away with him, leaving her daughters behind and forgotten. As a result, Nelia was underweight and very tiny, almost dying because at that time formula or baby food was not an option. Thankfully, her aunt came to her house and breastfed her. Later, she recovered and was happy because soon she would be starting kindergarten. Her dad used to cook for her and her sister. Their favorite food was beans and tortillas; for them, it was gourmet food.

Second, when Nelia was six years old and about to start first grade, her dad told her and her sister that he had met another woman and they would start living together. Consequently, this woman started to abuse the girls since the first day. For example, when Nelia's dad was not at home, this woman prohibited them from going out to play with friends. Also, Nelia was not allowed to eat or drink water unless her dad was around. If she wanted some fruit she would clean the house, wash the clothes by hand in the river, and feed all the animals that they had on the farm. The stepmother was angry when the girls told her dad what happened when he was not at home; and when he left the house, the stepmother took Nelia by the hair and smashed her to the ground and broke her nose. Nelia was afraid to tell the truth to her dad, so for everyone it was an accident. Nelia used to go to school without shoes and with her clothes all ripped. The abuse continued for so many years.

Third, when Nelia was about to turn fifteen, she met this guy and fell in love with him. She was looking for the opportunity to leave her house where she was unhappy. Nelia thought she would have a happy life, but this guy turned out to be a monster. He would hit her and was about to kill her. She would say that it would be better to be dead because her life was a nightmare. Nobody was around to support her, not even her dad. After that she would work in the flower fields to save money so she could travel to the city to find a family that would adopt and love her as she deserved.

In conclusion, Cinderella's story is true with a different ending. Nelia does not like to talk about God or religion; she does not believe in it because nobody was there to help her when she was suffering. All these traumatic experiences are now scars on her body and in her mind. Nelia will never forget her mom and her dad, but she is stronger than ever; and last, but not less important, Nelia is my aunt.

BABY BYE

BY KATRINA COLLINS



My mother, Dorothy Williams, is my woman of courage. She was born and raised in Mississippi. She was one of fourteen kids. She left Mississippi at an early age of eighteen. She was a dedicated mother and a hard worker who also was very funny.

She left Mississippi at an early age. While she lived in Mississippi as a kid, she had to pick cotton. She wasn't able to go to school because she and her siblings had to pick cotton. They had to pick from sun up to sun down. So I think by moving out of Mississippi, it was her way of freedom. She got out of that city so she could do better for herself. She was able to get a job and go to school.

My mother was a very hard worker and a dedicated mother. She was used to working hard in the cotton fields for pennies. Then, later in life, she worked for fair wages to take care of her family. She worked driving school buses for over 20 years. She later retired from driving school buses. She made sure that we had hot food to eat, a roof over our heads, and clean clothes, and she made sure we went to school every day.

She was a very funny lady. She had a saying, "Baby bye." She used it a lot. She always put a smile on people's faces. For example, I can say, "Mama, are you going outside today?" She would say, "Baby bye, go outside for what! Baby bye." For example, I took her to get something to eat. The people would give me the total of her food. She would say, "Baby bye, that is too much!" When she had to go to the doctor, the nurses would say, "Miss Williams, we got to take your blood today." She would just say, "Baby bye!" The staff would just laugh. She was a very funny, sassy lady.

She got her freedom when she left Mississippi. She was a hard worker and a dedicated mother. She kept her sense of humor until the end. All of those things made her a woman of courage.



STILL FIGHTING

BY KAYANNA BRANCH



Have you ever met someone that used every challenging situation in their life to succeed? I have. Her name is Alice Paul. She is one of my mom's childhood friends and has been around my family since before I was born. She faced a number of painful challenges but was always able to keep going.

Alice became a mother at a young age. She never let her being young or being a single mother discourage her. She was a mother to four: three boys and one girl. She always wanted to provide for them. She would give my mother money to take her kids school shopping every year. They thought my mom had "style." Alice was a kind-hearted lady that people could count on, so going the extra mile for her was never a problem. She never let anyone or anything get in the way of her being a great mother. Her kids loved her so much.

In 2015 Alice faced a challenge that every mother prays to never face. Her daughter was murdered, and her body was put into a burn pit. The only thing she had left to bury of her was her teeth. She was her oldest and only baby girl. The loss of her daughter was devastating. It took her years to feel better—never ok, but better than she felt on day one. Years after her daughter's passing, she was able to start a clothing line in memory of her. She redid her garage area and sold clothes from there. She will be in her own suite sometime in 2022. Although the loss of her daughter caused her a lot of trauma, she was still able to find hope and put her all into something that would keep her daughter's name alive.

Alice was able to connect with a group of women about a year ago and became an advocate in the community. They attend and help at different events in Madison like baby showers, school drives, and food pantries. I was able to attend one of the baby showers they put together. It was decorated so nice, with great food and music, and all of the women had on matching shirts. Being with Alice is always a good vibe. She has a heart of gold, and she doesn't look like anything she has been through.

This is what a woman of courage looks like to me—someone who has taken every challenging situation in their life and used it to be successful. Alice was able to be a great mother, start a business, and become a part of the community. She worked for the things she wanted and never gave up. She's still fighting till this day.



ANGEL IN DISGUISE

BY LARONDA MORRIS



"If you get knocked off your horse, you get up and start again," my mom always said. She meant no matter what, don't give up. She was always encouraging us to do better. My mom was a woman of courage because she had a smile that lit up the room, was an angel in disguise, and never gave up.

My mom had a contagious smile that lit up the room. No matter how you were feeling, as soon as she smiled, you couldn't help but smile as well. Those dimples she had were perfect.

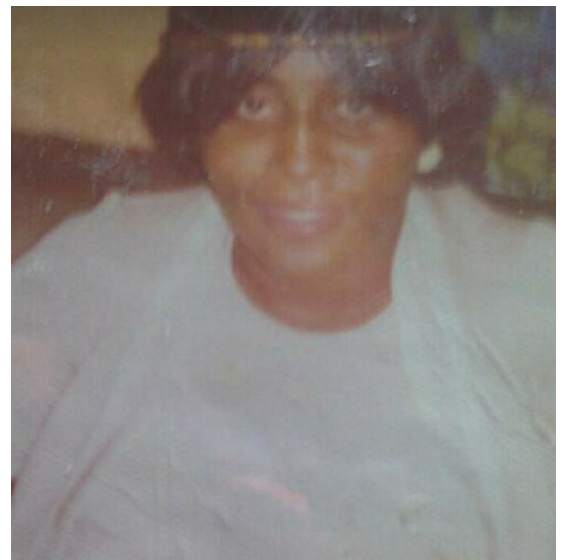


My mother was truly an angel in disguise. A lot of people would agree as well. My mom would give you the shirt off her back. At my mom's job at the Boys & Girls Club, where she was a cook for 25 years, she would send extra food home with some of the children because she knew that for some of them it was their last hot meal of the day. She would also share her own personal paycheck with the volunteer who helped her in the kitchen. It didn't matter where you were in life; my mom never judged you.

