

odyssey oracle

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Who Said It?

Find Out January 18, 2012

"I wake up every day with Odyssey on my mind before I get out of bed. I deserve to be in Odyssey second semester because I have a hunger to feed my brain with all this great knowledge the project offers me. I won't have it any other way."

"The Odyssey Project has given me the chance to rewrite the story of my life. To stop my Odyssey and get off the ship now is not an option. Please let me continue this Odyssey because my best is yet to come."

"I am privileged to be part of this class that is assisting me to shun and hurl away the doubts and cages that may still hinder success in my quest."

"The Odyssey Project has opened my mind to a fresh and endless world of knowledge. The Odyssey Class of 2012 is full of energetic, serious-minded, and caring individuals. I consider all the students and faculty a part of my family."

"If Odyssey were a jigsaw puzzle, then I would be a piece—probably not the biggest piece, most definitely not the brightest piece, nor the smartest, but assuredly I would be an important piece, just as all of my other 29 classmates are; without me or any of them, this jigsaw could never be complete."



“A caterpillar crawling through life is what I used to be; a butterfly now taught how to fly free is what has become of me. Please don’t stop my growth!”

“Not too many people have the opportunity to be a part of something so valuable, something they can carry with them for the rest of their lives!”

“With Odyssey, I am finding the blueprint that escaped me; the instructions on how to put my life together. While I continue to work on finding my own voice, my own allegory, my own poems and prose, I am thankful that I had the bread crumbs provided by Odyssey to get me to my future destination.”

“This class has taught me that it’s OK to have help but you also have to believe in yourself.”

“Odyssey is helping me learn who I am and accept who I am. I will come out of this wonderful, blessed Odyssey a winner because I hopefully will have found my voice by the end of class.”

“My seven-year-old son said, ‘Mommy, I pray you get your college degree.’ This program has been a blessing to me and my family.”

“This is the longest I have ever gone doing class assignments and homework. I feel I now have the tools I needed a long time ago to be able to find success in school.”

“I may be quieter than most, but I really try to soak in everything. Odysseus was on his journey home to become king. I am still on my journey (just having more forks, curves, and detours) home to become me—a queen of my success.”

“What I learn in Odyssey, I take home and talk to my children about. My son has chosen to go to college after finishing high school.”

“With the work we have been assigned, I have been able to dust the cobwebs off my writing skills. Racism is omnipresent in all our lives, and I’m glad for all of us that in this class we are assumed

to be intelligent, capable people with many talents worth sharing.”

“My mind has been stretched almost to the limit, but that’s okay. When you’re used to hearing ‘you’re dumb,’ that stays with you for a long time. I’m not afraid anymore; I say bring it on.”

“For me, having this class has been like being born out of an egg. It has been an explosion of progress.”

“Odyssey class is an amazing, outstanding, fulfilling, goal-seeking invention.”

“Odyssey reminds me of church in some respects, learning the good news of literature, art, philosophy, and history accompanied with a plethora of topics to cover. Odyssey is a course that’s daring enough to be outside the box while simultaneously prepping its students for the demands and culture of college life.”

“I refuse to give up on anything I believe in, and I believe in the work the Odyssey Project is doing.”

“I can honestly say that I am Odyssey and Odyssey is me. I am inside of Odyssey and Odyssey is inside of me. I never thought learning could be so much joy.”

“Odyssey has become part of my dream of going back to school, and it has changed my thought from *maybe* to *it will be*.”

“My mind is hungry for more, and I am starting to realize that I’m not stupid. I’m here to learn. We are all here together now, and there’s no looking back. Full speed ahead with all the lights on!”

“Odyssey is a place where you learn your own strengths, talents, or skills that you never knew that you had in you.”

“Before Odyssey I had not attended school for 30 years; however, now I have a renewed sense of purpose with vigor, dedication, and determination.”

Gang Member to Author:

Luis Rodriguez

By Brandon McCarey

On November 9, 2011, I was privileged to meet awarding-winner author, poet, and community activist Luis Rodriguez. In collaboration with United Common Ground of Madison College and Rainbow Books, Rodriguez had scheduled a trip to Madison as part of a promotion tour for his latest memoir, the sequel *Always Running*, which was released in October of 2011.

Luis Rodriguez has become one of the leading Chicano writers in the nation. He has written 15 books, consisting of memoirs, fiction, poetry, children's literature, and nonfiction. He is best known for his 1993 memoir of gang life called *Always Running: La Vida Loca, Gang Days in L.A.*, including stealing, fighting, rioting, attempted murder, and assaulting police officers. The book discloses Rodriguez's youth as an East L.A. gang member. He began stealing by age seven, by age 11 he had joined a gang, and he began using drugs by age 12.

A high school dropout by 15, Rodriguez was kicked out of his house and was homeless until returning to live with his family in their garage. From 13 to 18 years of age, he was arrested for numerous crimes, including stealing, fighting, rioting, attempted murder, and assaulting police officers.

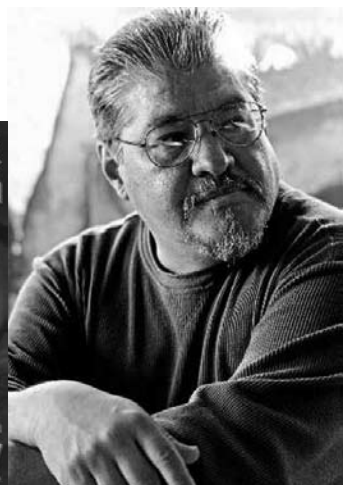
Despite his gang activities and drug addiction, Luis Rodriguez also participated in the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, including the 1968 East L.A. School Blowouts and the Chicano Moratorium against the Vietnam War of August 29, 1970.

After time spent in prison and losing 25 of his closest friends to gang violence, Rodriguez began taking night classes in East Los Angeles Community College. By early 1980 Rodriguez worked as a reporter and photographer for seven East Los Angeles weekly newspapers. Showing both strong potential as a writer and having a deep passion for community activism, he was able to escape the trauma and danger of gang life, to use his experience to help others like him, and to bring

attention to pressing contemporary social issues.

In his public book signing and talk at Madison College, he revealed it was a love of books that helped him through struggles. "Even when I was on drugs and deep in gang activities, I would always find time for books," he explained. He believes social inequalities, lack of educational advancements, and various other social ills are in large part responsible for many youths turning to gangs for support. "In rundown ghettos with sub-average schooling, drug dealers and economic barriers, is it any wonder why many young minority men and women turn to street gangs for support?" he asked the audience.

As an Odyssey student I couldn't help but relate his struggles and triumphs to Plato's cave allegory and the fight to liberate oneself from ignorance and self-defeating attitudes. He chooses to push himself to be someone better and to give back to community, using his gift of words and sense of social justice. Having traveled the world and spoken on a variety of subjects, Luis Rodriguez is now the head of his own publishing company, Tia Chucha Press, and is currently in production with the filming of his first documentary about gang life.



Delving into Emily Dickinson

#23

*I had a guinea golden
I lost it in the sand,
And though the sum was simple,
And pounds were in the land,
Still had it such a value
Unto my frugal eye,
That when I could not find it
I sat me down to sigh.*

*I had a crimson robin
Who sang full many a day,
But when the woods were painted
He, too, did fly away.
Time brought me other robins,—
Their ballads were the same,—
Still for my missing troubadour
I kept the “house at hame.”*

*I had a star in heaven;
One Pleiad was its name,
And when I was not heeding
It wandered from the same.
And though the skies are crowded,
And all the night ashine,
I do not care about it,
Since none of them are mine.*

*My story has a moral:
I have a missing friend,—
Pleiad its name, and robin,
And guinea in the sand,—
And when this mournful ditty,
Accompanied with tear,
Shall meet the eye of traitor
In country far from here,
Grant that repentance solemn
May seize upon his mind,
And he no consolation
Beneath the sun may find.*

...The main idea of the poem is that having misguided attachment will lead to unhappiness.



It's not possible to have possession of a bird, star, or person, but she felt as if they belonged to her, so when they were no longer around she felt a deep sense of loss. Her unwise attachment to these specific things also made her unable to enjoy other things around her, like when she says of

the star, “Although the skies are crowded . . . I do not care about it” or of the robin, “time brought me other robins . . . still for my missing troubadour I kept the house at hame.”

I love this poem for so many reasons. When I first read through it, I saw the speaker as a victim. The twist at the end took me by surprise because it was a change in tone from mourning to vengeful. I originally saw her as someone who had lost something that meant the world to her. The fact that she wouldn't accept a replacement showed her devotion and made her “traitor” seem even more despicable.

Then I noticed some subtle word choices that changed my perception of the speaker from victim to a little foolish and lacking justification. The first thing that struck me as odd was the use of the word “had” when speaking of a star or a robin. Nature doesn't belong to people, and only fools would think they can own or control it. Even a coin is only a representation of wealth, which is not something tangible that you can possess. Then I saw how she doesn't want to take responsibility for what happened, beyond losing the coin, almost like she's purposely playing the victim to make you feel bad for her. Can you blame a bird for flying away when winter is on the way? Did the star wander, or did she lose track of it? The last stanza in particular sounded like a very angry, bitter, petty person to me. It sounds like someone who is wasting a lot of energy on negative thoughts and feelings. Instead of looking to herself to see how she could avoid those feelings of betrayal in the future, she's placing all of the blame on someone else and not learning anything. It's also a little pathetic to think that while

she's pining over her lost "star," she's missing out on the other "stars" that the world has to offer.

