

# Odyssey Oracle

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# Considering Second Semester

***Stay tuned for the Oracle of January 19, 2011, to find out who said the following:***

“Because of this class, I’m throwing off the bowlines, sailing away from the safe harbor, and catching the trade winds in my sails. I know what I want and what I need to make my dreams come true, and this is the start.”

“I have more of a yearning for learning again. Being in this class, I am starting to have more confidence and have started to live again.”

“I really enjoy being in Odyssey. This class has made me use my brain more and more, and now I am a speeding train that will not stop. . . . I love my classmates. I love my instructors. I love the staff.”

“People look at me differently when I speak and they listen to the excitement in my voice when I talk about the program and how Odyssey alumni have gone on to obtain higher education and degrees from the UW-Madison and other institutions of higher learning.”

“It gives me so much hope when I come to class because I see the strong individuals who come to class week after week giving their all, no matter the setbacks.”

“I am determined to finish this course and get all that I can get out of it.”

“I should be allowed to continue this journey because I understand the importance of bettering myself and striving to be more than I am today. I’m ready to grow.”

“Now my interests have expanded from when I began this Odyssey. I love to read, and I am a writer filled with stories to share.”

“Every Wednesday I look forward to coming to class, hearing Edwina’s laugh, seeing Emily’s smile, and smelling the great food.”

“I’m more confident in myself. Odyssey has helped me to learn things I thought I would never learn. . . . I’m looking forward to next semester!”

“When I got accepted into Odyssey, I felt elated, excited, and empowered and still do. In addition I feel excellent, efficient, and even exalted. I feel Odyssey has raised my senses, my self esteem, and my ability to do more. I must be in Odyssey next semester—I need to, and I can’t stop now.”

“I want to be here second semester because I still want more in life than what I have now. I have not been a consistent student this fall semester, but I am getting better.”

“I’ve been in the mud too long. Now I’m coming out and washing off. Please bear with me and don’t give up on me!”

“Thanks for feeding my mind with Henrietta Lacks, Socrates, Frederick Douglass, The Bill of Rights, William Blake, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry... and interesting, different vocabulary words every week. . . and so much more . . . I can’t go back to where I was before, trapped in a cave with no real hope for the future.”



“I’m learning to respect others’ opinions because their ideas must be heard and honored. I was told I would never be anything. I now know with hard work and studying, I can be pretty smart.”

## Conclusions about Socrates

Socrates was great. As with most great people, everyone in their time thinks they are crazy and stops at nothing to shut them up. The thing that stood out to me about Socrates was his steadfast attitude. Socrates knew what was in store for him but he didn't back step at all. . . . I think Socrates lost his life way too soon. Socrates has taught me to be a person of integrity. Growing up I always struggled with either being myself or what others wanted or expected me to be.

Learning about this man was fascinating. Even though he knew that what he said and did meant death for him, he did it anyway because that is what he believed in. **(Morgan Chichester)**

Crito offers Socrates a chance to escape death. Socrates refuses because he does not want Crito or his friends to get into trouble for having stolen him away, and running away would defeat the principle he stands for. He feels that he will be betraying what is right. . . . I don't feel like dying is the way to prove a point.

However, he was older and felt he lived his life to the fullest. By being put to death, he showed that the government was scared of the facts. **(Tracy Cunnigan)**

Crito offers him escape and to move to another town. Crito doesn't want Socrates to die. Socrates doesn't want to leave or to disobey the law. He doesn't want money or to let his children down

by leaving. Socrates knows he's going to die and would rather stay in jail to await his execution. I think Socrates made the right decision to obey the law. He's a man of his word.

**(Kian Cunningham)**

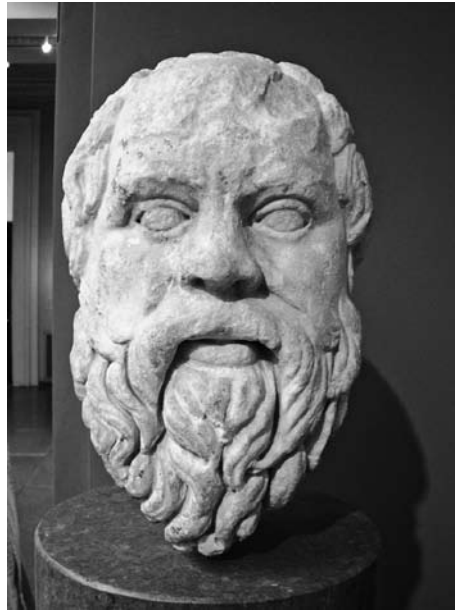
Socrates made the correct decision because trying to persuade the jury rather than escaping was really leaning towards his personality and his way of

teaching. Escape would have really contradicted his way of life and morals of teaching. **(Dwayne Ellis)**