Eaisie never gave up on anything. I remember her studying for a test. The first time she

didn't pass. I watched my mother study hard for her test, and eventually she passed. Eaisie never gave up even when she had her stroke. I watched my mom fight until she couldn't any more.

I wish I could be half the woman she was and have half the impact she had on the kids she worked with and the community. Not everyone's funeral makes the news. Just like she would say, NEVER GIVE UP! Rest easy, Mom.

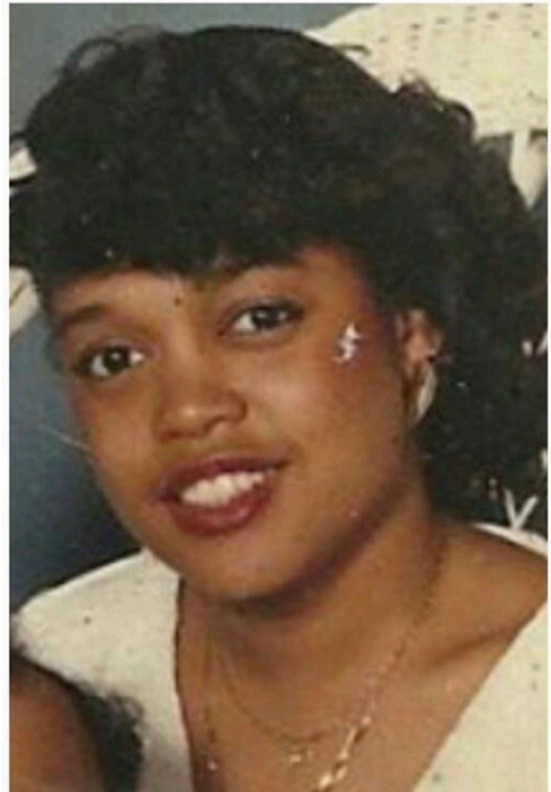


A SELFLESS LOVE

BY NAQUILA TAYLOR



(Loud music by Fred Hammond) "Jesus!!! be a fence all around me every day, Jesus, I want you to protect me as I travel along the way!" That's the first thing that comes to my ears when I think back on my woman of courage. I would often wake up to the sound of my mother listening to gospel. I remember getting up and seeing her jumping up and down in place and using her holy ghost as exercise. I know my mom is heaven sent. We kids were not always that easy to raise, but even when we gave her a hard time, I can't remember her getting that angry. My mother always said I was her strongest child. The truth of the matter is that half of that is from her. She is strong, spiritual, kindhearted, selfless, giving, and loving, to name a few. My mother is the perfect example of how to be a good person and, in my eyes, God's creation of maternal.



My mom is Lenee Cole, born a Sagittarius on December 1, 1965, to Laverne Cole-Williams and the late Robert Leroy Cole Sr. My mom was considered a daddy's girl growing up, so we grew up very closely with my grandfather's side of the family. I believe most of my family's blessings come from up above from my grandfather's mom, the late Stacy Cole. If you have ever seen the movie "Soul Food," my mother's grandmother Stacy was her "Big Mama." She was what you consider the heart of the family. My mom showed courage after losing her grandmother; it was extremely hard on the family. Another one of the greatest times I can remember my mom having courage was when I was about nine years old, my uncle, her brother, was slowly passing away at home on hospice at my grandmother's house. That is a time I will always remember like yesterday. Until this day, I cannot fathom the strength it took to endure that pain and be a rock for my grandmother. My grandmother was also trying to be a rock for her, my baby brother (who was only two years old at the time), and me. Despite tough times, my mom moved with a confidence that we are still blessed, and everything will be all right as long as you take faith with you.

My mom was a single parent. She was not like our current generation of parents. She did not keep us from our fathers because she was mad or any other personal reason. We went with our fathers every summer and every break if we wanted. It was nice being able to have an option. My mom never said anything bad about our fathers in front of us. In fact, I am today at age 30 learning about some of the past problems they had. She would make sure we got our dads a gift on holidays. Most importantly, we kids were always the main priority when it came to co-parenting, and communication was always open. It impacted us girls, my sister and I being the two oldest, by teaching us how to be the strong mothers we are today, how to co-parent reasonably, and how to keep what's best for our children our main priority.

Being selfless is one of the ultimate ways my mother showed us courage and pure love. By the time I was a junior in high school, my mom had moved us back to Chicago. I gave my mom the hardest time about her decision to move back home, so in return she would do whatever it took to make me happier about our new circumstances. She would scrape together any money she could find to get me a bus ticket to and from here in Madison to Chicago as often as I could, which was almost every weekend and every school break. Her ultimate act of courage during this time is when my friends and I decided we were going to Junior Prom. At the time we were low on funds and my mom really could not afford to send me to prom, yet alone prom in Madison. So, one day my mom packed her brand-new radio set and surround sound system in the car, and we drove and ended up in front of the pawn shop. My mom went on to carry in her radio set. Once we got to the counter I said, "Mom, are you sure?" and she looked at me and confidently said, "Yeah! I'll get it back." We used that money to purchase me a beautiful red prom dress with rhinestones down the roped shoulder straps and got my hair done with beautiful long black curls that fell down my shoulders. My mom never got her radio system back, but I am currently 30 years old and that gorgeous red dress still hangs in my closet—still silk, brand new, and with memories I will hold forever. That dress reminds me what type of mother I should be every day. My mother is the type to give you more than what you ask for. It takes courage to be a single mother, but to do it so graciously and patiently is a trait I pray to be blessed with and carry on.



As a woman, I would say it was definitely in the stars for my mother to create two beautiful women and one man. We need more women to value themselves, be maternal, understand all of our children, even the troubled ones, like "Big Mama." We need more men to come from women like that so that they can be less broken and know how to appreciate and hold more value in women and understand the value in themselves. I look around and see many people who were not as fortunate to experience the kind of love we experienced in our household. I think about my childhood and feel blessed. There was love and understanding, and even in separate homes between our parents there was still a feeling of fullness. My mom was opposite of most and believed in going to church not when in need but at her best and feeling worthy of HIM instead. That to me is an utmost act of humbleness. Even if we did not attend church, church was always in the house. I am not saying my mom is perfect, but for a human being she is pretty remarkable.

