

Odyssey Oracle

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odyssey.wisc.edu

Editors/Contributing Writers:

Kegan Carter, Odyssey 2004 Graduate, Designer kegancarter@wisc.edu

Emily Auerbach, Project Director eauberbach@dcs.wisc.edu 608-262-3733

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The Power of Short Fiction

From “The Circuit” by Francisco Jiménez:

... During recess I went into the restroom and opened my English book to page 125. I began to read in a low voice, pretending I was in class. There were many words I did not know. I closed the book and headed back to the classroom.

Mr. Lema was sitting at his desk correcting papers. When I entered he looked up at me and smiled. I felt better. I walked up to him and asked if he could help me with the new words. “Gladly,” he said.

The rest of the month I spent my lunch hours working on English with Mr. Lema, my best friend at school.

One Friday during lunch Mr. Lema . . . picked up a trumpet, blew on it, and handed it to me. The sound gave me goose bumps. . . . “How would you like to learn to play it?” he asked. . . .

That day I could hardly wait to get home to tell Papá and Mamá the great news. As I got off the bus, my little brothers and sisters ran up to meet me. They were yelling and screaming. I thought they were happy to see me, but when I opened the door to our shack, I saw that everything we owned was neatly packed in cardboard boxes.

The little boy finally gets to go to school again for the first time in a long time. He has a good teacher with a caring heart who welcomes him in. He takes his lunch time to ask his teacher for help with his English. His teacher was eager and willing to do whatever he could to help this child. This made the child happy, and he felt his teacher was his best friend.

His teacher introduced him to



the trumpet and was going to teach him to play. The child was happy about this and excited that he has finally settled in. He runs home from the bus stop happy to tell his family his good news, only to have his bubble burst by being uprooted again. He has to move somewhere else and start all over again. He was crushed to see everything all packed in boxes again.

The message is that nothing is permanent. Sometimes things are only for a season; then you have to move on regardless of the painful feelings. Some things are just out of your control, and you have to just go with the flow. . . . Who knows the reason why the parents left their original home in Mexico to begin with, or how many times they moved in their children's lives in order to have an income as migrant workers? But stability is important for the physical and mental growth of everybody, especially children. (**Marie Hill**)

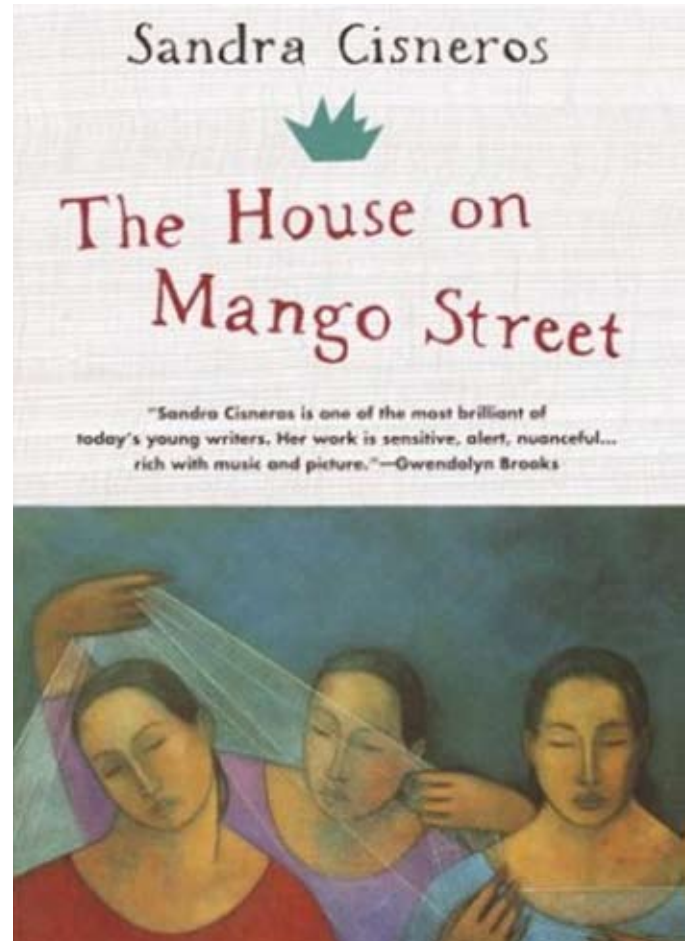
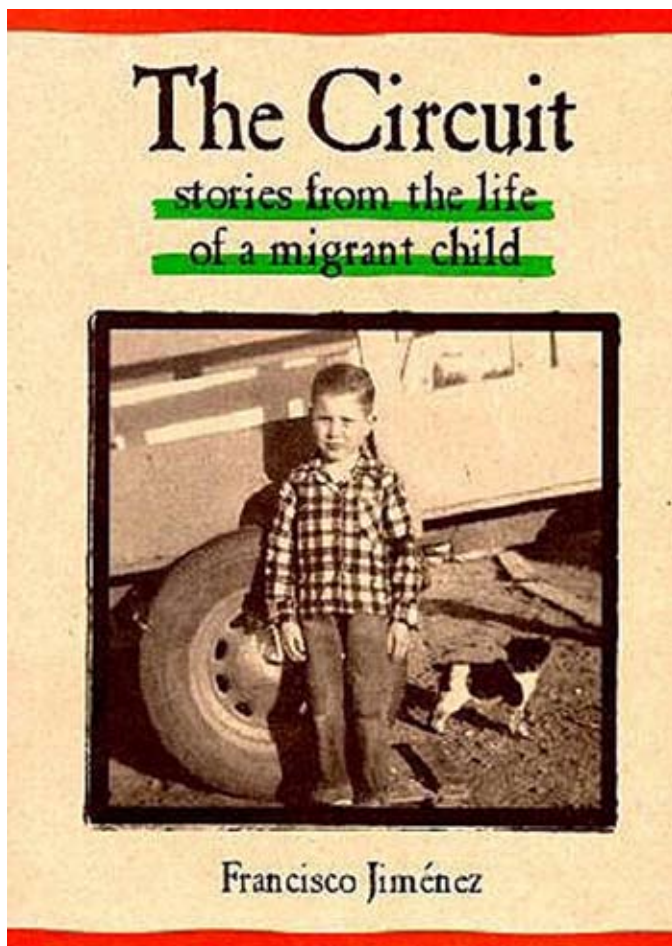
At the end of "The Circuit," he ends up having to move again after he was just starting to settle down. It's painful to us as readers because we are always