I don't know if Emily Dickinson intended for the speaker of this poem to be a woman scorned or misguided girl, but I love that it can be interpreted more than one way. I enjoyed the imagery of woods being painted to indicate fall colors and the personification of a star wandering out of the sky. I found it impressive that a poem of this length could have the syllabic pattern that this one had, combined with the sing-songy rhyme pattern. The poem reminded me of Robert Browning's "Porphyria's Lover" because in that poem, a person takes love and admiration too far and in so doing destroys their happiness. (Katie Pruitt)

#248

*Why -- do they shut Me out of Heaven?
Did I sing -- too loud?
But -- I can say a little "Minor"
Timid as a Bird!*

*Wouldn't the Angels try me --
Just -- once -- more --
Just -- see -- if I troubled them --
But don't -- shut the door!*

*Oh, if I -- were the Gentleman
In the "White Robe" --
And they -- were the little Hand -- that
knocked --
Could -- I -- forbid?*



I think Emily Dickinson is saying she feels like a second class citizen, and that men get all the special treatment. Men get to do whatever they want, and even God prefers them over women. God hears men's prayers but not women's. The image here is showing how God prefers men over

women. Emily Dickinson says, "Oh, if I were the gentlemen in the white robe and they were the little hand" (meaning little to no power and authority).

I like the poem and understand where Emily Dickinson is coming from. For many centuries, the white man has considered himself superior to all life with all power and authority. Look how the Native Americans, African Americans, and Asians were treated here in America at the hands of the white man, who thought he was God here on earth. (Eugene Smalls)

#254

*"Hope" is the thing with feathers--
That perches in the soul--
And sings the tune without the words--
And never stops--at all--*

*And sweetest--in the Gale--is heard--
And sore must be the storm--
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm--*

*I've heard it in the chilliest land--
And on the strangest Sea--
Yet, never, in Extremity,
It asked a crumb--of Me.*



Hope is what matters the most in our lives. Hope is what we do not want to lose at any time in our lives. Hope is the most valuable gift that we have received in our lives. The beauty of hope is that it does not have an end. Our hope is like a seed: it will just grow. (Elvira Rodriguez)



With hope and faith there is sunshine after the storm. This poem suggests we hold onto hope and faith during our greatest times of trouble and hardship.

This poem gives me a sense of renewal in hope and faith. There are many times in life that we lose

hope and our faith is tested. Sometimes the trials and tribulations of life may cause so much despair that we give up.

I do agree with the ideas of the poem. I believe that hope gives us strength, drive and determination to keep moving forward. This poem reminds me of the determination and will that Frederick Douglass had when trying to learn to read and escape to be a free man.

I apply many of the concepts of this poem in my talks with my children, saying trouble and hardships accumulate in life; however, you must remain hopeful and full of faith.

(Phyllis Anderson)

#381

*A Secret told—
Ceases to be a Secret—then—
A Secret—kept—
That—can appal but One—*

*Better of it—continual be afraid—
Than it—
And Whom you told it to—beside—*



I enjoyed “A Secret Told.” To tell a secret is to let out something that should be told, and this expresses getting things off your chest that need to be told. How can you bottle something up for so long and not tell anyone? You have to one day. . .
(Jesse Hamilton)



This poem represents trust in sharing a deep, dark secret that she must share, but it is so dark that it shouldn't be shared. Maybe it isn't a secret after all. She asks herself if she shares the secret with someone she trusts, they might just be the person who committed the act kept secret.

Dark secrets are embedded in most. Most of us share, keeping in mind that this person is worthy of telling. We feel that expressing a dark secret will clear our soul, that it will help relieve stress and pain, sometimes even suffering. Holding it in can cause trauma to our daily lives (depending on how dark it is), but relief is what most look forward to.
(Arnella Royal)

#408

*Unit, like Death, for Whom?
True, like the Tomb,
Who tells no secret
Told to Him—
The Grave is strict—
Tickets admit
Just two—the Bearer—
And the Borne—
And seat—just One—
The Living—tell—
The Dying—but a Syllable—
The Coy Dead—None—
No Chatter—here—no tea—
So Babblers, and Bohea—stay there—
But Gravity—and Expectation—and Fear—
A tremor just, that All's not sure.*



The poem is saying Death is here. Be ready because it's coming. There is nothing fancy about it. You have your ticket to go to the other side. You will be going by yourself, just as you are born into this world. It's going to be lonely and fearful. The image is dark, cold, and

strange, not knowing where you are going. It could be heaven or it could be hell; no one knows. You and the bearer, as he accepts your ticket, are in a seat for just one. The dead have no voice, and the living are remembering you.

Death for me would be terrifying: alone in a box, cold, my flesh and clothes rotting off my bones, not knowing if there is an afterlife. Which road should I take? Will my family be there? No one has completely died and come back to tell us how it is.

We live on what we see and feel on the death of another person. It kind of reminds me of Socrates's Allegory of the Cave. How bleak death is! When you are by yourself and you don't have that other half beside you, it's like a living death: bleak and cold and silent. No one is there to fill that void that you have in your heart and mind.

(Samantha East)

#435

Much Madness is divinest Sense—

To a discerning Eye—

Much Sense—the starkest Madness—

'Tis the Majority

In this, as All, prevail—

Assent—and you are sane—

Demur—you're straightway dangerous—

And handled with a Chain—



Emily Dickinson's poem suggests that people think differently; in other words, some people can have excellent and wise ideas and others can have crazy and horrendous ideas. Impartial and objective persons may see common sense (wise ideas) in some of the ideas articulated

by crazy people. In line four, Dickinson suggests that crazy people are the majority. It also appears that the ideas of the crazy people tend to prevail. People who disagree with the majority's ideas are considered dangerous and crazy, and they are chained or sent to mental hospitals! However, lines three and four suggest that even the crazy people may have good ideas. (Beatriz Mairena-Kellman)

#437

Prayer is the little implement

Through which Men reach

Where Presence—is denied them.

They fling their Speech

By means of it—in God's Ear—

If then He hear—

This sums the Apparatus Comprised in Prayer—



Poem #437 gives the reader an answer to how men use prayer to assist them when they encounter problems in life that they themselves can't solve. This practice of prayer is used to assure man of a more favorable outcome. After all, God and God

alone answers prayer and lends his assistance to change things that man can't change... The Bible according to Scripture is the word of God, and if it's followed, all things are possible. In this poem, Emily Dickinson sums up prayer as a tool for man when she writes, "This sums the Apparatus Comprised in Prayer." Prayer is given to men and is designed for their use in overcoming any problems they may encounter in the borrowed time they have in this life.

This poem speaks to my spiritual emotion. I gather that Emily Dickinson has a good understanding of how one should communicate to God in prayer. I would agree that prayer is a tool that God has given to us on this journey of life. This poem reminds me of the entire Odyssey Project in that the program is a psychological tool that we are currently using to assist us in improving or understanding our lives. The Odyssey Project helps promote healthy thought processes, and that's a tool similar to prayer that we will continue to use our entire lives.

There are many ways that this poem can assist me in a more complete, positive change in my life. For me, the fact that a person like Emily Dickinson has beliefs similar to my own is why I adore those with a solid education in their field of choice. Every time I am afforded a chance to gain knowledge, I celebrate so deep inside it lifts my soul.

(Abraham Thomas)

#442

God made a little Gentian—

It tried—to be a Rose—

And failed—and all the Summer laughed—

But just before the Snows

***There rose a Purple Creature—
That ravished all the Hill—
And Summer hid her Forehead—
And Mockery—was still— . . .***

Creator—Shall I—bloom?



God, the Creator, made a little gentian. God's purpose was not for it to be a rose. God has a purpose for us, but we want to do things our way. We as human beings try and fail and get laughed at. . . . Before we take a step ("Creator—shall I—bloom?") we need to ask

God for His direction.
(Marilyn Johnson)

#473

***I am ashamed—I hide—
What right have I—to be a Bride—
So late a Dowerless Girl—
Nowhere to hide my dazzled Face—
No one to teach me that new Grace—
Nor introduce—my Soul--***

***Me to adorn—How—tell—
Trinket—to make Me Beautiful—
Fabrics of Cashmere—. . .
Bring Me my best Pride—
No more ashamed—
No more to hide—
Meek—let it be—too proud—for Pride—
Baptized—this Day—A Bride—***

In this poem, Dickinson shares her fear and excitement about getting married. She compares herself to the fine ladies who marry young, with dowries in hand and beautiful wedding dresses. She is not any of those things. At the end of the poem she is "baptized" a bride, which I believe references



her marriage to God as a man.

Having never been married myself, I was drawn to this poem. It also made me pursue more about her life story in order to understand her life. Seeing she never married, I was able to understand that she wasn't talking about

marrying a man, but rather accepting herself as she was and her decision not to marry.