Socrates stands by his beliefs and accepts his punishment proudly. If he is to escape after the state has sentenced him, he would be less the man of the arguments he made. He is not too afraid to die for what he believes, and he believes that you do not do injustice in response to injustice. He believes in being good and true to oneself. If after all his years of expressing his views and beliefs he did not stick to them

at this hour only to escape death, then he himself would be a fraud. **(Eleita Florence)**

Socrates believes he is too old to be afraid of death and that running away would only suggest that he was a criminal who disobeyed the law. He also said that the Athenians are the ones who gave him life and nurtured him. . . . He stood for what he believed and was somewhat a martyr. The reason I think





he should have run is that his teachings needed to continue. They condemned an innocent man, and that is vile in my eyes. His followers were at a huge loss. **(Bonita Greer)**

Socrates refused Crito's offer of an escape plan and place of hiding out of the city because of his character, dignity, his word, and his obedience to his government. He basically said he will not cause hurt or injury to those that injured him. He will die with knowing he stood firm in righteousness, integrity, grace, and honor, knowing he told the truth and that his accusers, murderers, will have to face a just, righteous God! I felt he was right to stand up for what he believed in, but I also felt his family needed him too. By no means am I implying he should have lied and bowed down to them. I just wish his life could have been spared. He was killed for nothing. He was innocent! **(Marie Hill)**

I am simply amazed by Socrates. He has become a great addition to my collection of heroes. . . . Socrates refuses Crito's offer for a few reasons. His main reason for staying in prison and welcoming death was that he would be a hypocrite if he escaped, and . . . it would show he did not keep his honest word. Socrates does not want to fight against his upbringing. He loves his country, and he will die for Athens and the Athenians! Socrates to me is so brave, standing up not just for himself but for all the people who have been treated unjustly. I feel you can't say one thing and then do another. Socrates sticks by his word. **(Leah LaBarre)**

I would have been torn in my decision (to escape or not) because I have a son. I would want to escape to be around for him until the end of his nurturing and education, but at the same time I would want to do the right thing first in the eyes of the Lord and secondly in the eyes of the law. God does say to

follow man's laws. **(Precious LaShore)**

Socrates knew if he fled from Athens his teaching would fare no better in another country as he would continue questioning all he met and undoubtedly incur their displeasure. . . . He is making the right choice because he invested so much time in his life building up his reputation, teaching others what's right and what's wrong, and fighting for the cause he believed in. If he chose to follow out Crito's plan, then he would be a total hypocrite. All that he stands for would become meaningless. **(Marseills McKenzie)**

. . . I was ready to go on the run when I knew I had to turn myself in for a year sentence. I knew I had been done wrong, and I thought of every excuse not to go through with it, but I valued certain principles over other ones. As Socrates wrote, "For just consider, if you transgress and err in this sort of what, what good will you do either to yourself or to your friends? . . . Will you then flee from well-ordered cities and virtuous men?" He makes incredible arguments for his reasons for not escaping. Other than Jesus Christ, Socrates is the noblest human being I've read about. It's uncanny how much of his life mimics Christ. Did Christ escape? Surely he could have, but truth was more important than vanity. **(Eric Rodgers)**

Socrates is a true revolutionist who will stand by his views even if it will cost him his life. In this way he is like Christ. He is not caught up in the trends of the times or gaining anything from his work. He just feels that God has put him here to speak truth... I don't think he made a wise choice [to die rather than escape]. I think his duty to see his children to adulthood and pass on his wisdom to the world was more important than following the laws of the supposedly wise. **(Danielle Rosales)**



# Oracle Call and Response



*Odyssey students responded to editorials on racial inequities in prison sentencing (by Corey Saffold '06), torture (Thomas Gardner '08), and universal health care (Keith Meyer) and commented on writings by and about Brian Benford '07.*

## Corey Saffold

Corey Saffold is speaking truth about the judicial system. His topic refers to Blacks and Latinos who make up the prison population all because Lady Justice looks at their income. . . . I agree with Corey. It coincides with me striving to be a successful attorney because I am going to help these statistical percentages decline.

**(Michelle Bozeman)**

Corey Saffold is so dead-on point with what he is trying to say. If black men only make up for 13% of Dane County but make up 73% of its inmates, there is something wrong with that. I see a lot of truth in the idea that racism is one of the biggest reasons black men are being locked up most of the time, but it's not all on racism. Each man has to make good decisions and better choices for himself.