MY INCREDIBLE WOMAN

BY TALAISHA GOODWAN



When you try to think of a person of courage, you try to think of words to describe a courageous person like brave, fearless, or greathearted. Describing a person of courage, you can list off a thousand and one words, but for me, it only comes down to one name with three words: Janice Marie Dill, my grandmother. At age 26, my grandmother was already a single mother to four children. Living in Madison, Wisconsin, she had many disadvantages, and money was one of them. My grandmother worked full-time as a Customer Service Receptionist at Dean Clinic on Fish Hatchery Road, where she remained for her first ten years in Madison. My grandmother was very strict and taught her children there's never a want in your life, and that what you have is enough. She made sure her children were well behaved and respectful. At age 51, my grandmother had a myocardial infarction, better known as a heart attack. The entire family was devastated, but my grandmother came home and continued to be everyone's backbone with the same smile and personality we remember her by. My grandmother showed a remarkable amount of courage throughout her life, as a grandmother when it came to taking care of my siblings and me while my mother was away, supporting me in my extra-curricular activities, and (even better) as a great-grandmother taking on the duties of babysitting when I worked or had class.

My grandmother didn't stop being a mother once her children became adults; she kept going. I was born October 7th, 1999, and just six months later, my mother got into some trouble which landed her down the wrong path. My grandmother stepped in and took care of two of my siblings and me. The time my mother was away, my grandmother continued to work as she became the second mother to three children under the age of five. My grandmother would work, then come home and make the biggest dinner, enough that would fill our bellies so we would sleep through the night. My grandmother continued this routine for nine months, but not once did she show us she was tired or overwhelmed. When my mother returned, we were all plumped enough to look as if we skipped three ages.

Growing up, my favorite place was my grandmother's house. Mostly every weekend I would catch two buses to my grandmother's house just to spend time with her. When I approached sixth grade, my grandmother signed me up to be a Southside Raiders cheerleader. Practices were Monday and Wednesday; my grandmother made sure I made it. Whether it was raining, snowing, or humid, we made it there. Saturday was game day, and again my grandmother made sure I was prepared; she would dress me for the weather of the day, do my hair, then add black and white ribbons to top it off. As I cheered for the team, she cheered for me. Over the next couple of years, she not only became my motivation to cheer but also my motivation to be my "unique" self, as she would say. I started joining different dance teams to express myself. My biggest accomplishment was becoming a praise dancer, and there she was at every performance encouraging me to give it my all.





Years and years later, she still seems to be the super-grandmother. My first child was born October 25th, 2018, making me just 20 years old at her birth. I struggled with being able to work and doing school full-time. Many times, it came down to dropping one or sometimes even both. That brought me so much depression and anxiety, but who would have known that one call to my grandmother would change everything? I spoke to my grandmother and vented more than I knew I was holding in. It took just the sound of her voice and the words out of her mouth to enter my ear to motivate me to show that “I Can.” I started working as a Member Service Associate at the Boys and Girls Club, which wasn’t far from her house. Everything started to seem more meant to be. On days I worked, if it was just when I needed a place to take a nap, being seven months pregnant with my daughter, because I arrived early to work and was exhausted, or when it was when I needed a babysitter while I worked even if it was for a few hours, she was always there when I needed her.

There are moments when I just ask, “What would my life be like if she wasn’t my grandmother?” In those moments there was never an answer for me because I couldn’t imagine it even if I tried. All the strength in her I couldn’t imagine not seeing, her wise mind I couldn’t live without, her big hugs I wouldn’t want to miss, and her big heart I wouldn’t want to not be a part of. My grandmother has given me solidity to be the mother I am today; there’s not one moment in my life I can’t thank my grandmother for. My ability to express my personality comes from her, always encouraging me in every profession I have taken on in life. It comes from the moments she dressed me for game day or sat in the front row watching me praise dance. My ability to balance being a young mother and going to school comes from her always being there to answer my calls, not only listening but also giving me the greatest advice each time I was overwhelmed with school. My ability to understand love comes from her warm hugs and endless compliments that created a feeling that I am the one and only Talaisha with this personality, this strength, and this mind. When it comes to me, I salute my grandmother. Today my grandmother is 71 years old; she still seems to be that courageous woman, whether it’s still bringing the smile to the party, answering phone calls, or being one’s support person. Every day it amazes me to see a person who doesn’t get tired and to be able to know that person isn’t a stranger but a person who knows me inside out. If I can think of something I would tell my grandmother, it would be, “I love you beyond a galaxy, and you spike a personality that no one can match, creating a person like a mama bear and her cubs. Full of love, protection, and bravery, there’s no one like you.” If I were to write this paper a million times over, I would always choose my grandmother as my woman of courage for a million reasons.



CRUEL MIRRORS

BY JONATHON ADEYANJU



Sometimes life is like a broken mirror, shards of glass reflecting painful memories, experiences, and heartbreaks of yesterday. For Alice Ramirez, these broken pieces were a failed school system, homelessness, and losing her childhood love for fifteen years. Although these shards of glass cut deeply, she has overcome in beautiful ways.



The school system shattered her confidence early on, but she never fully accepted the stigma school placed upon her. At an early age, Alice was taken out of class and given a low-level school curriculum, all because she was labeled as an ESL (English as a second language) student. She couldn't understand why she was being placed in such an easy class just because she spoke and understood Spanish. Her confidence would take a huge hit when in high school. She was placed back into a normal curriculum and realized she couldn't keep up. Even though the broken mirror reflected the words "dumb" and "inadequate," Alice saw more, so she pursued college, ultimately graduated from the Odyssey Program, and later worked her dream job at her local high school.

A few years later, after having her first child, Alice would face homelessness. Reaching rock bottom while she and her son lived in a hotel, she made a silent vow to never be in that position again. She would have to move out of state and sleep on a mattress in a relative's kitchen to get by. The broken mirror reflected "failure," but Alice saw more. Several years later, she would purchase her own home.

At age 18, Alice would find herself furiously running up the steps of the courthouse to attend the court date of her boyfriend of seven years—and she was late. It was the day the jury would find her soulmate guilty on all counts—and she missed it. Not only would she have to battle the guilt of not being there but



also the reality that he wouldn't be there for the next 15 years. The broken mirror reflected every fear imaginable, and some even came true. Through courage, she endured and faced it all, and 15 years later she was reunited with her true love to share the story.