(Hedi Rudd)

#501

***This world is not Conclusion.
A Species stands beyond—
Invisible, as Music—
But positive, as Sound—
It beckons, and it baffles—
Philosophy—don't know—
And through a Riddle, at the last—
Sagacity, must go—
To guess it, puzzles scholars—
To gain it, Men have borne
Contempt of Generations
And Crucifixion, shown—
Faith slips—and laughs, and rallies—
Blushes, if any see—
Plucks at a twig of Evidence—
And asks a Vane, the way—
Much Gesture, from the Pulpit—
Strong Hallelujahs, roll—
Narcotics cannot still the Tooth
That nibbles at the soul—***

This poem is about God, a positive, righteous God. God is also elusive from the wisest of men that try to figure him out to no avail. They are left puzzled at all of his miraculous ways. For many generations, men have tried to obtain what he has from wisdom to all of his miraculous ways (even today, they desire to create men by way of cloning). But in failing to be like him, they grow in contempt, even despise the crucifixion of Christ. As a result,



they lose faith. But at any sign that there is evidence of a living God, they will grab for support of belief. They often go to senseless measures to find the way. The preacher preaches and the congregations roar. Through it all, there is nothing, not even a drug, that can kill the conscience

or inner being.

I agree and relate to this poem entirely based on my own personal experiences with God. I have been trying to figure out my own purpose and the reasons for my struggles since childhood.

(Juba Moten)

#576

*I prayed, at first, a little Girl,
Because they told me to—
But stopped, when qualified to guess
How prayer would feel—to me— . . .*

*And often since, in Danger,
I count the force 'twould be
To have a God so strong as that
To hold my life for me . . .*



What Emily Dickinson is saying to me in this powerful poem is that she prayed as a child because she was told to by adults who already knew God and how powerful prayer and God were. Once she became old enough, she stopped praying because she was limited on knowing

how prayer worked and how powerful God was.

When she was a child, she wasn't really taking the time to get to know God or his powers, to know that He holds her life in His hands. She didn't understand as a child that prayer worked until God showed her parts of His fair plan for her. It was baffling to her because she saw something that was

unexplainable. That's when she knew how powerful and godly He was.

The poem suggests that by keeping God first in your life and praying to Him, He will answer when He thinks it's time to answer. God doesn't come when you want Him to, but He is always on time.

On a personal level this poem called out to me because she wrote about me and how I am with God. I strayed away from God when I got on my own, and now I am trying to find my way back to Him. This poem is very emotional for me because it is me. . . . I can apply this to my life—to go back to the church because I was at peace when I was involved there. I was calling God on the main line all the time because I was lonely and confused, and all I had was God. **(Nkechi Johnson)**

#650

*Pain—has an Element of Blank—
It cannot recollect
When it begun—or if there were
A time when it was not—*

*It has no Future—but itself—
Its Infinite contain
Its Past—enlightened to perceive
New Periods—of Pain.*



She writes of pain as if it is a living, breathing thing with a past, present, and future. It cannot remember from whence it came, yet it can feel itself as it is “enlightened to perceive New Periods—of Pain.” There is a sense of time for the pain, yet the time it exists in is an infinity that

does not necessarily relate to how we humans think of infinity. This infinity is contained within itself.

I picked this poem because it spoke to me emotionally. When I read it through, it made me tear up, which makes it a good fit for me. I have received and witnessed a lot of pain in my life. Much of this occurred in my childhood, which was particularly brutal.

As I intentionally work on undoing the effects of all this “stuff,” I spend a fair amount of time working on the hurts/pains that were laid on me. They do have an element of “blank” to them—a strange sort of feeling that doesn’t quite have a particular spot, as it is a complex made up of fear, dread, anticipation, and love. The infiniteness of the pain is also a valid description of a feeling for me, as the pain comes and goes of its own volition at times. I often find myself looking for the sources of pains that I can’t define or remember yet I know are there. (Billie Kelsey)

#668

*“Nature” is what we see—
The Hill—the Afternoon—
Squirrel—Eclipse—the Bumble bee—
Nay—Nature is Heaven—
Nature is what we hear—
The Bobolink—the Sea—
Thunder—the Cricket—
Nay—Nature is Harmony—
Nature is what we know—
Yet have no art to say—
So impotent Our Wisdom is
To her Simplicity.*



In this poem, there are three people arguing their point of view about what Nature is. The first person says that Nature is what we can observe around us, such as plants, animals, the sun, or the moon. The second person disagrees and says Nature is like Paradise, a place where you don’t hear

anything but the sound of songbirds, the calm sea, the loud thunder, or the soft crickets. However, the third person has a different point of view and says that Nature is a place like a comfort zone or safety zone...

Nature can be described in many ways, as seasons, creatures and plants that live in nature, or a picture of a peaceful place with no problems. I think there really isn’t a disagreement because everyone

looks at Nature differently. My life is almost like Nature, with good days and bad days, like when the sun shines brightly or when the sky is gloomy and sad so it rains. (Linda Thao)

#919

*If I can stop one Heart from breaking
I shall not live in vain
If I can ease one Life the Aching
Or cool one Pain*

*Or help one fainting Robin
Unto his Nest again
I shall not live in Vain.*



Emily Dickinson is saying that she finds meaning and purpose in her life when she reaches out to help and make a difference in people’s lives, even if it may mean just one person in need.

Robin is the image she uses to describe people.

I think she uses “Robin”

because it is a very familiar bird that builds its nest where people can easily see it, but in most cases it is ignored. In her poem, Emily Dickinson emphasizes “one,” which means that it doesn’t have to be necessarily a group of people you can help that will make you feel useful in this life; even helping one makes life worth living. She uses physical pain to describe emotional things when she says “one heart from breaking”/ “one life the Aching.” In the last stanza when she writes “Or help one fainting Robin/unto his Nest again,” I think she is saying that she finds comfort in reviving people who had lost hope in life. She will help them find a reason to live a meaningful life where they feel contented and secure.

I once worked with orphans at an orphanage, and this poem has reminded me of these kids. Most of them, if they had not been brought to the orphanage, would be living in the streets without any significant future. It feels good to help, even if just to say kind words to cheer someone who is hurting. (Tatenda Bvindi)



If they could bear the hurt of another from all the pain that they were going through, they would. If they could lift any weight or take the heaviness that you feel, they would. If they could lend one a hand in restoring someone to their original state, they would and their life would have

had meaning after all.

I can see myself in this poem. I love to help people realize their worth. I believe my calling in life is to be that listening ear, or the shoulder to lean on when needed. If I can put a smile on someone's face, I'm happy. If I can take away some of their pain, I'm happy. If I can love someone unconditionally in life before I die, then my life would be worth living all the more.

(Lorraine Garrett)

#1455

***Opinion is a flitting thing,
But Truth, outlasts the Sun—
If we cannot own them both—
Possess the oldest one—***



Opinions can change, but the truth always remains the same. If you can't possess both, then the best one to possess is the truth. This can be a guide to quieting one's mind, being a reminder that critical thinking should be stressed before any other types of thoughts.

I agree and like this poem a lot. There are many opinions out there today, many of which lead people astray. I feel as long as your core knows the truth, everything else will end up working out. (Michele Withers)

#1601

***Of God we ask one favor,
That we may be forgiven—***

***For what, he is presumed to know—
The Crime, from us, is hidden—
Immured the whole of Life
Within a magic Prison
We reprimand the Happiness
That too competes with Heaven.***



This short and powerful poem is a beautifully written metaphor for the ignorance of mankind's blessing of life itself. Often in our lives we apologize for imaginary or irrational faults we find in ourselves, when in fact what we see as faults may be our true nature and actual gifts

from God. Society has taught us to keep ourselves guarded and private. We view the world from without our own personal prison: ourselves. By doing so, we are often unable to let the true beauty and power of His gifts within shine out for the world to see. I believe that God wishes us all to shine in our own way and not be ashamed to do so. It is almost as if we are afraid to show our happiness for fear of ridicule because so many others in the world are filled with misery and grief. The light within each of us can shine as bright as heaven if we allow it to do so.

I personally am attracted to this poem, as I have recently begun to reinvent myself into the person that I have always felt I could become. Life has a way of side-tracking us with bills, vehicle troubles, relationship issues, and the like. It is easy to lose track of oneself and fall head first into this dim and dismal abyss if we are not diligently aware of our own thoughts and feelings. I have been recently introduced to the Law of Attraction, which states that "like" attracts "like." If I transmit positive thoughts and feelings of gratitude, they will in return manifest themselves into my life. The world is what we create it to be. I agree with the poem completely and have begun to make changes to bring about the things in my life that I most desire. (Keith Johnson)

This poem is telling me that people don't really



mind screwing up because they can easily ask God for forgiveness and everything will be okay. Even if other people don't know what happened, God saw it so He knows. You can set it straight by asking Him for forgiveness.

Then the poet uses the word "favor," like God is giving out forgiveness like treats. Also when the poet says, "The crime, from us, is hidden / Immured within a magic prison," that shows the poet telling us that people know they're doing wrong and don't care because they can ask for forgiveness to make it all good. When the poet says, "We reprimand the Happiness/That too competes with Heaven," it suggests everything is good now and I can be accepted to heaven.

I agree because I see people doing the same bad thing over and over; then they ask God for forgiveness, even when they hurt people. I think people should think about what they have done and ask themselves if they should be forgiven. **(Donta Starr)**

We ask God for forgiveness of our sins and transgressions. Why, when He is omniscient? Our sins are hidden from us, surrounded by walls that confine us to our daily existence. We pretend that we are happy to be imprisoned in our sins. We chide and ridicule the thought of being happy. We feel that since we have sinned, there is no place for us in heaven.