**(Trendell Johnson)**

## Thomas Jasen Gardner

I have heard about police brutality and racial profiling against minorities for some time. . . . Reading Thomas Gardner's article really brought to life what I've been hearing all my life. I knew of the beatings and lynchings of blacks, but this made it seem real. Here is someone who actually lived to tell the tale; someone whose innocence and

eagerness to help made him a target for evil and injustice.

**(Eleita Florence)**

I think it's terrible that Mr. Gardner as a 14-year-old boy trusted officers who were supposed to uphold the law but they took an innocent kid, beat him to a pulp, and just about killed him because of the color of his skin. Nothing has changed much. Racist cops are still getting away with it every day.

**(Marie Hill)**

I recall some of the treatment my parents had encountered, as well as being a young man visiting the south. Mr. Gardner points out some of the inhuman actions that took place. No one should have to go through this.

**(Dennis Listenbee)**

## Keith Meyer

Keith Meyer wrote about health coverage. This article touched home for me because when my son was one he was diagnosed as an acute asthmatic. He stayed in the hospital a month. My husband and I worked and had the insurance through my job; however, I had to work so many hours in order for us to have insurance. My son would get worked up when I had to leave to go to work. Even though my mom, dad, and husband were there, he wanted his mommy. It hurt but I had to go to work to cover the insurance. I agree with Dr. Keith Meyer: keep pressing for universal health coverage.

**(Tracy Cunnigan)**

When I read Dr. Keith Meyer on "Pressing for Universal Health Coverage," it sounded so familiar to me. It sounded like me. On the Wednesday before Easter, I passed out in the kitchen for no reason and hit my head very hard; it swelled up as big as an orange. I remember my family standing over me when I came to, saying, "Call for the ambulance!" The first thing I said was, "I'm fine. Don't call. I don't have health care insurance," so they helped me up. My son and daughter-in-law said, "Mom, your head is swollen and you need it checked." Again I said, "No healthcare

insurance. I'm already in bills up to my neck from the hospitals and I don't need more." They took me anyway. When I got there, they kept me to find out my heart stopped for a second and they wanted to know why. "Oh God, more money," I said. . . . I totally agree with Dr. Meyer concerning the need for health care reform.

**(Edwina Robinson)**

The article that stood out to me the most is Keith Meyer's topic of health coverage. I believe that in America everyone should have health care coverage. It is hard and scary to go to the doctor's office knowing the bill will come after, with the fear of not having the money to pay it off.

**(Diance Lor)**

Universal health care is mandatory. My heart breaks daily as I realize I can't go to a dentist and many others, family and friends alike, can't even go to the doctor. My daughter had uterine cancer at age 18. The chemo did away with it. That was when she was under my insurance through my job, but now that she's on her own and I'm on Medicaid, she has no coverage for checkups. I worry about her health daily. Maybe I need to move with her to Europe, Canada, or Costa Rica. Thank you, Dr. Keith Meyer, for addressing this issue, as the President does in all his speeches.

**(Bonita Greer)**

As a young liberal woman, I completely agree with Dr. Meyer. . . . Shouldn't our taxes be spent on something useful like health coverage instead of a pointless, greedy war for oil? I really hope my daughter sees a better democracy when she grows up! **(Leah LaBarre)**

### **Brian Benford**

Brian is a middle-aged role model. He has a good heart and is a very strong, admirable, hardworking, and dedicated man. **(Tracy Cunnigan)**

Despite doubts, frustrations, and sacrifices, Brian in the end is shining. The fact that he is an Odyssey graduate lets you know that we can do what we have set out to do: be successful. **(Michelle Bozeman)**

Brian has served in the community and I love people who do that. Brian is cute and a very humble person who will do anything for his children. I love that Brian is at UW and I hope he graduates.

**(Kian Cunningham)**

Brian Benford seems to be a very determined and dedicated individual. The fact that he's a single father of four and attends school with one of his children speaks a lot about him as a person. To hear he attended Odyssey was good for me because it reinforces that anything is possible.

**(Dwayne Ellis)**

Brian is a wonderful person who cares more about the poor being helped than himself. A quote of Brian's that stood out to me was, "I wanted to empower other people to fight City Hall, to take marginalized and underrepresented people and provide a voice for them." Brian dropped out of school in the 80s and never thought he would return. Now he is at UW and is an encouragement to others like himself. **(Kiara Hill)**

Wow!! . . . Brian is going to make a remarkable social worker. He has all the right make up for it. I wish him and his family all the best and success. **(Marseills McKenzie)**

As I read Brian's editorial, I could see in my mind scenes of homeless individuals, and it was all too familiar. These people were me when I came to Madison in 1991. At that time I was invited into the Salvation Army Shelter with my then four children. We as a people need to step up to the plate. I do not believe one million to fight homelessness is impossible. It is vital that we get involved in our community as parents, students, and especially activists, for we are the voices that truly need to be heard. **(Bonita Greer)**