used to happy endings. I liked it because it's real life. For instance, I can relate not just because of the ethnic background but because whenever something good goes on in my life, it seems like it gets taken away either from my stupid decisions or just life altering changes.

I think the message in this story is about family. It shows how hard some families struggle to make ends meet. It also shows how fast things can get taken away from you. Take in every day as if it's your last because the things and people around you aren't promised tomorrow and neither are you. (**Michael Lozano**)

When I read the last sentence of the story, my eyes began to well up with tears. He had a new beginning at his school and had made an amazing friend. Having to move again after finally feeling accepted must have been the worst feeling imaginable.

I wish that I could have jumped into the story and given him some sort of help so that he could stay and be happy. I still can't get the image out of





my head of the boxes being all packed. I so badly just want him to feel content.

The message I got from this story is to never take life for granted. Sometimes I feel like my life is falling apart, but then I read something like this and all my worries seem trivial in comparison. . . . From now on when I'm feeling sad or alone, I am going to think of that little boy and just remember that he would have probably given anything to have the life I do. (**Leah LaBarre**)

He was starting to let his guard down as far as school was concerned. He endured the stares a new student gets at any school. When a good thing happens to anyone who is not used to it, the last thing you're thinking about is the next bad thing, but the next bad thing that's going to make you

cry is probably right around the bend. This story evoked a great deal of emotions and familiar memories for me. (**Pam Lee**)

The message of this story is that things do not always work out the way we want them to; life is not always what we imagine it to be. We have to feel fortunate, grateful, and thankful for each and every moment, even if it's brief. (**Marseills McKenzie**)

. . . Panchito's joy was short lived when he learned that the family was moving again. The message to me is that you work hard every day to have a good life. Once you

reach a part where you can slow down and enjoy the fruit of your labor, your joy can be snatched away in a heartbeat. (**Eleita Florence**)

The sixth grader that was scared and got a chance to read was getting attached to Mr. Lema at lunch time with help with words in English. Mr. Lema had read his mind and also volunteered to teach the trumpet to the sixth grader. On the first day arriving home, it was sad and painful to find out from the packed boxes that the family was moving. The message is live in the moment, but it's also good to have dreams. (**Dennis Listenbee**)