Why should we ask God for forgiveness of our sins when He knows what we are going to do before we do it? Our lives are surrounded by obstacles which make it hard to live a sinless life. We'd rather be unhappy in our sin, pretending that we don't know any better. We criticize and ridicule people that are happy because we feel that they are sinless. Happiness and repentance of your sins gets you into heaven.

I agree with the idea of asking God to forgive you for your sins and transgressions. God is all

knowing. He knows our thoughts, words, and actions before we do. We give reverence to God when we pray and ask forgiveness of our sins and transgressions. We all sin and fall short of His glory. God will forgive us each and every time we sin. When you sin, you have to repent and pray to God with a sincere heart.

I pray to God every day. I ask Him to forgive me for my sins, known and unknown to me. I would not blame the everyday activities of life on sinful things that people do. You should know right from wrong and good from evil. Sin is sin. There is nothing magical about being imprisoned in anything sinful. How can you be happy in sin? If you repent for your sins, you too can be happy in heaven... **(Marcia Brown)**

#1659

*Fame is a fickle food
Upon a shifting plate
Whose table once a
Guest but not
The second time is set.*

*Whose crumbs the crows inspect
And with ironic caw
Flap past it to the
Farmer's Corn—
Men eat of it and die.*



This poem tackles the upside and downside of fame. Emily Dickinson uses the metaphor of a dinner guest as fame. For a short time the guest is popular and is honored by all at the table. When the second time comes around, fame has lost its appetizing appeal. It becomes mere crumbs that crows don't find at all appealing; rather, they find new fame somewhere else.

I enjoyed this poem. Fame really is fickle and unstable. The famous struggle to stay famous, yet despite their best efforts, fame can easily be taken away or passed on to someone else. **(Brandon McCarey)**

Christmas Spectacular By Marcia Brown

The feel of the Christmas season filled the room with poinsettias lining the front of the stage. Quite a few people were adorned with red attire, including me. There was even a light display of various Christmas memorabilia. When the orchestra and various choirs would sing, on both side walls a picture of snowflakes, Christmas ornaments, candles, and angels would light up. This brought the magical and warm feeling of Christmas to the audience. I was blown away by how many people came to share this wonderful event.

When the conductor of the Madison Symphony Orchestra, John DeMain, appeared on the stage, everyone in the audience clapped long and hard. John DeMain sure knew how to work the crowd! He was a great master of ceremony. He kept us laughing and relaxed. After he acknowledged the first violinist, Midori, the concert began. Midori plays the violin with four bows. Her violin is the 1734 Guarnerius del Gesu "ex-Huberman." While the orchestra played their first selection, "Joy to the World," The Madison Symphony Chorus sang the words. The Symphony Chorus was in rhythmic motion as the singers turned the pages of their hymn books in perfect unison. This showed how strict and disciplined these singers are.

Two Wisconsin alumni were spotlighted in this Christmas Spectacular: Jamie-Rose Guarrine and Kyle Ketelsen. Jamie-Rose graced the stage wearing a stunning red dress. When she sang in her high pitched soprano voice, I imagined a song bird singing a beautiful love song. Kyle Ketelsen resides in Sun Prairie. His bass-baritone voice was electrifying as he sang one of the most popular Christmas songs ever, "The Christmas Song."

There were two Madison Youth Choirs singing at this event. One choir consisted of

middle school age girls. I was surprised to see that no boys were members of this great choir. The girl choir sang "Angels' Carol" with the voices of beautiful angels. The second Madison Youth Choir were older children and consisted of both boys and girls. The young men looked handsome in their black suits, white shirts and ties. The young women looked chic in their black dresses. You could hear and see the professionalism in their voices as they sang "It Was My Father's Custom."

This event consisted of quite a few collaborations of singing and music by the Madison Symphony Orchestra and the Madison Symphony Chorus. My favorite was "Sleigh Ride." Jamie-Rose and Kyle Ketelsen sang a beautiful rendition of "White Christmas" in collaboration with the Madison Symphony Orchestra. When Jamie-Rose Guarrine sang a duet with Oliver, a male soprano from the Madison Youth Choir, it was so wonderful, it brought tears to my eyes. It was so nice, they sang it twice! This performance was so good that the audience gave Jamie-Rose and Oliver a standing ovation.

The Mt. Zion Gospel Choir, directed by Leatha A. Stanley, was the last choir to perform. Oh, what a performance it was! René Robinson, a former Odyssey student, is a member of this tremendous choir.

René Robinson, standing front and center, clapped her hands, rocked back and forth, and smiled as the choir sang "Sing Praises To Thee" in collaboration with the Madison Symphony Orchestra, the Madison Symphony Chorus, Jamie-Rose Guarrine, Kyle Ketelsen, and both Madison Youth Choirs.

I enjoyed attending the concert with my son, Justin.



Christmas Spectacular

By Hedi LaMarr Rudd

I desperately wanted to find a way of thanking my Uncle Tommy for allowing me to take refuge in his and my Aunt Joyce's home during this transitional period in my life. When Emily offered us the opportunity to attend the Madison Symphony Orchestra's Christmas Spectacular, it was the perfect solution. My uncle and I made a date of it, complete with dinner afterwards at a lovely Indian restaurant, trying new foods and enjoying each other's company.

Arriving at the Overture Center for the Arts, I was excited to see so many people coming out to enjoy the music. Our balcony seats were in the center, giving us the perfect view of the orchestra and choir below. The lights dimmed and the music began. Starting with "Joy to the World," I knew that I was not going to make it through the evening without tissue. The music immediately filled me, lifting me even higher than the balcony itself. I peeked at my uncle to see that he too was equally enthralled.

I loved to watch the transitions as the harpist and percussionists came and went throughout the performance. I watched carefully to see when they actually played. I found it interesting that while they were on stage, their instruments only came in during specific points of certain songs; as if providing

exclamation
to the feelings
invoked by the



composition itself. I felt similarly when the opera singers Jamie-Rose Guarrine and Kyle Ketelsen joined and added their voices as instruments, blending in rather than taking over. They were also joined by Oliver Cardona, from the Madison Youth Choir, who sang

soprano with Jamie-Rose. I decided at that moment that I want to talk to my grandson about singing in the choir. It obviously lacked diversity, but I figure that could be for a multitude of reasons. So I won't let the lack of it keep me from seeing if he might be interested.

The highlight of the evening was of course the arrival of the small, but mighty Mt. Zion Gospel Choir, led by Leotha Stanley. I was glad I had my tissue as my emotions welled up not just because of the music, but the sight of the people around me who were equally overcome. It was hard not to clap and be moved by voices that reached every inch of space in the room. Upon entering your soul, the music swelled inside your heart until it jumped out of our clapping hands. There was no fighting it and I didn't see too many people trying.

The performance ended with a group sing-a-long of familiar Christmas songs such as "Deck the Halls" and "Silent Night." My Uncle Tommy and Shaquida, who sat with us, sang along and it

reminded me of being a child again. It also reminded me that I had to share this joy with my grandson as he deserved to have a similar moment in his life as a youth and one day as a man. Thank you very much, Emily and donor Carroll Heideman, for the gift and opportunity.



Should Socrates Have Escaped with Crito?



In “Crito” from Plato’s *Trial and Death of Socrates*, Socrates is visited by one of his close friends, Crito, in the early morning hours on what proved to be the next-to-the-last day of Socrates’s life. Crito hopes to influence his friend to escape the prison in order to

save his own life. Socrates first rejects the offering immediately, stating if it is the will of God, he is willing to die.

Crito continues trying to persuade Socrates to flee the prison, but he is refuted on each attempt by the conviction and principles of his longtime friend and teacher. Crito even tries to use guilt as a means of saving his friend, to which Socrates acknowledges the possibility that the public might look ill upon Crito for not saving him; however, he is not concerned with the opinions of the majority, for they cannot make a man wise or foolish.

Ultimately, Socrates informs Crito that he will maintain his resolve to abide by the principles that he has honored for a long time, remaining true to reason, and will abide by whatever it demands of him. He further states that it can be dangerous to follow public opinion and that the opinion of some people should be regarded, as those of others should

not.

Socrates has been a man of virtue and ethics throughout his life. It would not befit him, his legacy, or the principles he teaches for him to disregard them in order to save his own life. I agree that he made the correct decision for himself; however, if I were faced with the same situation today, I must admit that I would choose to save my own life and flee, continuing to fight for justice until I could return to society with my name and honor restored. I believe my decision is in part due to the state of the world and society as a whole during the years in which I have learned and developed the ethics and values I live and abide by. Ultimately, I am not as enlightened as the great thinker Socrates, although as I grow as an individual I am evermore dedicated to attaining such wisdom and conviction. **(Keith Johnson)**



On an early morning Crito arrives to visit his friend Socrates in prison. As he approaches, Socrates is sleeping. Feeling the weight of his friend’s circumstances, Crito elects not to break this seemingly peaceful rest. Suddenly Socrates awakens



Canova’s *The Death of Socrates*

and is greeted by Crito, who has come to offer his friend a way of escape from imprisonment. Not too surprisingly, Socrates, a man of deep integrity, refuses his friend's offer of escape.