To hear how Brian accomplished everything he did (community work, school, parenting, etc.) really makes me want to yell with joy! I agree with Brian on so many issues. When it comes to all the money going towards football games, where's the money for students who can't afford a decent education? **(Leah LaBarre)**

# Review of the Madison Symphony Christmas Spectacular Concert

By Edwina Robinson

I attended the Christmas Spectacular Concert on December 5 at the Overture Center featuring the Madison Symphony Orchestra, Madison Symphony Chorus, Madison Youth Choirs, Mt. Zion Gospel Choir, and soloists. It was SO beautiful! I enjoyed every minute of the concert.

What a surprise! I never went to any symphony of any kind. There were many in Chicago, but it never interested me to go. I only did wild partying etc. and thought symphony concerts were a waste of time.

But oh my God! It was so wonderful, exciting, thrilling for me to have been there. I came out of my comfort zone and actually enjoyed it.

I knew about opera but not African American opera singers. This lady, Angela Brown, was amazing. Her voice was so calming, and the Madison Symphony Orchestra music was soothing to my soul. The combination of Ms. Angela Brown's voice and the Madison Symphony together was like heaven. I closed my eyes and was at peace.

I felt great from so much quietness to the spirit. I was so amazed. I thought opera and classical music were for a certain kind of people, but it's for all who will listen. I am so coming out of my cave

daily, like the prisoners in Plato's Allegory of the Cave, and I feel great. Ms. Brown was down-to-earth, and I thought she would be a snob. Not at all: she was full of encouragement and also was so beautiful. She sparkled.

The Madison Symphony Orchestra and Chorus were magnificent. The voices blended beautifully with the instruments. I enjoyed every Christmas song played. There was a lady sitting next to us who was crying when Angela Brown sang "Ave Maria." When I asked why she was crying, she said because it was so beautiful.

As the evening progressed, I understood why the lady was crying. It was so heartfelt. I cried as Angela Brown and the Madison Symphony Orchestra performed "Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire." Wow, that was so beautiful.

I enjoyed the Mt. Zion Gospel Choir with the Symphony. It was gospel/classical/opera together. I thought that was very creative. With everyone together, it seemed a powerful unity. Wow.

So in a nutshell, would I ever go again? Yes, I would like to go. So thanks, Carroll Heideman, for donating tickets that gave me the opportunity to find out what a symphony concert was like. What has been proven to me is that you shouldn't judge something unless you have tried it yourself.



# Bittersweet Holiday Memories



The holidays have always been bittersweet for me. I can imagine more so for my mother. My mother wasn't one for myths, so the whole Santa Claus thing wasn't ever an item. She'd say to my sister and me, "I'm Santa Claus, just like there's no tooth fairy. There ain't no fat old white man

delivering presents coming through your chimney in the projects." My mother did this because she wanted us to make sure we weren't disappointed and in her way protect us from a tradition normally reserved for the well off.

One tradition I recall involved the moments around the end of Thanksgiving, which usually coincided with my birthday, when the new toy catalogs would come. My mom would tell us to circle the things we wanted and put a star by what we wanted the most. I'd always been aware we were poor, so I'd be sure to put stars on the absolutely practical or cheap things and made my sister do so as well, much to her protest.

There was one point in my life where I decided to reject Christmas and proposed we celebrate Kwanzaa. It didn't really happen, but that year my mom bought me an Afro-centric adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*. (**Dalonte Nobles**)



It was a scary moment in my life. I was 11 years old and was locked up and sitting down in the recreation hall. It was my first real Christmas by myself. I got jumped by three boys older than me. I had no mom to run to for love and nurturing and no father for security

and safety. I got my nose broken and a busted lip. To this day I still don't know why they did me that way. The rest of the night I was on lock down—no singing songs, no gifts to receive, no love felt.

It happened years ago, but the impact it had on me still in a strong way is with me. (**Trendell Johnson**)



A joyous Christmas was when my brother and I found out who Santa really was. That Christmas we received our first bikes. From 3 AM we rode our bikes in a circle around the furnace between the clothes line. We didn't go to sleep. Later on we even took the bikes out in the cold to ride

with more room. (**Dennis Listenbee**)



I remember the holiday when my children got everything they wanted for Christmas. They thought that they were getting nothing. I was so excited because I always promised things and had to compromise for something cheaper, but this Christmas 1989 God saw fit to allow

me to get the things they wanted.