The thing about looking in broken mirrors is oftentimes you don't see the whole picture, just sharp fragments of distorted truths that cut deeply. I hope when Alice looks around she sees the beautiful ways she's impacted people with her courage. She'll see herself as she truly is—courageous, brave, and beautiful. Now when I look in my own broken mirror, I think of Alice, and I can't help but to smile.

MOTHERLY MELODIES

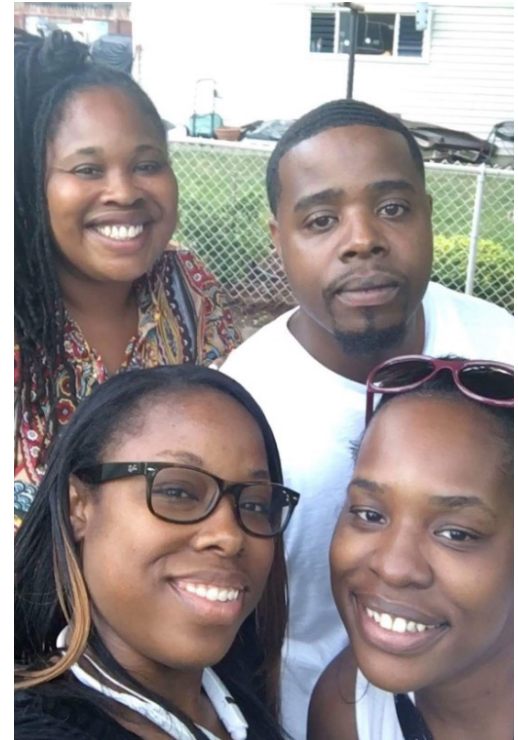
BY ZARIA HUNTER



“Mrs Hunter, at 7 lbs.8 oz, here is your new baby girl. What would you like to name her?” On March 9th, 1999, my mother’s life completely changed. I’m sure Shawwna Hunter had no clue just how much it really would over the course of time. Although my mother had conceived me at the early age of 18, she was able to go to college twice, bounce back through several adversities, and still manage

to be a strong woman while even having her own trauma. My mother displayed not only courage but sacrifice and strength.

Shawwna Hunter was born originally in the city of Chicago, coming from her own family with its own dysfunctions like any other. As she grew older into the world, she decided to create her own path. Sometime after graduating high school, she met my father and they made me! I can remember small glimpses of being in her college classes with her. or even in the gym at her poms practices throughout my childhood. That was her doing the best that she could to strive for her dreams.



My mother progressed through life with us both growing together at impact speed. She then met someone and got married. Fast forward, she had twin boys, and about 11 months later a baby girl. We are now a family of six. My mother decided with her partner that they were ready for a fresh start, which was us relocating to Madison, Wisconsin.

Around December of 2012 our new life shattered during a traumatizing house fire. Everything that we had known at that point was gone. Yet something in her persevered. After staying at the Marriott Hotel, within a month my mother was able to restabilize our entire family. Shortly after, our family went through extreme discord from me being taken away from the home in 2013. This experience trampled the entire family dynamic that we once knew and resulted in not only divorce but so much hurt and pain that we are still trying to recover from to this day.



Although she had endured so much, she still went on to attend the University of Wisconsin- Whitewater during a national pandemic. She was also featured in an article on the City of Madison’s website about the work she does for the Meadowood community. She still finds it in her heart to be a mom! No matter the doubts and fears, she made it all happen, through dedication, consistency, and discipline. So, I hope that by reading about my mother that you get the right impression that whoever you are and no matter where life takes you, you should always choose to be courageous!

A FIGHTER'S HEART AND STRENGTH

BY BRANDYN BESS



Who is Hedi LaMarr Rudd? To me she is my mother, a lady with a fighter's heart and strength. When you meet Hedi, she is most likely smiling behind a camera taking pictures in the moment and capturing the essence of life. When I think about a woman who has courage, I think about my mother. Why, you ask? No matter what life threw at my mother, she faced it head on and never gave up. She pushes herself and others to work hard, captures beautiful moments with her photography, and embodies community activism.



Hedi did not have the easiest childhood growing up in the 1980s and dealing with the drug epidemic; a lot of people succumbed to the street life. Hedi chose to work hard to support herself and her kids despite the odds against her.

Hedi grew up not knowing her real father but was raised by a black man named Lavelle Rudd and by her mother, Penny. My mother loved her father and was really hurt by his death in 2001. She decided to move the family to Las Vegas. Hedi Rudd has worked hard her entire life, including her years working

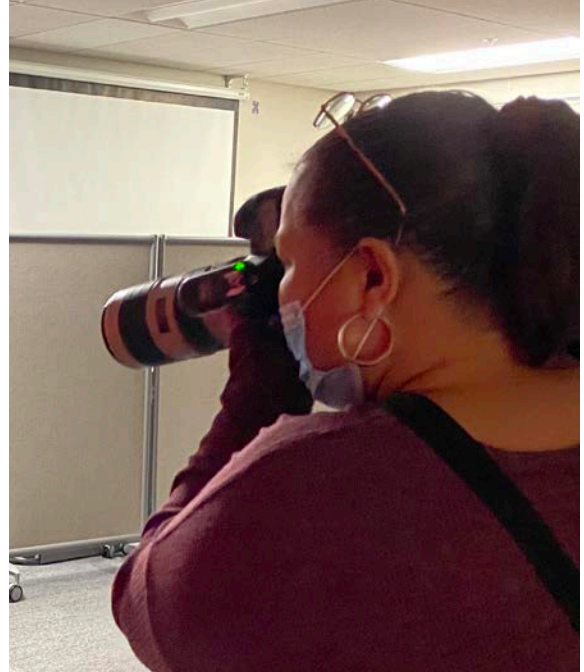
at places like WPS, Nevada Cancer institute, and Urban League of Greater Madison. When I was young my mother was always working a day job to support the family; never was there a time when she was not working. Even though she was working a full-time job, she still had time to make dinner after a long day of working. I remember doing an internship through the Nevada Cancer institute, where my mother worked as the receptionist to the CEO of the company. The internship was for Information technology, and my mother is the reason I got the internship. She pushed me to do it, just as she pushed me to do Odyssey. I thank her for pushing me because it gives me courage to do better through her courage.