Socrates's decision to refuse Crito's offer to escape was the correct choice, in my opinion. His life work would not have been as purposeful if he had chosen to escape. I believe Socrates understood that in death his teachings would have a lasting effect on all those who believed in his life as a man of principle.

After reading about the relationship between Socrates and Crito, one could argue that teaching was not something that Socrates does for a nine-to-five job; he lived being a philosopher. In my opinion, the philosophy today is paper thin. As a result, our current society suffers because many of those who are leaders lack integrity. The people of influence and power—the one percent on Wall Street—are the clearest example of people who have abandoned the spirit of integrity. (**Abraham Thomas**)



Crito offers to pay for and facilitate Socrates's escape from prison days before Socrates is to be executed. Socrates argues with Crito, and they run through every possible scenario, finally deciding that the only honorable outcome is for Socrates to remain in prison and follow through on his sentence.

If Socrates escapes, he knows he will be banned from Athens, and his friends and children could have their property seized and may be driven into exile. Most likely, word will spread to wherever he goes, and people will look down upon him.

Crito brings up how it would look to some people to think that Socrates's friends didn't help him escape death. Socrates makes Crito realize that the opinions of the masses don't matter; it's the opinions of good men only that matter, and good men will know the truth.

Crito also asks about the welfare of Socrates's children if the execution goes through, but Socrates doesn't think that it would be wise to take his children out of Athens, the country he loves. . . .

Crito thinks at first that it is all right to break the law because it is an unjust law that sentenced Socrates to death. Socrates makes him realize that it is never okay to wrong someone who wronged you and that Socrates agreed to the laws of Athens when he chose to live there.

I think Socrates made the right decision because tossing aside his morals when in the face of death would have discredited everything he stood for in life and everything he said during his trial. He knew that death was a probability, and he was unmovable in his resolve to live honorably to the end. When he tells Crito that he would like to take his offer but first needs to talk things out and decide whether or not to escape, I think he's only saying that for Crito's benefit. He wants his friends to understand more clearly after he is gone. (**Katie Pruitt**)



I enjoyed reading "Crito." What a power-packed 12 pages! Crito offers Socrates an opportunity to escape the prison with his natural life intact. There were so many loyal and loving followers who would have done whatever it took to help Socrates escape

and continue speaking out.

Socrates refuses this offer because he felt that it would be wrong to escape, even though he was being wronged. He told Crito that we can't follow only the laws we went to follow, "returning evil for evil," "breaking covenants and agreements." . . .

I do think he made the right decision, though his stance cost him "a little more life." Socrates's life and decision to not escape made him more of a man because he laid down his natural life, which very few humans ever need to do. How brave he was! His life stirred the life of great people like Martin Luther King, Jr. (**Yetta Harris**)



... Crito offers Socrates the opportunity to escape with the help of friends and money. Socrates refuses Crito because of his strong beliefs. He is an honorable man with virtue, and he has no fear of the prospect

of death. Socrates believes that escaping is a form of retaliation and doing so would be doing wrong.

I do think Socrates made the right decision. Socrates believes his pending death is God's will. . . . Socrates further believes that escaping would cause the suffering of those that may help him. Socrates accepts his fate with honor and the lack of fear. **(Phyllis Anderson)**

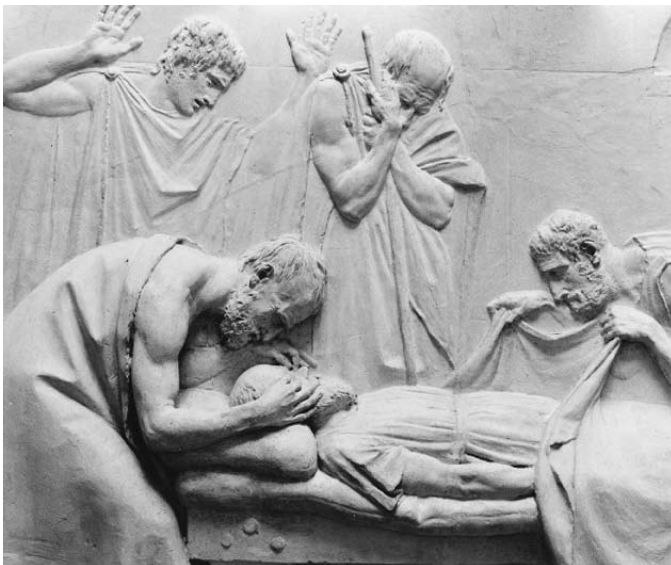


Crito came to Socrates's prison cell to offer him the chance to escape. He even told him that he has friends in Thessaly that will look out for him and keep him safe from other people. The reason Socrates didn't escape is because he felt if he left he would be deprived of

his rights of being able to do good by teaching his people. He didn't care what others were thinking of him as long as he was doing what he felt was right.

I would have left and kept on practicing on the low and on the run. In a way Socrates was right by staying true to the law, but he should have run for it because what's a law if it's unjust? Plus I would have wanted to escape no matter what if I felt the ruling was wrong and I got the sentence of death. **(Donta Starr)**

Crito offered Socrates help to escape before his execution. Socrates said, "it would be wrong



**Canova's *The Death of Socrates* in detail:
Crito closing the eyes of Socrates**



(Samantha East)

to disobey even unjust laws." . . . Yes, Socrates made the right decision. . . . He was standing up for moral justice. Socrates viewed it shameful and hypocritical to run away. He was not a law breaker, and virtue is the only thing that is important.



(Tai'Kiah Phillips)

. . . I kind of agree with Socrates. When you grow up somewhere, you never have a problem with their laws until you're the one in trouble. Just like he said, he had plenty of time to leave and take his children and family elsewhere if he wasn't content with his



Crito offers Socrates a means to escape his imprisonment. Socrates refuses Crito's plan for him to escape the Athens prison because he does not want to undo an evil by causing another evil. Crito and some of Socrates's friends are willing to buy Socrates's freedom from prison. Socrates feels that the Athens court was wrong for finding him guilty of a crime he did not commit. Socrates is a man of honor and a law abiding citizen. He was found guilty by a court of law; therefore, he feels that he should accept the punishment given to him. Socrates taught right versus wrong and good versus evil. Socrates believes that he would be going against his own beliefs if he escapes the prison.

I think that Socrates made the right decision not to escape. I feel that since Socrates lived his life speaking about his belief in God, good versus evil, and right versus wrong, he should die by these same beliefs. I think that Crito's conscience was eating him up. He was worried that people would think that he chose money and property over his

friendship with Socrates. Crito should have come forward with this same plan to save Socrates at the time of the trial. God will have the last judgment. It would have been wrong for Socrates to escape the Athens prison. It was wrong for the Athens court to imprison Socrates for a crime that he did not commit. Two wrongs do not make a right. (**Marcia Brown**)



In this dialogue Crito offers Socrates freedom, but freedom that comes with a price. Crito wants to break Socrates out of the prison in which he is being held and where he will be put to death. Socrates has morals. He has commitments not only to God but to the government

of Athens. Breaking these commitments will cause great grief on Socrates's heart. He'll have let himself down, but mostly he'll have let the God he believes in down. All of his perseverance to tell the truth will be thrown out the door. He will be a hypocrite in the eyes of the people to whom he was spreading the good news. I feel that he made the right choice. (**Arnella Royal**)



... Socrates tells Crito not to worry about what others think. He says, "But why, my dear Crito, should we care about the opinion of the many? Good men, and they are the only persons who are worth considering, will think of these things truly as they happened."

Socrates carefully examines his options and the way his sentence was arrived at with Crito. In the end he makes it clear that to impose any will other than the will of the State would be against his beliefs and teachings and all that is good. Crito agrees. In his heart he disagrees, but Socrates's arguments are sound. I think he made the right decision in terms of respecting the law, but it makes you wonder about the law sometimes! It is a lesson for the ages in that it illustrates how too much government control can have unjust consequences. (**Hedi Rudd**)



McCarey)

...I feel that Socrates made the right decision. If he truly believes in his teachings, then dying for them should not be out of the question. He thought about the consequences of an exiled life and felt his death would be more suitable than a life on the run. (**Brandon**



bad example to the youth. (**Lorraine Garrett**)

...Socrates did not want to do anything that would label him as doing wrong. He believed if you make a promise then you need to keep it. He had made an oath to the Gods that no matter what the verdict or penalty was, he would accept it. He also did not want to set a



... I believe Socrates should have taken Crito's offer because he can do more good alive than dead, and because he has children and would miss their growing up. I feel he is running instead of fighting for what he believes in. (**Nkechi Johnson**)



...I believe Socrates made the right decision because he stood on what he believed and felt about God. I would have escaped because I enjoy life and would have been scared to die.