It saddens me as a reader to see what happens at the end of this story. A kid gets settled in at school,





which was hard at first, just to go through it all over again with a big move. . . . A person needs stability at all times in their lives. Being constantly on the move can truly hurt a person. They never get a chance to grow and nurture their friendships. **(Trendell Johnson)**

The ending is so painful because he is a child, yet his life is so hard and his living conditions are so poor. You start to see a glimmer of hope for him, and then it seems to be taken away. I think the message of this story is family and resilience. Though they move from job to job, camp to camp, they work together, care for each other, and are learning to be able to adjust to what comes next. I was saddened by the end, but it also brought me hope that better was ahead for this family. **(Danielle Rosales)**

I can imagine what it must have been like for a little boy not to have a foundation—a stable home (physical house), community, school, sports, a place to play with siblings and friends, and the right to be a child and not have to work. The pain for me is knowing that this is a reality for many children from around the world and here in America. For me the message is, “What can I do to change things on my level?” I can vote, lobby, pray, get to know other

cultures, and seek education. **(Bonita Greer)**

. . . Just as something begins, it can end as quickly. We are not in control of some situations that occur in our lives, but we must maintain the power of believing. **(Helen Montgomery)**

At the end of “The Circuit,” Panchito, who had finally gotten comfortable in school and was looking forward to Mr. Lema teaching him how to play the trumpet, came home to find everything his family owned in cardboard boxes. It was hard to read this story because your heart went out to this child who so desperately wants a “normal” childhood. He wants to go to school to learn, make friends and develop into a contributing member of society, but due to the hardships of his family he is not able to do so.

For me it just pushes home that we have no idea what a child’s home life is like. Also it brought home that even when you think your situation is pretty bad, there is always someone that may have it just a little worse than you. What this family resorted to is horrible. But they are forced into this lifestyle by rules and laws in this country that are biased and unfair. **(Morgan Chichester)**



**From “Beautiful and Cruel” from
The House on Mango St. by Sandra Cisneros:**

I am an ugly daughter. I am the one nobody comes for.

Nenny says she won't wait her whole life for a husband and to come and get her, that Minerva's sister left her mother's house by having a baby, but she doesn't want to go that way either. She wants things all her own, to pick and choose. . . .

I have decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain. . . . I have begun my own quiet war. Simple. Sure. I am one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate.

She decides to not act or carry herself like all the other women. She says she will “get up from the table just like the men do.” I think that she wants to be treated as an equal, not as a lesser.

(Marvin Pratt)



The girl decides not to follow the rules and not to wait around for a predictable lifestyle. She doesn't want the life that every girl wants, which is to get married. She wants to experience life as an independent woman, a life all her own. **(Shardetra Ofori-Anim)**

She decides to rebel to not be taken for a weak link or softie. She has decided to stand up for herself. She doesn't care how anyone else feels about the stand she is now taking. She is angry.

It sounds as if she is hurt about being overlooked. She was sad about being considered the ugly daughter and is hurt about being the black sheep of the family. She was tired of her hair being called dirty. She was fed up with talk of her blouse learning to stay clean when she grows up. She feels her existence doesn't matter to her family. . . **(Marie Hill)**

At the end she takes control of her own existence as a woman. Instead of waiting for a man to help her, she behaves like one and gets up from the table in the manner she sees them display. It's not simply an empty gesture; it's a symbol of taking control instead of waiting for someone to think she's beautiful enough for attention. **(Takeyla Benton)**

She gets up from the table like a man without putting back the chair or picking up the plate. She does not want to be the typical woman who waits for a man to pick her to marry. She doesn't want to get knocked up so some man can “do the right thing.” She wants to be her own woman and make and live by her own rules. **(Eleita Florence)**



Emily Dickinson Blows Our Heads Off

"I don't know what poetry is, but when I read something and I feel as though the top of my head has been blown off, I know that's poetry."