Even to this day, Hedi Rudd works hard. She's 51 years old but working harder than most 20-year-olds I know. She has built up a lifetime of work in great places that try and help better the community. Even now she currently works

at the Badger Rock Community Center, working with young elementary and middle school kids and teachers to build a better community on the south side of Madison. Her current job as the overseer of the Badger Rock Neighborhood Community Center has my mother working with young kids, building gardens, and making sure they are doing their homework. This shows she still cares for her community and is passionate about seeing the next generation succeed.

My mother also is a great photographer. She found photography through a friend and mentor of hers, Ms. Milele, the founder of UMOJA magazine. She found her true passion in life. Finding photography changed my mother's life, and I am so glad she found it. Working for Ms. Milele and UMOJA magazine, my mother found her passion taking pictures for events and eventually got so good she opened her own photography business. Hedi LaMarr Photography has its own business store, a website, and a business card. She is always at different events or life moments taking pictures, capturing people's smiles and beautiful moments. This is because my mother has the courage to stand up for herself and what she believes in and does not stop until she completes her goals.



On May 9th, 2019, my mother won the Nan Cheney March for Social Justice award, which one person receives every year. The winner receives 15,000 dollars and a lifetime of recognition for their work in the community. My mother truly embodies a community activist. She is always working at different events



or writing columns about things going on in the community. This award is meant for someone who has the courage to stand up and fight for what they believe in, and my mother believes in change for the better for minorities. When she received the award, she also had the day May 9th changed to HEDI RUDD DAY in Madison. She went from being an unheard-of young lady from Madison to being Hedi Rudd, community photographer and activist. Therefore, my mother gives me courage because if she can achieve things like this, then there's no telling what I can do with my life. In conclusion, my mother is a hardworking, strong, and giving lady who gives her all for the people in her life or in the community.

MY SHERO

BY CRYSTAL JOHNSON



The woman I picked that's full of courage I've been knowing for almost 42 years. She knows me so well: My Shero, my Suga Mama, AKA Grannie. Born into this world courageously, she lived in the 1930s as a courageous adolescent who became a daughter/sister, wife/mother, friend and grandma with plenty of courage.

Velma C. Smith was born November 1, 1936, in Walcott County, Camden, Alabama. My grannie always says, "It's a small town, if you blink, you'll miss it." She was born to Frank and Nezaree Miller/ Scott as the seventh of eleven kids: five girls and six boys. Growing up in the 1930s in an Alabama suburb called Whiskey Rum, she lived in a two-story house that was big enough for everyone to be comfortable in. The house was beautiful and set at a top of a hill. They had mules, chickens, and goats. My great-grandpa purchased this house from a white family that moved away. My grannie and her brothers and sisters were all born and raised in that house. Still in an era of segregation, they had to ride the back of the bus, sit at the guest column in the theater, and use separate fountains. My grannie still was raised to be an honor student, took honor classes, and graduated at the top of her class in 1955 from Walcott High School.

Now Velma was considered grown, and her parents couldn't care for her any longer. So, she caught the bus to Chicago where two of her older brothers were. She said they were her second and third dads. LOL Annoying.... In Chicago she started at Kennedy King Community College for Broadcasting. She wanted to be a radio host for a gospel station. But life had other plans. She started working and soon after in 1960 she met a handsome, well-mannered gentleman, James W. Smith from Mississippi. She said he wanted to take this chick out to dinner. A few days later, they went on a date to a Chicken Shack. The date lasted an hour and a half. Then James walked her back home. They continued to date, and six months later he proposed. They went on to have five children to add to her three that were in Alabama with her parents. James claimed and loved all Velma's kids.

What makes my grannie a woman of courage to me is that she made it through segregation as a kid, young adult, and woman with no problem. She was focused on getting her education and moving away from the South to better herself and build for her kids. Even after her husband's death in 1992, she still provided for her family. At that time, she worked multiple jobs throughout the years, like at Baby Ruth/Curtis Candy Factory, Capital Candy Factory, and finally Embossed Graphic Company, which she later retired from in 1988. She never remarried nor dated after her husband's death. She dedicated her life to raising her grandkids.

My grannie had a tumor on her uterus, a slipped disk in her back, and triple bypass surgery, but she is still kicking it and reading her bible every day. She said to tell y'all to thank God because she has been doing that for 85 years!!!

ALWAYS WITH AN OPEN DOOR

BY CINDERRIA HARWELL



My woman of courage is my grandmother. Her name is Betty Harwell. She raised me, so for that reason alone, I want you to understand how courageous she was. There are reasons that many find her courageous as well. She was a woman of God in the

21st century. Another one of her talents that exemplifies courage was her upbringing. She was a foster child who fought her challenges to help every child who would otherwise be left behind.

Betty Harwell was a woman who did an excellent job of raising me. She would make sacrifices. The way she ensured safety was that I had rides to school when others had to take the bus. She made sure my school fees were paid, when other students were broadcasted on a bulletin board for late or unpaid fees. She had me in piano, track and field, cross country, cheerleading, and much more. Lastly, she had my clothes cleaned, folded, and hung up in the closet for the entire week, when others came to school dirty. At this point she outshines me as a mother by far!



At her homegoing, I can't pinpoint what exactly happened. There was a history that I've never known.



My hero, Betty Harwell, was adopted. Apparently, her mother had twelve kids. She was very poor. There was a point where Child Services was called. My grandmother was taken into the system. A Catholic church took her into custody. They would leave her a lunch on her desk so the other kids wouldn't find out that she was adopted. I want to thank that church because she gave me the best childhood because the Catholic church cared enough to give her one.

Always with an open door, my grandmother raised nations of children. Everyone at her homegoing said she always made room for me. That stuck with me. Back then, big families were very prominent. Mothers just couldn't raise their kids.

My grandmother never closed her doors. She would even raise, clothe, and educate many kids before I was born. She had no problem with eliminating the cycle.

TÍA MATTHE

BY BENJI RAMIREZ GOMEZ



At the heart of every immigrant's story is a spark of courage. The moment someone decides to leave their country, their home, and family is marked by a leap of faith. Few will embark on the journey, and fewer persist through adverse conditions, and yet my aunt did all this and more.

When my mother was sixteen, she decided she was going to brave crossing the Mexico-US border. She told my family, and everyone broke into tears. Little *Uvita* (grape) was leaving home. My aunt, without a quaver in her voice, said, "I'm going with you."

My Tía Matthe raised me as her own. For the first nine years of my life, my tía would make dinner when my mother was too tired and babysit me when my mother was gone at work. She loved me as her own through several miscarriages.