I was so excited I could hardly cook their dinner. I wanted them awake so I could see the faces! I couldn't wait until morning. I woke them up about 3 AM and said, "Santa Claus came." Boy, they ran into the living room!





When they opened their gifts, their faces were lit up. “Oh, that’s what I wanted!” “Oh, Mama, look at it! Santa gave me what I asked for!”

I stood back and the tears fell because that moment was priceless. (**Edwina Robinson**)



When I was 10 or 11 years old, we were soooo poor that the heat got turned off. It was the day before Christmas 1979 or 1980. No Christmas gifts were expected; therefore, I decided to make something for my two younger siblings. My brother was 9 or 10, and my sister was 7 or 8. I made my brother a drum out of toilet tissue rolls and a box. I made my sister a stocking doll stuffed with cotton with a washcloth for her dress.

When they saw the things I had made, we all laughed and played. It was as if Christmas didn’t miss us. (**Bonita Greer**)



I will never forget Christmas 2008. My boyfriend’s parents hadn’t liked me our whole five years of being together, but this Christmas I went to their house. I ate dinner and they gave me a card. It doesn’t seem like much, but for me it was the best Christmas ever.

(**Nikyra McCann**)



One holiday morning when I was 12, I got the news my uncle committed suicide. I felt like I just died when I heard the police tell my mom that they found his body in an old, dark building hanging from the cold, damp basement ceiling. I cried a long sullen river where my body was

frozen as ice, lost for words, lifeless, gone was the niceness . . . (**Marseills McKenzie**)



I will never forget December 1984. I was eight years old, and my biological father came to visit me. I was shocked and a little confused because all my life my stepfather had been my dad. Even though my mom and stepfather told me of my biological father, he was just a figment of my

imagination.

My biological father knocked on my door, and I saw myself in his face; however, I did not have love, compassion, nor many words for him. I thought it was nice of him to travel just to see me, however.

I am 34 as of December 9, 2010. I will never forget my birthday back in 1984. That was the day I was able to close a chapter in my life that I always wondered about. December 2010 my stepdad is not my biological father but he is my dad, my father, and my friend. When I’m in Mississippi, I always call my biological father just to say hi; however, we do not have the bond I share with my dad.

(**Tracy Cunnigan**)



I remember as a child we would always go to my cousin’s house to celebrate Hanukkah. We would light candles. My cousin would always want me to play He-Man with him and I didn’t want to play. My aunt gave us each an alarm clock.

Mine was purple and his was blue. We decided to

trade because we liked each other’s colors better. We would rough house with my uncle and eat food.

My aunt and uncle had a wood stove in their living room, and it was warm and cozy in the house. We all had fun and enjoyed family time. The adults talked, we played, and all was well.

(**Danielle Rosales**)



Lee is the Senior Tech at Madison Geeks Office. My kids and I decorated his desk with a Superman table cloth and blue balloons. We had blue balloons all over the office with “Happy Birthday” signs.

Tuesday Lee came in very excited about his desk and his breakfast

that I made him. I am the Birthday Queen for Madison Geeks and Kleen Geeks. I will celebrate an employee’s birthday for a whole month. Lee has gotten two cheesecakes and a chocolate cake from me. Everyone at the office was excited for Lee and is looking forward to their birthday! (**Kian Cunningham**)



Entering my grandmother’s house with the big Catholic crosses and perfectly sanitary floors (you could eat off them), I had never been so

nervous. Don’t get me wrong—it was the same as it had always been except for one thing: Me! I was pregnant, and it stood out so much in my matching cranberry colored sweat suit. I felt so lonely and afraid and decided to sit alone. Previous years if I had sat by myself someone would normally have joined me immediately. Not this year, though: everyone knew I was a sinner because the proof was right there with my belly protruding from that sweat suit.

I had come to that Christmas party every year with my dad, but we usually ended up going

our separate ways, me in the basement playing ping-pong with my cousins, and him upstairs conversing with the adults. This year, though, I just didn’t know where I belonged. Was I a child? Or was I now supposed to sit with the responsible adults who talked of things I couldn’t care less about?

I was stuck. I had no clue what to do, and I think my dad could really tell.

Sitting in that one confined spot on the couch with no one around, I looked across the room at my dad, who was actually paying attention to me. I’ll never forget that look, the reassuring smile letting me know that he was there even if no one else was.

Even after all the betrayal, yelling, screaming, hitting, kicking, and lying, my dad still loved me. I was still his daughter, and I knew I always had him in my corner.