—Emily Dickinson, Letter

38

*By such and such an offering
To Mr. So and So,
The web of life woven—
So martyrs albums show*

People give of themselves and do charitable things. Sometimes they go unknown. People go their whole lives not knowing who or where donations and scholarships come from. Generous, anonymous people go unnoticed all the time . . . but there is a list somewhere that . . . gives blessings in heaven. (Eleita Florence)

454

*It was given to me by the Gods—
When I was a little Girl—
They give us Presents most—you know—
When we are new—and small.
I kept it in my Hand—*



*I never put it down—
I did not dare to eat—or sleep—
For fear it would be gone—
I heard such words as "Rich"—
When hurrying to school—
From lips at Corners of the Streets—
And wrestled with a smile.
Rich! 'Twas Myself—was rich—
To take the name of Gold—
And Gold to own—in solid Bars—
The Difference—made me bold—*

I feel that this poem is talking about the gods giving this woman a gift that she never lets go of; she takes it everywhere. She hears the word "rich" as if the gift's wealth makes her feel bold as a person. . . . I hope one day I can give my son something that will make him feel "bold" as an adult. (Precious LaShore)

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--***

She speaks of the earth not being the end because we have spirits which are invisible. This defies all reason, and insight or good judgment must go. Even the most knowledgeable people don't understand what the afterlife has in store. The descendants are scorned, and Christian death is revealed. Some have no belief that it exists, yet pastors continue to preach of its existence, and the congregation agrees with highest praise. Medication can't stop the yearning in search of the unknown heaven.

I agree that we are spiritual beings and the afterlife is unknown, yet we all yearn for it. Our souls hope for heaven—a place of peace and beauty. Yes, I believe, and I hope to see my past brothers and sisters there. **(Bonita Greer)**

Dickinson says there is a spirit or higher power directing the ways of the world. No matter who we are as people, we can never know all of life's answers. We should just live to find out who we are as human beings.

I can relate to this poem in a lot of ways right now. I have never in my life felt closer to God! Some of my friends try to argue with me about my spirituality because there is no way to prove it. But I told them just because you can't see God, that doesn't mean you can't feel God within yourself and in all beauty in the world. I wish more people would just let go and see this magnificent life for what it really is. **(Leah LaBarre)**

In this poem, Emily Dickinson is attempting to illustrate the human relationship with reality and our desire to understand the unknown. The opening line of the poem says it all: this physical world, of which we are a part, is not all there is—rather than being a conclusion, life is a question. Dickinson likens this desire for answers and clarity to the beckoning of a song in order to capture the intangible nature of truth. You cannot approach it with sagacity (wisdom), she warns, nor can you solve it like a puzzle. Also, you cannot deny the lingering questions, as they will be unable to “still the Tooth / That nibbles at the soul.” The truth remains a riddle that can make even faith slip, laugh, and rally. **(Dalonte Nobles)**

545

***I fear a Man of frugal Speech—
I fear a Silent Man—
Haranguer—I can overtake—
Or Babbler—entertain—***

***But He who weigheth—While the Rest—
Expend their furthest pound—
Of this Man—I am wary—
I fear that He is Grand—***



Emily Dickinson's house in Amherst, Massachusetts

In this poem, Emily Dickinson is saying that she would rather converse with a man who doesn't think he knows it all and uses big vocabulary words. She can take on a haranguer (which is someone who goes on and on) and can entertain a babbler by pretending she is listening, but a silent man she fears because someone who keeps their thoughts to themselves you don't know what they are thinking, which could be fearful...

(Catina McAlister)

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 if she can prevent one person's heart from being broken, her life would not have been for nothing. She's saying if she can spare one person the aches of life, cool one person's pain, or help pull one weak robin back into his nest, then her life has been worth living.

My response is that if you can push past yourself and help somebody else in need of heart lifting by showing them that you care about them and that you are there for them, then you know that in life you have stood up and helped somebody when they were at their lowest; you have helped them to gain their strength again. . . . Also know that when you are going through a rough time, somebody out there cares about you. At some points in my own life, someone has encouraged me and helped to lift my spirit up. I agree 100% with this message.

(Marie Hill)

. . . The way she expressed her feeling about helping others was simple but powerful. I also feel the same way about others hurting. I can't take the sight of someone crying; in reaction, I always begin to cry myself. I'm just sensitive, but I always have felt I could intensely sympathize with anyone who was in some kind of pain. I just think of myself: what if I were in that situation, and what if that were me? (Shardetra Ofori-Anim)

If you can do one good thing, your life was worth living. I just need to do small things every day to get the best out of life.

(Diance Lor)

Her life is worthwhile if she can help stop suffering in the world. The fact I consider myself a very empathetic and caring person is why I identified with it and agree with its message.