My tía has lived in this country 25 years now, and she continues to demonstrate immense courage every day. She was courageous through the birth of her three children, through her sister's stroke, an imminent loss of home and job, and through her pursuit of her GED.

My tía is so brave. I wanna be like her.



A SPECIAL TEACHER WHO REFUSES TO QUIT

BY JERMAINE BOOEY



When I think of a woman of courage, I think of Lauren Zepp. I met her in my freshman year in high school in gym class. She was job shadowing at that time. Later she got hired as a reading and English teacher, and I was put in her class. We had great chemistry, she was a great teacher, and she believed in me. She was very understanding. After a year of her being my teacher, I was bumping heads with my case manager. I asked if Lauren could become my case manager. I wouldn't allow anybody else to be my case manager from my sophomore year until I graduated. It made a big difference to me because I was failing geometry, and I might have stopped showing up to school. I was going to get kicked off the basketball team. She took the

time out of her day and out of her family life to stay after school to make sure I passed geometry and stayed on the team. I didn't like school, and sports literally got me through. Lauren is my woman of courage because she was a first-generation college student who overcame poverty, she worked hard at different jobs and is still working to progress in life, and she cares about others in the community.

Lauren struggled growing up poor in rural Pennsylvania. Although she would be the first in her family to be in college, she knew that college would help her make a change and open up doors for her to escape her small town. Lauren says, "I was successful academically, mostly because I had some amazing teachers who supported me, but I never felt like I fit in or was welcome at my school." Lauren earned a scholarship, so she moved to Washington, DC as a first-generation college student and began working towards her bachelor's degree. It was a big leap for Lauren because she had never lived outside of her small town. Now she was in a big city. She also





didn't know what to expect from college, and she didn't have the kind of support some of her classmates had because of her different family background. Lauren says, "There were definitely times when college was scary and challenging and I wanted to quit. I worked a lot through my years in college and tried to stay in school, but I also felt freedom and independence. I liked being out on my own and being in charge of my own life."

She majored in history but didn't have a clear path to her future career. She accepted a job with a domestic violence shelter in Washington, DC, but inside she wasn't sure if it was what she wanted for her career. She also had a part-time job with a community clinic doing outreach work and helping people learn about the health care services that were available. She says, "I learned a lot from those jobs, mostly about how privileged I was as a white person and how I didn't understand the experiences of other people. Through those jobs, I developed a strong sense of social justice and a desire to work for equity." Even though Lauren is a 38-year-old white woman with a disability and a mom of two kids ages six and two, she's not done with

her education. She is still continuing to work on her career. Right now, she's a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Lauren hopes to finish her PhD in special education in the next few years. I think she will be good at this career. This would be a perfect fit because she's very understanding, very patient, and is in the same position as her students since she struggled with a disability, has been low on money, and was the first to open up the door to college for her family.

I know from my experience that Lauren was a patient, kind woman who took the time out of her day outside of school to help me with English, reading, and math. One time I even got in trouble and she helped me with community service. She took me to the places where I did community service, drove me to basketball practices, and gave me a ride home when it was late or if I missed the bus and it was cold. It was like having a second mom at the school. It was amazing. I never felt so comfortable with another human being besides my own mom. I'm not the only one who felt that way. Friends in my classes who went through struggles also found her helpful. She found the energy to help them through school, and they're still in contact with her to this day. If you were hungry, she would take you out to eat. It's crazy how much energy she had to help us out. No one felt left out when she was there.

Lauren Zepp is my woman of courage because she refuses to quit, has the ability to keep fighting through the struggle, and has had an impact on me from when I was a kid until now. She is one of the reasons I want to do special education myself. She has created a path for me for my future work and in general as a human being. I used to be short-tempered and would snap in seconds. I gave her a hard time. I think of all the times we worked together, we only bumped heads a few times. I was goofy and gave her a hard time, but she never gave up. She stayed on top on me. If I could say something to her now, I'd say, "Lauren, thank you, and please never quit what you're doing. You're changing a lot of kids' lives, more than you know. You've impacted me and my younger brothers. Thank you, and never stop what you're doing."

COURAGE BY EXAMPLE

BY WILL NUNN III



Woman of courage: these three words together are powerful. Those three words make me think of no one else but my mother, my mama. With having three kids and being the only parent in the household, she definitely needed courage every day. She is a woman of courage because her background made her really love the elderly of the village, she did not give up on taking care of us, and she had the courage to keep going even when the odds were against her.

The youngest of six children, my mother was sent to live with her grandma because there were too many children in her parents' house. By living with her grandma, my mother gained a great appreciation for being around older people. She still has that appreciation today. She often takes time out of her days to go check on the elderly of the community and make sure they have everything they need. My mother says it always reminds her of her grandma when she connects with any elder. I've watched my mom go over an elder's house to clean, to bake or cook food, or come over just to talk. I would ask my mom who everyone was, and she would always say, "That's Grandma. You can call her grandma." I didn't understand as a kid. It was my understanding that everyone had their own grandparents, but despite my questioning I obeyed. "Hey, Grandma" is how I greeted every elderly woman my mom introduced us to. I had like 20 grandmas by the time I was in high school.



I remember when my siblings and I were little kids. Whenever it would rain, my mama would pull out Matt's soft chocolate chip cookies and we would sit behind the couch with our covers with my mom like we were hiding out from the lightning. I really thought we were hiding from the lightning. I just recently asked my mom why we would do that whenever it rained, and she said that's how she dealt with the storm of being a young mother and having us back-to-back. That was her moment of solitude to regroup and refocus. We always got cookies out the deal.

I remember another time my mom had to work three jobs at once. I became a latchkey kid because she was always gone. My mom would make sure she left us dinner in the fridge every day. One day she forgot.



So 11-year-old me made us some macaroni and fried chicken. Luckily, I didn't burn the house down. I had successfully cooked my first meal, and I had learned from watching my mom. I was so excited for her to taste what I had cooked. When she got off work in the morning, she ate it and was so surprised she didn't believe I made it. I told her I learned from watching her. I'd like to feel that was one of those moments in my mom's young parenting career that she felt like a good teacher.

These are just a couple of stories, and there are plenty more. My mother is a woman of courage because she had the courage every day to get up and do what she needed to do to take care of us. Even if that meant having to leave me in charge while she worked, it taught me a lot. My mother gave me room to grow on my own. My mother had the courage to go her own way even though people would tell her differently. She always stayed true to herself and helping the elders. I get a lot from my mom. I'm proud to say that.