I will never forget that day. It was the most comforting feeling ever. I had my Dad through thick and thin. (**Leah LaBarre**)

On November 25, 2010, I wanted to surprise my son Tasuki for his third birthday. I went out





and bought him a big cake. After Thanksgiving dinner, I walked into the living room, turned out all the lights, and started singing “Happy Birthday” while walking over to him. I looked at his face. He stopped, widened his eyes, took a deep breath, and made a high pitch sound

inhaling. After he was done, he clapped his hands together, stuck out his tongue, and smiled at me, saying, “My birthday! Yay!”

After everyone was done singing the birthday song, I told him to make a wish and blow. Tasuki looked at me, smiled again, and then tried blowing out the three candles in front of him. He kept missing, so everyone laughed at him. Then his cousin Kyo helped out and blew two out for him. Tasuki had one candle to blow out, and this time he didn’t miss.

After all the candles were blown out, everyone clapped and cheered for Tasuki. He smiled and ran after his cake.

This is one of my memorable memories that I’ll cherish most. I won’t forget the facial expressions he had that day. Mommy loves you, Tasuki!!

**(Diance Lor)**



My most joyful Christmas was having all of my children running down the stairs, happy, smiling, opening up their presents, hugging me and thanking God, playing with their toys, looking at their clothes, and all of us eating the food I cooked. Christmas was a

special time for us. We would sing, pray, and read Scriptures, and all my children got everything that they asked me for that was on their list. We would take pictures and get dressed up. The Christmas with all my children present was the best memory ever. **(Marie Hill)**



Christmas 1985 I will never forget. We had just gone to bed after opening our gifts. About 4 AM my drunken mother came home and woke my uncle up saying that she smelled smoke. I was on the floor by the non-lit fireplace with my sleeping three-year-old sister next to me and my

13-year-old brother asleep on the couch. I could hear my uncle and mother arguing. . . . As my mom yelled in the hallways waking the entire building up, I noticed smoke coming out the cracks of the hardwood floors. I immediately woke my siblings, my brother grabbed my sister, and we all ran out of the house, no shoes, no coats, out in the brisk night air. By now the rest of the family was coming out of the building. Then I saw the flashing lights and heard the sirens. When the police and fire trucks arrived, they immediately put us in warmth and wrapped us in blankets and coats, giving us words to not cry. By now, I was looking at the flames bursting through the windows of my basement. I couldn’t believe that my house was on fire on Christmas Day. We lost everything, including one of my uncle’s lives. He fell asleep with a cigarette. It was NOT a Merry Christmas. **(Michelle Bozeman)**



I remember a Christmas time with one of my younger brothers and my mom. We were taking the train from Michigan City, Indiana, to Chicago. As the conductor walked up and down the train calling very boisterously for tickets, my little brother watched his every move.

The conductor must have sensed how taken my brother was with him. He stopped and asked him his name and what he wanted to be when he grew up. My brother replied, “A snowman.” When the conductor asked why, my brother said, “Because they wear hats.”

Needless to say, my mom and I sat way down in our seats for the rest of the ride. (**Pamela Lee**)



The last Christmas I spent in Chicago before moving to Madison sticks with me. I was still in my addiction, so I didn't expect my children to have much. My electricity was already turned off, so the tree had no twinkling lights, just a cold green plastic pine.

There were barely any gifts to wrap, so the coloring books that came from the dollar store and the free cereal bowls I got when I bought a box of Frosted Flakes were lovingly wrapped in comic strips from the newspaper. When all seemed lost, I did get a donation. Now the amount of gifts increased, but the dark and dismal tree still reflected my sad expectations of Christmas morning.

(**Eleita Florence**)



"You never keep your promises!" The blades flew from my mouth as I stood at the top of the stairs. My foster mom and I were once again locked in battle. I had lived with her for a year, and though we'd had our ups and downs, I thought this time she would keep her word. I thought this

time she would come through on my class ring. I mean, I had gone along with the fact that it had to be silver. I even went along with the fact that it had to contain a ruby, the firestone of those born in July, but I wanted it in the coolness of March's aquamarine. Perhaps that would cool my temper before it erupted. My thoughts were jumbled as tears burned my eyes. We were at a stand still . . .

Christmas morning arrived and we discovered mountains of gifts under the tree. Lights were everywhere, and tinsel gleamed merrily. We dug in as if we were younger than our 16 years. Surrounded by sweaters and books and movies, I

felt my heart drop, for she had broken her promise.

Then I reached for my stocking. Underneath the fruits and nuts lay a black velvet box.

(**Stephanie Pamperin**)



I remember a Christmas from when I was about five or six years old. I'll never forget it. We lived in a cruddy, two-bedroom apartment on Chicago's west side. It was just my mom, my grandmother, and me. I know my grandmother worked as a nurse at Cook County

Hospital, and I'm not too sure what it is my mother did. At the time I remember being very anxious and excited to receive an abundance of gifts. I don't know how I came to this conclusion or who instilled in me the idea that Christmas was the greatest time of the year.