(Pamela Lee)

. . . My joy in life is to be able to comfort others and make them feel good about themselves. Sometimes I have gone too far with trying to help; it became enabling instead of helping. . . . I wonder sometimes if in the past couple of years I have helped enough, not just my friends but also giving back to the community. Maybe this summer my daughter and I can get out and try to give so our lives won't be in vain.

(Leah LaBarre)



Dickinson's headstone

In this poem Emily Dickinson is saying if she can stop someone's pain or take away their aches she would have a purpose here; she would have made a name for herself in life. I cannot say I agree with her message because she wants to be God. . . .
(Tracy Cunnigan)

This beautiful poem to me reads as the voice of a doctor, nurse, pastor, or mother, for these are people who nurture, love, and nurse others back to health. I am this person—a healer, a lover, a nurse, a nurturer, an intercessor. I take encouragement and feel elated because this poem warms my heart and reminds me of myself. Then I believe my life is not in vain.
(Bonita Greer)

What this poem says to me is that if you do nothing more than be kind, caring, helpful, and thoughtful to others, then you have not wasted your life. To help others or animals is the true essence of life. . . .

I really like this poem. I feel at times that my life stands for nothing. I have few major accomplishments, but I am a good friend, a kind, caring mother, a steward of nature, and a caring wife.
(Danielle Rosales)

. . . If I can't make a change in some way to help shape someone's life, then I will die trying.
(Marseills McKenzie)

If she can help someone in any way, shape, or form, or help a person from hitting rock bottom, then she will have lived a purposeful life. . . . I agree with this message and will try living a positive lifestyle.
(Michael Lozano)

This poem is saying if she can help one person and prevent one heart break, then she has not lived her life in vain. If she can save one person's life, then she has not lived in vain; her life has a purpose. This speaks to me because that is the way I feel about working with children. I know there is no way for me to change or impact every single child that I come into contact with. But if I can touch

just one child my work is not in vain.
(Morgan Chichester)

1492

*"And with what body do they come?" —
Then they do come — Rejoice!
What Door — What Hour — Run — run
— My Soul!
Illuminate the House!*

*"Body!" Then real — a Face and Eyes —
To know that it is them!
Paul knew the Man that knew the News —
He passed through Bethlehem —*

. . . Her inner being or soul was jumping with joy and rejoicing. Apostle Paul knew the good news . . . , which was Jesus. (Edwina Robinson)
[Editor's Note: See 1 Corinthians 15:35 But some man will say, "How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?"]

1293

*The things we thought that we should do
We other things have done
But those peculiar industries
Have never been begun—*

*The Lands we thought that we should seek
When large enough to run
By Speculation ceded
To Speculation's Son—*

*The Heaven, in which we hoped to pause
When Discipline was done
Untenable to Logic
But possibly the one—*

I feel that this poem expresses regret for all the things one could have done in one's lifetime but never made the time to do. It reflects on how we get so caught up in everyday life that we never see the importance of the simple things. I think it's a reflection of those things wasted in our own

lifetime.

I personally always make excuses why I can't follow or haven't followed my own dreams. I always regret that I never did. I feel that in my life there are never enough hours in the day to get things done.

(Marvin Pratt)

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.*

God forgives us 777 times in one day, but the writer is specific in asking God for one favor. God sees all and knows all, the writer states, but will forgive us if we repent. God is a forgiving God. Even as sinners, we're able to pray and ask God for mercy. . . . God has given me mercy in my life; of this, I am sure.

(Helen Montgomery)

No one knows but God about whatever crimes or wrongful things we have done. Because of secrets, happiness may not be granted, and because of all your hidden misdemeanors, heaven may not be an option. . . . "Magic prison" was this person's conscience sheltering her from the truth. . . . Heaven has too much competition with evil in the world.

(Michelle Bozeman)

1677

*On my volcano grows the grass
A meditative spot—
An acre for a Bird to choose
Would be the General thought—*

*How red the Fire rocks below—
How insecure the sod*

Did I disclose

Would populate with awe my solitude.

This poem expressed me, simply. Outside, all looks neat, calm, and pretty inviting, but inside (below the surface) is boiling, clashing lava ready to overflow at any moment. If I let folks in and tell them what I really think and feel, they would think I'm insane, or be amazed. Either way, they would be intrigued to learn more, and I wouldn't be left alone.

Emily Dickinson felt the same; her expression was the same. How can a 19th-century white woman understand what it feels like to be a 21st century black girl with all my sadness and internal injuries? She understood that it was necessary to conceal the fire and pressure that brewed below in order to maintain solitude and peace. I dig that.