THE CALM IN MY STORM

BY YASMINE DOBBINS



I remember hearing a shriek, then a plummet succeeded by absolute chaos. My aunt had somehow fallen down the flight of stairs into our basement. I recall all of the adults in the house in complete dismay, all except for my grandma. She always had a more serene outlook on things even when there seemed to be none. She has

always been a beacon of strength and a reminder that I can overcome any obstacle that is presented before me. She had so much love to give from a person that lived a pretty callous life. There are numerous times where she showed her unwavering strength to love and uplift others in her life. Although she came from a troubling past, including adoption, leaving an abusive husband, and pushing through plentiful health issues, I am here to convey the countless ways she's pushed past hardships and still has been able to teach me many things about life.



Growing up, my household has always been a busy one. My family would take in other members from our family and allow them to stay with us until they got on their feet. There was one person who was in our home from very early on in my life and that was my grandmother (my father's mom). I never fully understood why it was so important for us to do this or where it all started until I started talking more to

my grandma. I learned that Grandma did not have the chance to grow up knowing her birth mother and had to grow up in multiple foster homes. She never felt comfortable, never felt safe or welcomed, but was always a friend to other kids in the homes. She was telling me stories about the amount of time she spent there as well as a couple stories that stuck with her over the past years. Even as a young child she displayed courage as she would take up for other kids that were being made fun of. She showed tremendous strength even as she had to move from foster home to foster home or even watch as others found homes before she did.





As an adult, starting a family of her own was very important to her, so my grandma married fairly young. I assume that back then this was something that was not out of the ordinary. Then she started having kids, starting a family that she had always wanted for herself. But with the love came a new wave of pain that was foreign and caught her by complete surprise. It went from happy in love to flying fists. And when there wasn't physical pain, she withstood words that would cut so deep and sting like those nasty paper cuts, words mocking her of her past - as if anything was humanly her fault. My grandma found courage the day she decided to put herself and her children first and left him. She found courage when she chose herself first and did not keep that pain from keeping her from loving again, which in time was something she did. I'm happy she did because she would not have been able to live the life full of bliss that she truly deserved. She remarried and lived with him happily for the rest of his years. I think without courage that would not have been possible for her.

In her older years she started facing what every older person starts to experience, your body slowly weakening and breaking down. First she would gain weight and have a hard time moving around, would become depressed and shut everyone out. One thing she didn't shut out was my father, who was always her biggest fan and supporter. Things started to get pretty bad for her when she



broke her fibula and her tibia bone at the same time and ended up in a rehabilitation center. My father visited daily; he practically lived there and would get there to see her even though he was without a car—by bus, by bike, whatever. He was such a big support that he became her caregiver.



I think it was the love from my father that made her get the courage to fight back and take control of her life. She fought back with everything she's encountered from falls to strokes and left this world showing me that there is always a reason to fight back and show courage regardless of what you're facing.

JENNIFER'S GIFTS

BY CAPRI BOOKER



As a child who met Jennifer Hudson, I have benefited from her gifts and been inspired for a decade and a half by her courage. Jennifer Hudson is a woman of courage because she has overcome the most terrifying things and mastered the hardest life changes that most thought would for sure smash her, suffered cruel comments about her weight before losing 80 pounds, and still, after all the things she's been through, started foundations to help people.

Jennifer was noticed from American Idol in 2004. Despite losing, she nevertheless auditioned for Dreamgirls and got the lead role in the movie in 2006. Jennifer Hudson experienced losing three people in one year on the same day. On October 24th, 2008 Jennifer Hudson lost her mother, brother, and nephew. Jennifer Hudson's sister's husband threatened if she left he would kill her family first and she would be the last to die. He went



through with his threat and got arrested. He denies to this day having any involvement, although he was spotted by a guard and had a gun on him; he stated everything was planted. Because Jennifer Hudson is famous, knowing the person who murdered your family is not only hard but traumatizing. How do you ever trust again? They had known him since middle school. Her mother and brother were murdered in the household. They put an award out for finding the nephew. They had so much faith and hope, but just three days later he was found dead.



Jennifer Hudson suffered cruel comments on her weight because the role she played in Dreamgirls was the heaviest. Not only was that when she suffered cruel comments, but even after losing 80 pounds to be exact she told the world she did Weight Watchers and was a spokesperson for them. There were rumors going around about what she took and did and that she had surgeries. After losing weight, Jennifer Hudson was focused on music. But each time in conversation, someone would bring up her weight loss and how beautiful she was. She had to start all over because they focused not on her brain but on her beauty.

Jennifer Hudson and her sister have a foundation called Julian D. King dedicated to her murdered nephew. The foundation holds several events each year in Chicago where she was raised. I believe they have spread to other places, but Chicago was first. Her mother always said give back to where you came from. The foundation also runs an annual holiday toy drive where low-income families in the Chicago area are invited to attend in order to receive gifts for children who normally



wouldn't be able to get these. In conjunction with the toy drive, the foundation holds a dinner to celebrate and honor the scholarly achievements of high achieving and deserving students. Each student is nominated by a non-parent such as a teacher, coach, mentor, etc., and the winners are selected by the foundation board. Winning students are granted their unlimited holiday wish and are treated to a private dinner with Jennifer and her family. This dinner acts as a form of encouragement for these children to work harder and focus. It also provides a system of support for these kids and their parents as attendees create meaningful relationships with people who care. The reason why she gives Christmas gifts to children is because she says she knows how it feels to have two pairs of shoes and two pairs of clothes. This is the same event where I met Jennifer Hudson, which allows me to write about her. We got gifts, we got food, we took pictures, there was music, and we actually got to receive our gift from the family themselves as in walking up to them.

It takes courage to continue to help people after so much has happened to you Jennifer Hudson never forgot where she came from and always gave back. "Without help, where would I be?" is what she always says. I've researched her since I was a child, and she showed me how to grow up.

WOMAN OF COURAGE: SYLVIA MENDEZ

BY Yael Jimenez



Changing the world is no small feat, much less being awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. All of this was of little importance (at the time) to a young eight-year-old girl, whose later contribution to integration and the American civil rights movement would change the pendulum of American history forever. Its impact still reverberates through American history today. After being denied enrollment at an all-white elementary school, Sylvia Mendez went on to become a woman of courage for fighting for her right to education in the nation's highest court, being one of the first Hispanics to attend an all-white school, and prevailing against all odds to become a nurse and end segregated schools in California, the first state in the nation to do so. As a young girl, Sylvia naturally had a lot on her mind, but in racially segregated 1940s America, one issue was rapidly cemented in the forefront of her mind, her education. Although she was little, the world would soon remember her as anything but.