That morning I woke up in my pajamas in a hurry to see what awaited me. What I found was a bare Christmas tree about five feet tall, without a decoration of any kind. Under the Christmas tree was a single Coca-Cola truck, smaller than a child's hand, along with a fruit basket. At a young age I realized how poor my family really was.

(**Eric Rodgers**)



I think the last joyful memory for me was when my entire family was in Mexico celebrating Christmas. I remember every one of my family members being alive. My grandma and my uncles were all there. I think that was the last time I saw any of them. We all had fun

just being there with family. I think I even saw my Uncle Tonio. That was back in 1999, or even longer ago than that.

(**Michael Lozano**)

# Mary's Christmas Mosaic

## by Mary Wells

Christmas has always held a special place in my heart, and always will. My parents made my two brothers, three sisters, and me feel special on Christmas morning, even though our mosaic stones were clouded with the dysfunction of alcoholism. We knew it was a struggle for our parents to make ends meet, but we always had plenty of love, a roof over our heads, food on the table, and clean clothes. On Christmas Eve, my parents would let us see if we could stay up until midnight, and if we could, we could open our presents.

As the years went on, and my Christmas Mosaic was being built, I realized one day that the gifts under the tree were not brought to our house by Santa Claus. That's when my Christmas Mosaic started to have a noticeable change. I still looked forward to Christmas wholeheartedly. I enjoyed the anticipation of those wonderful visits we would make to our grandmother's house as a family, and the family members that would come over to our house during the season.

The colors of my Christmas Mosaic changed when I became a mother with three beautiful children of my own: Douglas, Frederick, and Ricky (Fred-Rick-Douglas). I had the pleasures of making sure their Christmases were anticipated as much as I remembered. They knew also that they too were rich in love, although we didn't have other material things. I enjoyed having them help me decorate the house, and make cookies and homemade ornaments.

I also started a new tradition where we would pile in the car a couple of days before Christmas and drive around the nicer neighborhoods to look at their Christmas light decorations. I hope that they will remember this tradition and do it themselves.

The stones changed colors once again as my oldest son Doug had a daughter named Gabrielle. She too has enjoyed the traditions that we have surrounding Christmas. Gabrielle really enjoys cooking. She and I have started our own cookbook of favorite foods that she likes to prepare. Her favorite of all things is the Homemade Overnight-French Toast, topped with fresh strawberry slices and powdered sugar.

In 2002, my mosaic stones changed drastically

when my son Douglas lost his life in a tragic car accident. My nephew and my son Doug were on their way to my house to pick up an early Christmas gift. They had to come across town, but only made it all but two

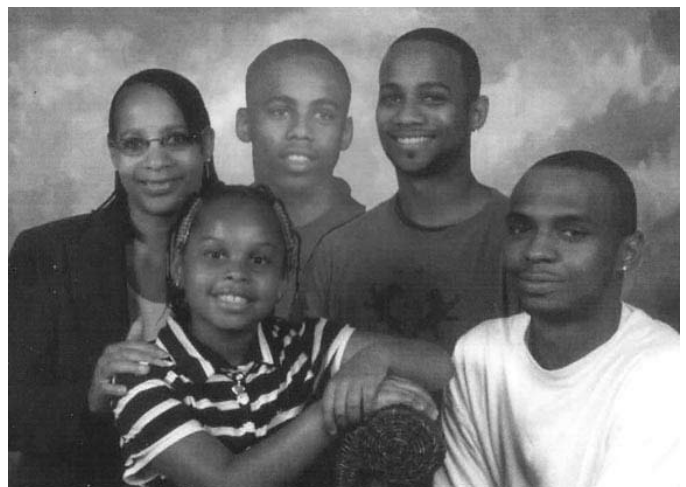
blocks away. My nephew was too intoxicated and shouldn't have been driving in the first place. My nephew apparently passed out behind the wheel.

The car hit a tree on the side of the car that my son was sitting on. My son was unconscious when the paramedics arrived, and he never regained consciousness. My Christmases have not been the same since.

The colors of my Christmas mosaic changed again in 2005. That was the first Christmas since the accident that I was able to put up a tree.

I am sure that the stones in my mosaic will continue to change as the pain eases over time, and always will change as I continue on my Odyssey. As I continue on with my life's Odyssey I envision that Christmas will still hold a special place in my heart with all of the traditions that have made each one special. My son's memory will live on through all of us, especially through his daughter Gabrielle.