(**Shaquida Johnson**)



Crito offers Socrates help to escape. Socrates turns the offer down because it is not the will of God. If he were supposed to live, he would have been found not guilty. (**Run Barlow**)



for himself.
(**Billie Kelsey**)

...I think that the decision to accept his death sentence was consistent with Socrates's life as he had lived it to that point. He examined the choices he had made during his life as to where to live and travel, how he was educated, and under what governing circumstances. Socrates made the right choice



what it is. To prolong his stay and fight against the wicked just isn't worth it.
(**Yolanda Cunningham**)

...Socrates believed that it is God's will for his life to end. I believe he made the right decision. He is an old man who has lived a full life. He has obtained much wisdom. He has seen the foolishness of the world, as well as the things of the wise. I believe he knows that the world will always be



of thinking. In the end, Crito knows Socrates won't change his mind. Also Crito knows Socrates is justified in his decision making.
(**Terry Hart**)

...Yes, Socrates made the right decision. All of the examples Socrates gives Crito are logical and justified. Socrates is sure of himself and his relationship with God. . . . In this decision making process Socrates looks at this plan from every angle. . . . Socrates wanted Crito to come full circle with his way



...Socrates believes in not breaking the law but letting God be the final judge. Socrates does not want to run away from his problems but face them head-on without

endangering others. I believe he made an excellent decision.

(**Kenya Moses**)



by escaping.
(**Juba Moten**)

...I strongly believe that Socrates was in all his wisdom a man of strong morals and values. He stood firmly on his ground and refused to be moved and/or shaken. He was fearless of men, yet he was concerned what men would think of him and say if he reduced himself to a criminal



people, he didn't, and I don't think that was a wise idea. The words he was preaching and the actions he was taking didn't add up in my eyes.
(**Bradley Barner**)

...I would definitely say had I been Socrates, I would have chosen the other way [escape] and fought all the way for what I believed in, not just for myself but for my friends, fans, and future people to come along. . . . When he has a chance to get away and keep fighting for and with his



say, "You see, I told you he was false, wicked, a hypocrite, a liar, and most of all a coward." Socrates would be alive in hiding on the run from the law, living in disgrace, with no character or integrity. He would be a bad example to all his followers.
(**Eugene Smalls**)

I think Socrates made the right decision because first of all the righteous need not fear death (we know death will come to all men; it is a part of life, like a caterpillar turns into a beautiful butterfly). Secondly, if Socrates escaped, the evil and wicked who condemned him will feel justified and

posterity
 enfranchise
 dishearten
 apathy
 apologists
 earnest
 precipitancy
 entitle
 vile
 strenuously
 discourse
 tyrant

Odyssey Alumna: Tineisha Scott, Class of 2004

Being a part of the Odyssey Project has been a blessing for me. The Odyssey Project is not just a class you take or credits you earn. It is much more than that: it's inspiring, powerful, joyful; a place where you can be safe and not be judged, it's where you feel like you belong (a family).

I was raised primarily by my mother. My father was in and out of prison my entire life. As a young child I witnessed domestic abuse, crime, drug addiction, and many other tragic events. As an adolescent I began having children at 19. After I had my second child, I realized that I wanted something different for my children than I had as a youngster, so I decided to go to school. I started out at MATC taking six credits a semester. Shortly after, I applied to the Odyssey Project and was invited to join the class. I went on to complete a four year degree at Edgewood College. In May of 2006 I received a BS in Psychology.

Since then I have received my social worker certification. Through my employment, I provide a lead role in implementing social service coordination by providing ongoing comprehensive support and case management services to assigned families.

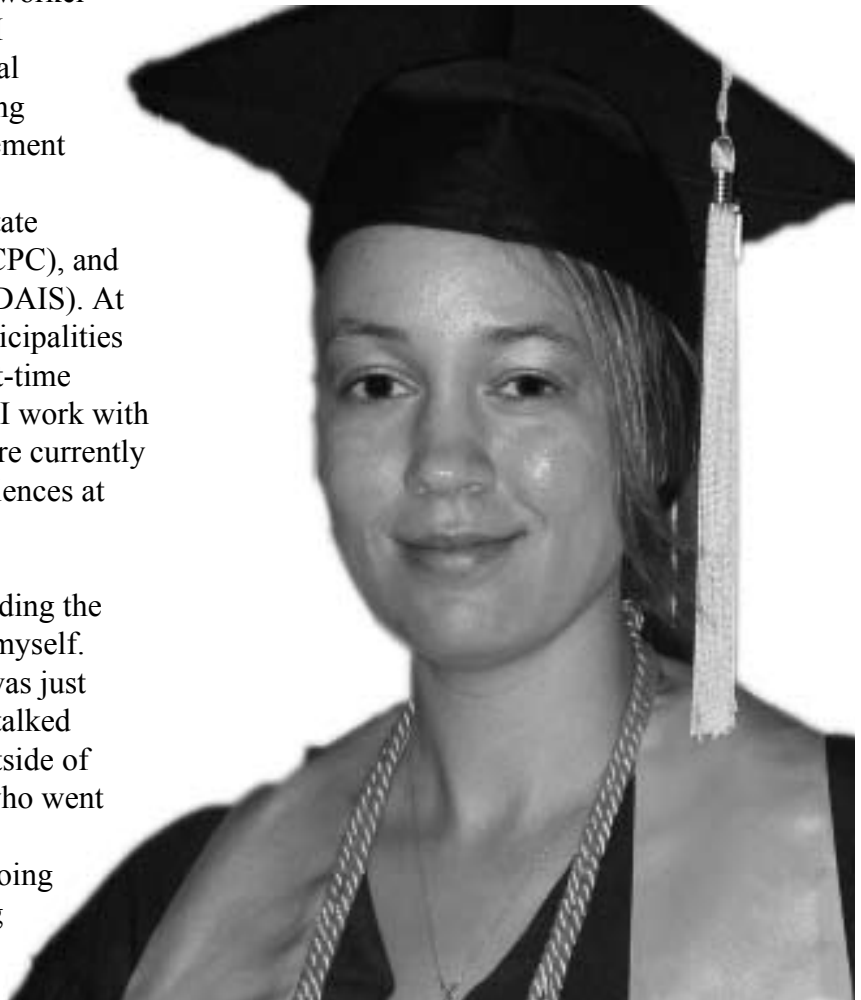
I have worked for the Secretary of State (SOS), Dane County Parent Council (DCPC), and Domestic Abuse Intervention Services (DAIS). At the SOS I oversaw all changes with municipalities in Wisconsin. At DCPC I work with first-time mothers and their children, and at DAIS I work with women and children who have been or are currently being abused. I enjoyed all of my experiences at my jobs.

The Odyssey Project has contributed significantly to my success. Before attending the Odyssey Project I had no confidence in myself. Coming from my circle of life, college was just something no one did and no one really talked about. Going to college was stepping outside of the box for me. I did not know anyone who went to college, so when I began I didn't have anyone who could relate to what I was going through. I didn't have anyone supporting me. I found that with the Odyssey Project –people who supported me and

could relate to what I was going through. I found people to share my successes with; people who gave me the tools I needed to succeed. The Odyssey Project gave me the strength I needed to continue and complete my education. The Odyssey Project stayed by my side until I got that BS; they didn't just disregard me after I completed their course. I have truly been blessed by being able to be a part of the Odyssey Project. Thank you for choosing me as a 2003-2004 Odyssey student!

As a way for me to be able to still be a part of the Odyssey Project, I started a community resource book for current Odyssey students.

Tineisha is enrolled in Edgewood's Marriage and Family Therapy graduate school program. She is working for the Dane County Parent Council as a family advocate and as a social worker for the department of corrections while raising three daughters.



Holiday Memories

Christmas

When we were young, my two brothers, two sisters, and I would sit around the kitchen table, covered with newspaper so the paint didn't spill on the table. We painted white ceramic ornaments my mother bought from the dollar store. Everything we used—the paint, paintbrushes, and glitter—all came from the dollar store. We had so much fun painting candy canes, kids throwing snowballs, and gingerbread houses. (**Run Barlow**)

One year my mom and sister and I lived in Milwaukee and were not financially able to have a regular Christmas. We decided to be creative instead. My sisters and I organized a variety show, sang songs, and acted out parts of the Twelve Days of Christmas, changing the items into funny things like twelve roaches climbing up the wall, etc. We gave each other things of our own that the others coveted. For dinner, we prepared whatever was in the house, lit candles, and listened to Christmas music. (**Hedi Rudd**)

Holidays have long been sad times for me, but I do remember a single Christmas that was the way I surely imagined each Christmas should be. I was eight and my sister six. There was a beautiful tree. It was huge, to my eight-year-old self—maybe five feet tall. This tree took up most of our tiny living room. Our little family picked out this tree together. Our mom was in such a good mood, and she allowed us to decorate the tree. I was so careful to get everything perfectly distributed on the tree.

I wanted to keep mom happy and enjoying this Christmas. I was so careful with the tinsel, even standing on the chair to get all the way around. Mom took pictures of the tree, saying how pretty it was. I just remember being happy because everyone was happy. (**Yetta Harris**)

I have beautiful memories of Christmas holidays in Peru. All my brothers and their families came to my mother's home. We always arrived around 8 AM to start eating breakfast with my parents. My mother made hot chocolate with cocoa, cinnamon, and milk to serve to us. Also she made bread for our breakfast.