Sylvia Mendez is a woman of courage for fighting for her right to education in the nation's highest court. 1936 was a good year to be born in Santa Ana, California—if you were white, that is. For Sylvia and her parents, 1936 proved to be a difficult year. Although being saved from having to traverse the treacherous passage across the border, Sylvia's childhood was anything but easy. Systemic racism, discrimination, and segregation plagued the nation, and the Los Angeles metropolitan area was no outlier. Her parents relocated their family from Santa Ana to Westminster after having to take care of a farm they were leasing. There, in Westminster, Sylvia's parents set out to enroll their children into 17th Street Elementary, an all-white school that had a vast amount of money and, additionally, had an insurmountably better education than the surrounding schools. 17th Street Elementary was located in the affluent white neighborhood. Sylvia was subsequently denied enrollment for being dark skinned and having a Hispanic surname, while



her brothers who were light skinned were permitted to enroll. She was forced to enroll in the only elementary school that was open for her, the segregated Hoover Elementary, along with her brothers and cousins. The school was a rundown, two room, wooden shack in the middle of the impecunious Mexican neighborhood. Wanting better for their children, in 1944, a legal battle ensued when Sylvia's father, Gonzalo, filed a lawsuit in conjunction with four other Mexican American families whose children had been forced to attend segregated schools. They filed the lawsuit in federal court against four Orange County school districts: El Modena, Garden Grove, Santa Ana, and Westminster on behalf of thousands of Hispanic-American schoolchildren. The battle became known as the *Mendez v. Westminster* case. There, they argued that segregating children based on ethnicity was a violation of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Westminster School District countered that segregation was due to a language issue, and the "fact" that



Hispanic students were “deficient in the English language and thus needed special instruction.” (Britannica). The “fact” fell apart after the children were asked to testify and proved that they were able to speak English as Hispanic-Americans, as well as having the capacity to learn just as their white counterparts could. The judge ruled in favor of Mendez in 1946; it was subsequently appealed by the Westminster School District. Finally, in 1947 the appeals court upheld the decision and affirmed the court’s ruling in *Mendez v. Westminster*.

Sylvia Mendez is a woman of courage for being one of the first Hispanics to attend an all-white school. Winning a landmark case such as the *Mendez v Westminster* didn’t alleviate Sylvia’s situation. Although she was able to attend the 17th Street Elementary school in 1948, her life continued to get harder. As one of the first Hispanics to attend an all-white school, she was constantly bullied by her peers. Her peers would call her names

and pick on her for having Mexican-Puerto Rican heritage. Yet she still had the courage to keep going at her elementary school. After all, she and so many others had fought so hard to be able to attend school. As she suffered through it all, she had the courage to keep getting up, to keep going, and to roll through the punches. Eventually, she graduated from the elementary school.

Sylvia Mendez is a woman of courage for prevailing against all odds to become a nurse and end segregated schools in California, the first state in the nation to do so. After Sylvia’s 1947 landmark ruling, the Governor of California, Earl Warren (who would later become one of the chief justices presiding over the Brown case when it reached the nation’s highest court), moved to outlaw all segregation in schools for all of California. Without Sylvia’s courage to take on the School District of Westminster in the highest court of the nation, it’s without a doubt that the push for desegregated schools in California would’ve been devitalized. Sylvia played a pivotal role in making sure segregated schools in California were outlawed. The arguments used in her case (equal protection) were imperative to the arguments in *Brown*, which argued racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. Essentially this paved the way for integration and set the precedent for the now famous case of *Brown Vs The Board of Education*. As if unsatisfied, she continued with her courageousness and graduated college with a nursing degree. She went on to work in the profession for a score and a half.

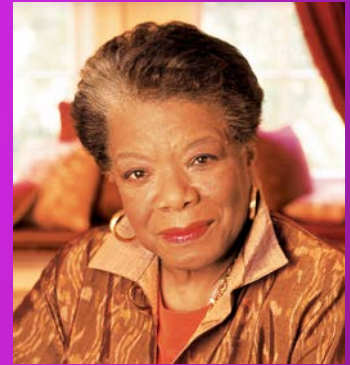
Sylvia Mendez is a woman of courage for fighting for her right to education in the nation’s highest court, being one of the first Hispanics to attend an all-white school, and prevailing against all odds to become a nurse and end segregated schools in California. As if that wasn’t enough, Sylvia went on to earn an associate’s degree in nursing from Orange Coast Community College, as well as earning a bachelor’s degree in nursing and a public health certificate from California State University at Los Angeles. Additionally, she received an honorary degree from Brooklyn College. In addition, her courage was revered and detailed in the documentary *Mendez v. Westminster: For all the Children / Para Todos los Niños* (winning an Emmy and a Golden Mike Award). Moreover, Sylvia went on to have not one but three schools named in her honor for her courage and work in the Supreme Court case. Furthermore, before receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the US Postal service crafted a stamp to commemorate her case. Sylvia continues to be courageous at the age of 85, traveling and giving lectures/speeches on the work she did in *Mendez v. Westminster*, as well as detailing the instrumental contributions her parents and many others did to overthrow segregated schools in California. Sylvia Mendez is a woman of courage.

FAMOUS WOMEN WITH THE COURAGE TO WRITE



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

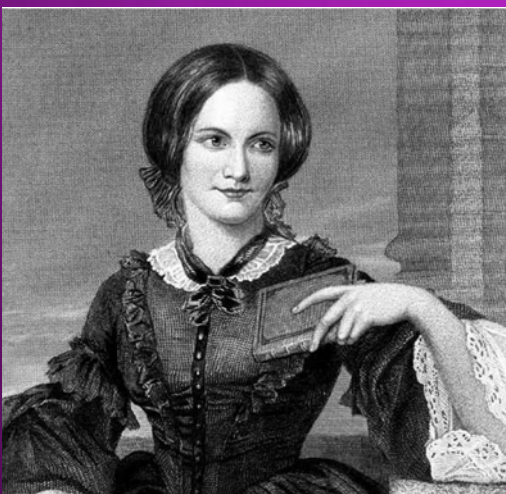
"Courage is the most important of all the virtues because without courage you can't practice any other virtue consistently. . . . I believe that the most important single thing, beyond discipline and creativity, is daring to dare."
—Maya Angelou



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



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



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



"You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, 'I have lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along. ' You must do the thing you think you cannot do."
—Eleanor Roosevelt



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

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



"You get in life what you have the courage to ask for." —Oprah Winfrey



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



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



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



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