*Mary Wells (Odyssey '07) used Photoshop to piece together her family mosaic.*





# The Gift

by Sherreallyum Allen '05

One fall day I woke to a surprise  
A little boy staring  
With innocent eyes

I looked and I wondered  
How could this be?  
Why was this little boy  
Entrusted to me?

I was very young  
Naïve and filled with dreams  
But when I woke that morning  
I really wanted to scream  
I was filled with doubt  
But ready to face the world  
To tell the truth  
I really wanted a girl

I said to myself wake up, you see,  
Because this little boy  
Was entrusted to me

When I looked in his face  
He was beautiful and fine  
Then I thought to myself  
That he was all mine

Just in a flash, there were  
A bunch of white coats  
They looked at me and said  
“Miss, just give up hope.”

With fright on my face  
I asked, “What’s wrong?”  
They said, “Miss, we don’t know,  
Please go home.”



“Go home!”  
I say  
“This must be a joke  
Aren’t you a doctor?  
Didn’t you take an oath?”

He looked at me and smiled.  
“You’re young and naïve.

You still have time to fulfill  
Your dreams.  
Just leave him here and no one  
Will know  
Turn around and walk out  
There’s the door!”

Now I was mad  
Insulted, you see,  
Because this little boy  
Was entrusted to me

I may have been young  
But no dummy by far  
Because I picked up my son  
And headed straight for the car.

I went from doctor to doctor  
All around town  
They would look at me and say

With that sarcastic frown  
“Miss, give up hope  
he’s not going to do much  
not walk, not talk,  
nor see, nor hear  
He won’t even be able  
To feed himself lunch,  
My dear  
People do it everyday  
It’s not that hard  
It’s a locked facility  
But they don’t have any guards  
See look! Children  
Playing in the yard.”

Enraged by now  
I turned and walked away  
Because they won’t get  
My son Oh no! not today

More determined than ever  
To prove them all wrong  
I awoke every day  
Just to teach him songs

People would look at me  
And stare  
How dare she bring him  
Out to play  
He looks funny  
You should take him away!

I would shout it from the  
Rooftops every time  
Isn’t he beautiful?  
Yes! He is mine.

With my family’s support we made  
It a long way  
I took him outside  
Everyday to play

Many people would  
Be ashamed  
But Oh! No  
Not me!

Because this little boy  
Is a gift from God  
Entrusted directly to me.



# Congratulations to Christina Wagner!

**Librarian at the  
Goodman South Madison  
Branch Library  
Madison, Wisconsin**

*Here is an excerpt of the nomination letter that Emily wrote:*

Christina Wagner has brought joy, hope, and dignity to the South Madison branch of the public library, serving many low-income families from diverse backgrounds. In addition to bringing to her library numerous grant-sponsored author events, provocative panel discussions, bilingual computer classes, and creative educational programs for children, she helped sponsor the UW Odyssey Project ([www.odyssey.wisc.edu](http://www.odyssey.wisc.edu)), a free, life-changing college humanities course for adults at the poverty level, and Community Writing Assistance, a program in which South Madison Library patrons seeking help with letters to parole officers or memoir writing receive assistance from UW teaching assistants.

I am writing on behalf of the 200 graduates of the Odyssey Project who know that Chris Wagner is an absolute treasure in the community. She has helped so many men, women, and children view libraries in a positive way and obtain resources they needed.

Christina Wagner has made a profound impact on the community. South Madison has half the income of the rest of the city. It serves many African American, Hispanic, and Asian American families, over a third of whom live at or below the poverty level.

At the time Chris began at the library, few people used the library and the facility seemed depressing. Within a matter of a few years, Chris had found a way to form partnerships with area schools and health clinics, bringing new life into



the library and boosting use dramatically. She spearheaded a Second Chance program to allow low-income children who had fines to begin to check out books again. Now the South Madison library is a cultural hub of the community!

On a daily basis, Chris is a quiet but kind personality who adds warmth and dignity to the South Madison library. She sees to it that every person who enters the library leaves feeling better and with new resources. She has been a tireless activist for social justice by seeing to it that the library hosts programs helping low-income adults get an education. For the last eight years, for instance, the library has sponsored the UW Odyssey Project, an award-winning free college humanities course for adults near the poverty level... Of the Odyssey Project, Chris writes, "My late husband used to say that 'an adult educator is someone who knows how to arrange the chairs in a circle. . . that the best learning takes place when we sit face to face and learn from one another. That's the kind of learning happening in the Odyssey classes—the kind of learning that is EDUCATION.'" Chris has been an integral part of a program helping adults overcome adversity and achieve dreams through higher education.

Chris Wagner has helped to change a low-income library that used to feel neglected and poor in quality to one of the most vibrant and culturally diverse places in the entire city.