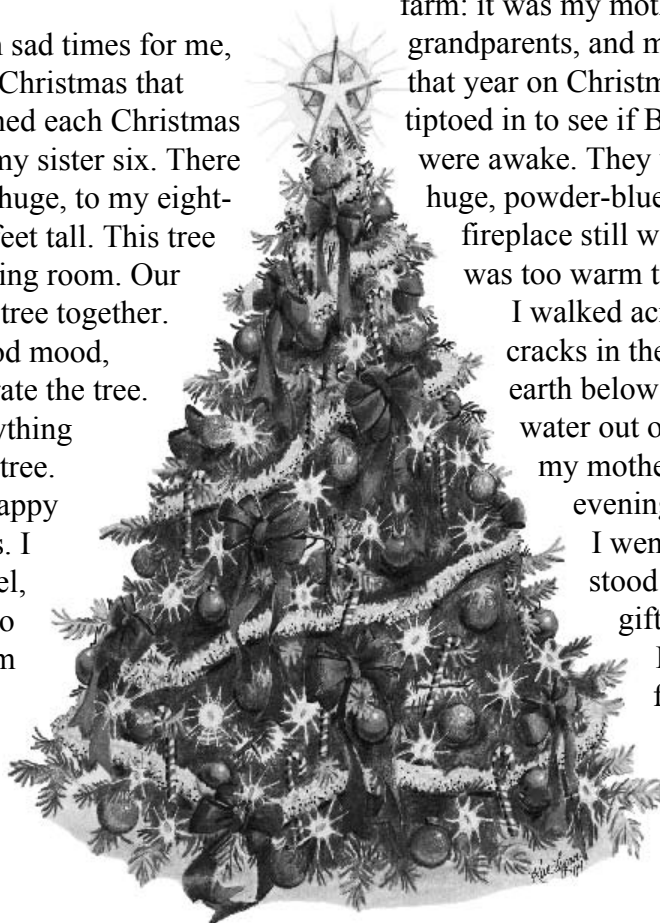
After our breakfast, my brother started buying the ingredients for the fiesta, and the ladies started preparing the house for the party. We prepared turkey for dinner and bread with dried fruit. We started eating at midnight. Only the children opened their presents, and adults started to dance to a lot of music—salsa, pop, and different kinds of music. We danced until 5 AM. It makes me very happy to have good memories. (**Beatriz Mairena-Kellman**)

The holiday that I remember most is waking up early Christmas morning and going into my great-grandparents' bedroom/living room to see if they were awake. We lived on my great grandparents' farm: it was my mother, baby sister, my great-grandparents, and me. It was unusually warm that year on Christmas Day in Louisiana. I tiptoed in to see if Big Momma and Big Daddy were awake. They were still asleep in their huge, powder-blue iron bed. The huge brick fireplace still was unlit and quiet because it was too warm to be lit.

I walked across the hall looking at the cracks in the plank floor and seeing the earth below. I only stopped to get some water out of the water bucket that my mother drew from the well that evening.

I went into the room. There stood the Christmas tree with gifts under it. My sister and I always got fruit and nuts for Christmas; that was our special treat. Funny I hadn't remembered a tree in the room; it's as if it had popped up overnight.

I woke up my mom and



sister so we could open our gifts. That year I got a bike. I was so happy and got to ride it around the yard, in the paddock, and around the smoke house.

Then mid-morning my sister and I would sit on the steps eating an orange and cracking nuts. My mom would open the hardest one with a hammer. That one was my favorite. I asked my mom what it was called, and she said it was called a “nigger toe.” Later I found out it is called a Brazil nut.
(**Samantha East**)

I have a sad memory of Christmas Eve, 1995. It was my first and only arrest.

After loud arguing, shouting, and swearing, my now ex-husband proceeded to slap me very hard in my face. He then started to punch me in my lower stomach and kicked me in the back. We had only just moved to Fitchburg, Wisconsin, in the middle of October. I thought things would be different, with no more fights and ugly name calling. I was so wrong.

I refused to accept being punched in the face or kicked in the back, so I fought back. For the first time in nine long, miserable years, I refused to take it any longer. In the end, I went to jail. *To be continued. . .* (**Phyllis Anderson**)

When you say the phrase “childhood holiday,” my “last” Christmas immediately comes to mind. I say it was my last Christmas, although I was about ten years old when it happened, and Christmas has come every year since then.

Being the youngest of four children, I was the last to find out the truth about Santa Claus; that he didn’t exist. When the rest of the family could stop pretending for my behalf, Christmas lost its magic, and it hasn’t been restored. I still have the memory of the specialness that it once held. I hope to keep that forever and create a similar effect for my children.

My siblings and I used to fight all day long, every day, but on Christmas Eve we would always receive a movie as a gift from our parents and watch it together. Then we would sleep in my brother’s bed together, which was special because normally my sisters and I were not allowed anywhere near his bedroom.

In the middle of the night, I woke up thirsty,

and my brother took me downstairs to get a drink of water. In the living room we saw the stockings full of candy and toys and all of the presents under the tree. Santa had even left the lights twinkling on the tree all night long to make the scene even more glowing. We didn’t touch a thing and snuck back upstairs to bed.

Even though I now know that my brother had been going along with the Santa story for my sake, I swear he could not have been faking the look of excitement and awe on his face that night. Most likely his belief in miracles had been sparked by experiencing it with me. (**Katie Pruitt**)

Christmas Eve after being up all night wrapping gifts, I felt something in the air. As my pager went off, fear took over me as I knew what it meant. As I called out to my husband that it was time, he ran down the noisy stairs, grabbed his keys, and we were off.

On our way I made several calls to others to meet us at the home. We gathered round as our mother lay unable to move. We all began to say our goodbyes. All of a sudden, she sat straight up and began to look at each of us. She made it around the whole bed. When she got to me, she smiled, lay down, and went home with the Lord. (**Lorraine Garrett**)

Christmas 1990 and my stepdad was on a rampage again. Pig: that was his street name. He came in the house and slammed our turkey, dressing, and cranberry sauce on the floor. “You mother f***ers!” were his exact crazy words. Everyone in the house started crying but not me: his evil ignorance wasn’t going to steal my holiday bliss! Ten minutes later he walked out of the house and left. I picked up our meal and tried to cheer everyone up. Smiles slowly began to come across my sisters’ and brothers’ faces. All we could do was laugh at my dumb stepdad. To this day, we all sit and laugh about that day. (**Kenya Moses**)

The first six Christmases of my son Ian’s life we traveled to Seattle, Washington, to visit my mom and sister. The winter he was seven I decided to stay in Madison. We bought a small tree and decorated it with homemade ornaments, including

some made from walnuts and glitter and a long chain of interlocking paper circles. We put out rice milk and gluten free cookies for Santa, wrapped our few presents, and went to bed early.

Waking up Christmas morning was like a dream. There was snow on the ground and in the trees, and it looked like winter! We emptied our stockings first while eating cookies and drinking hot cocoa in bed. Then we opened our few presents from me, Santa, and Ian, and ate more cookies. When we were done with the gifts and had cleaned up a bit, Ian said, "This is the best Christmas ever." I haven't traveled for Christmas since. (**Billie Kelsey**)

A majority of Hmong families don't celebrate Christmas. Most Hmong families don't even know what Christmas is. Celebrating Christmas with my family is like a special gift that Santa has given to me. I remember my siblings and I would hang candy canes on the Christmas tree the night before Christmas day. We would wake up at five in the morning, eat the candy canes, and stay up until we were able to open presents. Every Christmas year, my dad would play music and record us while we opened our presents as a family. I will never forget this holiday moment with my beloved family. (**Linda Thao**)

New Year's Eve

A bad New Year's Eve happened on December 31, 2003. I was on my way to church. I was at the bus stop waiting for the bus. I was kidnapped, robbed, and raped for several hours. I wished for death, but it did not come. Now every New Year's Eve I go to church early to bring in the New Year. I still fear New Year's Eve. (**Yolanda Cunningham**)

Birthdays

I remember when I turned eight years old, money was real tight. My mom wasn't working and we were on welfare, so there wasn't any extra money, only enough for rent and utilities. Mom told me that there probably wouldn't be any birthday presents but she might have something left over for a cake and ice cream.

I didn't understand, so I was very angry. I began to act up, just doing all type of stupid stuff, until mom was fed up and whipped my butt. I thought to

myself, this is the worst birthday I have ever had. I was feeling really bad, was very low in spirits, and my pride was hurt.

What really made me so mad was that everybody in my neighborhood was having birthday parties, everybody but me.

So while I was feeling sorry for myself, the doorbell rang. My mom opened the door. It was my older sister, Johnnymae, and she had a big package under her arm. I got happy because I knew it was a birthday present for me. My sister bought me a 007 Secret Agent Gun (it was five guns in one).

This was the best and funniest present I ever had. The most fun I ever had was with that Secret Agent Gun. I felt like I was James Bond. (**Eugene Smalls**)

I remember it like it was yesterday. It was 2006 on my 36th birthday. It was a good year. I had finally gotten a new job, and I had my health and my family. I also had a productive relationship going and we had a one-year-old son. We were finally on track.

My birthday is five days before Christmas, and we had planned to celebrate my birthday together. I



fell ill, so I chose not to celebrate until I felt better. The next thing I knew he was on the phone talking to one of his buddies making plans to go out and party without me! . . . At 3 AM I got a call from an officer: "I have your boyfriend down here at the Northside Police Station." I leapt out of bed and replied, "What has he done now?" He said, "He was drunk driving, tore up the PDQ fence, and wrecked your brand new van." Let's just say I did not have a happy birthday! (**Arnella Royal**)

I will always remember my 16th birthday! It was truly amazing from the time I woke until the time I finally went to sleep. The morning of my 16th birthday started out so awesome. I was awakened by my mother with her routine pulling of my nose. I got up and went downstairs, and my entire family was there and so was my girlfriend, six friends, and my football coach. They sang happy birthday to me, and then we ate chocolate chip pancakes and ice cream. Keep in mind this was at 7 AM.

That entire day went so well. At school they announced my birthday over the loud speaker. I actually got to leave school early, and my family and I went bowling that night and had burgers. It was a day I will never forget! That night when we arrived home I remember just being overwhelmed and so appreciative. I knew that I was special to my family and friends. (**Terry Hart**)

I remember two birthdays ago I just knew it was going to be a memorable birthday for me. I have six sisters and five children. I'm used to a call saying, "Happy Birthday, Sis. I love you," or "Happy Birthday, Mom. We love you." But it truly was a birthday unlike any other.

My two daughters came from out of town just to take me out to eat. My favorite restaurant is Red Lobster's. I got a beautiful purse from another daughter. All of my sisters but one called and told me happy birthday and that they loved me. My five children joined us at my favorite restaurant, along with nine grandchildren. It truly was a blessing. Sometimes when you think your children aren't thinking about you, you have to wait and be patient. That's what I learned. (**Marilyn Johnson**)

I had an unlikely but beautiful birthday on May

19, 2011. This year has been really beautiful for two reasons.

First, I had a surprise birthday party at my house for the first time in my life. It was the most wonderful feeling I have ever felt.

Second, I am really thankful for this year and God for what has been happening in my life. I have Odyssey in my life, and it will be the light of my future, helping me come back to school and obtain my career. (**Elvira Rodriguez**)

On my 41st birthday, April 14, 1996, I received a life-changing phone call. I did not go to work on that day. I laid in my bed and listened to the phone ringing off the hook. I presumed the phone calls were from family members and friends wishing me "Happy Birthday." At 9:30 AM, I decided to get out of bed and listen to all my phone calls. The first message I answered was from my eldest sister, Renee. She informed me that my grandmother passed away at 7:30 AM on April 14th, my birthday. I was devastated! . . . (**Marcia Brown**)

It was a birthday both to remember and forget. In 1995, I had finally reached a long-awaited day . . . my 21st birthday. A couple of years prior to this day, I had been traveling around the country following the Grateful Dead rock band and others from time to time. The tour ended in Orlando, Florida, just prior to my birthday and the beginning of Jazz Fest in New Orleans. I was on top of the world, living temporarily in Key West, Florida, and on my way to celebrate my 21st birthday in New Orleans.

Upon arrival in "The Big Easy," things were going great. I had a pocket full of money, which I made from selling glass artware, mostly pipes, and a lot of my friends around me.

One morning I spotted . . . Lenny Kravitz. After talking with him and listening to a few songs he sang us along the riverbank, I noticed my friend Ryan had disappeared. I did not see him for the next two days until he ran out of money and needed me to get it from our account. Another day and there was no Ryan. Again he showed up late at night needing more money. Little did I know that he was smoking crack and spent almost all of the money we earned all summer long (\$60,000). After the third time, I refused, and he surprised me by hitting



me in the face in the middle of Bourbon St. So I got my butt kicked and lost \$60,000 on my 21st birthday. **(Keith Johnson)**

Mother's Day

It was March, 1989. I was 19 and just had my first son. I was scared and very full of many other mixed emotions. Most of my family had put pressure on me that I was too young to care for someone else and should consider adoption. I didn't know what to do. I wanted to please my family, but I wanted to keep and raise my son. I knew that without family support it'd be very difficult to raise him and be happy.

I had decided (with the pressure of my family) that I would place him in foster care, but with no definite outcome to be decided. This turned out to be the right decision as I was pretty sick and weak after having him. As my strength increased, my visits with him increased. I spent more and more time with him.

On Mother's Day, 1989, I made the decision, even with the support of my family, to bring this little boy home with me forever.

Just a note: *forever* may have been the wrong word, as he's 22 and still home with me, but I love it! **(Michele Withers)**

Graduation Day

Graduation day June 12, 1987, at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma, celebrated completion of the basic training field artillery school, which included 10-day air assault training. Some of us earned bloodwings, which consisted of an air birds pendant

smack against the chest that produced two blood spots. "Oooh, ahhh," we all chanted.

Team training was like the rites of passage training course which you didn't complete unless all assigned soldiers finished the task together: the quarterly 25-mile road march with full web gear and weapons (total weight 60 pounds). My body ached in places I didn't know existed. You were sure to be motivated by a friendly drill instructor: pushups, pushups, and more pushups, early morning situps, running, and more pushups.

Finally my class wore dress uniforms, tall and sharp; each was a new person, a new man. United States soldiers, we travel any place in the world in 24 hours, ready to defend Mother Liberty. **(Abraham Thomas)**

Fourth of July

I used to love the Fourth of July as a little kid growing up in Joiner, Arkansas. I would wake up to the banging and booming sounds of fireworks and the sweet, smoky smell of juicy, finger-licking ribs on the hot grill. I was so excited about the Fourth of July that I would try to rush outside, but my mom would catch me and tell me to go take a bath before going out to play. I never understood why I had to get clean on the Fourth of July because I was going to get covered with dirt and barbeque sauce.

We would put rockets into bottles and shoot them in the sky and sometimes at each other, which was not safe, but we were having fun. Sometimes we would play far away from the adults because we could get away with blowing up stuff like we were some type of mad scientist. We would even save old remote control cars that no longer worked and blow them up along with baby dolls.

My favorite two fireworks as a kid were the snake and the Roman candle. The snake seemed as if it would never stop growing after you lit it on fire. It was stinky, and after it was done you could pick it up. It looked like a burnt snake but was nothing but ash. I would crush it and rub it all over my hands and face like I was a warrior. I would hold the Roman candle in my hand and shoot it into the sky. My brother and his friend used to say I was crazy because you were supposed to put it in the ground to shoot it in the air.

I also like that on the Fourth of July everybody seems happy even if they don't celebrate it. People are smiling, saying hi to each other, and watching each other light fireworks that dance in the sky to the rhythmic booms as if there's no worry. It's as if at the time everybody is carefree except the parents of the kids lighting the fireworks.

I still like the Fourth of July because it brings the family together for some fun, but nowadays instead of lighting a lot of fireworks I am manning the grill. I make chicken and ribs with my homemade barbeque sauce. It's fun watching my sisters' kids play with fireworks and smile all crazy when they see a big boom in the sky, as my nephews Jesse and James would say. I always called it the dancing fire in the sky because the fireworks are different colors and they are dancing and popping to the booms.

On the morning of the Fourth of July, I wake up thinking and saying it's going to be a lovely day. Fireworks, good barbeque, and happy people: that's why I love the Fourth of July. (**Donta Starr**)

Zimbabwean Independence

April 18 is a day when Zimbabweans got their independence. One holiday I vividly remember is when my mother got stung by wasps. She had gone to the garden to pick tomatoes so that she could prepare a delicious meal for the family. By the time she got home, her face was badly swollen and she could not manage to prepare the meal. We had to walk to a nearby clinic because she was badly

swollen and her eyes were closing.
(**Tatenda Bvindi**)

Thanksgiving

This year I had a horrible Thanksgiving because I was not around my family. I spent the whole holiday in bed due to my medical condition. I was in a lot of pain physically and mentally. On top of the pain, no one called me to say "Happy Thanksgiving!" I did not even cook or even eat because I was not in the mood and could not move. I was not only lonely but sad that I did not call my family either. So hopefully during this next holiday I can see my family or just call them to hear their voices. Hearing from my family is just as good as seeing them. (**Jesse Hamilton**)

The day before Thanksgiving, I woke up to a number of emotions. Anyone that knows me knows that I CANNOT cook, yet my mother wanted me to cook! So . . . I eased downstairs in my pajamas and began to start my journey.

First, she had me picking greens. I had done this before so this was a piece of cake. Next I had to clean the chitterlings, cook the macaroni, and bake the caramel cake. All those things seemed easy until the smell of the chitterlings gave me a headache, the macaroni was overcooked, and the cake kept falling over. My mother somehow rearranged things so everything still came out good.

(**Tai'Kiah Phillips**)





Father and the Son

By Keith Johnson

Tick, Tock; one, two, three...
Rhyme is rhythm's jubilee.
The child's cry will hurt my eye,
And wash away the fear from me.

Back to joy, my little boy's toy,
Left on the floor next to his door.
Rhyme and flow, so you know,
My heart still beats inside with glee.

Wrong decisions, who knows what's right,
As we pray to God tonight...
For strength and wisdom we do not have; we
seek, therefore we ask...
Rejoice in truth, and do His tasks,
just a test; it will not last.

Smiles abound without a frown,
though tough it seems to eyes like mine;
I keep on going to show the way...
In time... my son will take care of Me
someday.



To My Fellow Odysseians

By Terry Hart

To my knowledge, I have never met a more gracious group of human beings. From the time we boarded this ship, the constant love and care have been most obvious. The exchange of information has been most rewarding.



I welcome this challenge in my life. I will search, find, explore, think, learn, and store all facts consumed. I will apply all of these as fully as possible! I will also strive to enlighten and enhance daily.

I hope I haven't been smothering, for I adore each and every one of you entirely. Continued success to all on this journey. Enjoy the voyage! Seek and ye shall find. Carpe Diem!