(Takeyla Benton)

1763

*Fame is a bee
It has a song—
It has a sting—
Ah, too, it has a wing.*

Fame is equal to a bee. It owns a song, it owns a sting, but, oh wow, look out for that wing! I believe she is saying that being famous is not a stable career. At times there's a smooth song of peace, but during other times the low moments can hurt like that of a bee sting, leaving its mark of pain on you. Like a bee's wing, fame flits about here and there, not sure what to find, hoping for a richer taste of life.

(Trendell Johnson)

. . . Fame can bring you much wealth and happiness, but it can also bring you enemies and much unhappiness. Fame has a dark ugly side to it. Fame can hurt you if not used wisely. It can be your demise, physically, mentally, and financially, if you're not careful. . . .

(Marie Hill)

Call and Response



Three Musical Responses

There were three pieces in the past Oracle that reached into my soul and grabbed me. The fact that I have three other classmates that have the same view I have on music made me just shine.



Bonita, Marseills, and Marie captivated me with their descriptions of their intimacy with

music. Marseills wrote in his poem, "Hip Hop is living energetic poetry, a hidden anguish, spoken truth, forbidden language so complete whatever I bless you know it's me." Marie says, "it is very uplifting. It touches your heart and grabs your soul." She expresses her love for Gospel and how you feel the presence of the Lord just by music. I tell you, Gospel grabs you from within. Bonita says, "Music calms my soul as the rhythm enters my inner ear."

Soul, calm, soothes: we all express that, and I feel that closeness to my classmates. Music: Oh, how I love thee!

(Michelle Bozeman)

I Love R&B by Michelle Bozeman

I really enjoyed Michelle's piece on "I Love R&B." I love how she explains how individual songs may make her feel at certain moments of things she may be going through. I feel the same way about music. Gospel reminds me of my grandmother when she was alive. Listening to Barry White's



"Practice What You Preach" reminds me of how

much my father loved him. I, too, love R&B!
(Catina McAlister)

I really like Michelle Bozeman's "I Love"



piece talking about R&B! I like it because first of all I can relate to the things that she is saying, and secondly because she had a "groove" going on there. It really got me thinking of what songs play out my life.

(Precious LaShore)

I Love Gospel Music by Marie Hill

I did not realize how much gospel music gave me until I read Marie's article.



Yes, it does make me feel all of my problems are eased when I hear gospel music. After reading Marie's article, I now know gospel music helps you when you need an extra boost to get by and lift your head up.

(Tracy Cunnigan)

I Love Poetry by Takeyla Benton

I really enjoyed reading Takeyla's "I Love



Poetry" piece written so beautifully and eloquently. Her story of her love of poetry just ignites your soul and lifts your spirits from feeling cold. It puts you in the zone to grab a pen and just write, striking each line so fiercely with metaphors and similes from an endless mind,

only to create a masterpiece with precious time!

(Marseills McKenzie)

I am touched by every word that Takeyla wrote in her I love essay. She gives good examples and goes into details in her writing, expressing a side of her that you can't see. Her writing pulls me in and makes me feel like I'm there with her, feeling the rush of excitement, too.



(Diance Lor)

I Love Creativity by Shardetra Ofori-Anim

I like what Shardetra said about creativity—her



love of art, music, jewelry using beads, cooking, writing, sewing, etc. She seems to be multi-talented. I think it is so cool she is learning to play the guitar. Creativity is a beautiful thing and is an outlet. I believe it can also be relaxing for people and can help one unwind

in one's own way. Shardetra, maybe you can play something for us. Continue on your creative journey.

(Marie Hill)

I Love Jesus by Pamela Lee

Pamela Lee said she loves Jesus. I do, too,



and that's why I enjoyed reading what she said. I love that she gives Jesus the credit (glory) for being in her life. She even acknowledges that Jesus was in her life since childhood. When she and her siblings suffered as children, she feels Jesus was there to pull her

through. Once she made it to adulthood, she made some choices that were destructive. She says Jesus once again came and saved her life. She says she feels that her life has purpose and her self esteem has grown, all because of Jesus.

(Eleita Florence)



I can relate to Pam's "I love Jesus" essay. I don't know how many times God has saved me, but without Him I don't think I'd be here today.

(Michael Lozano)

I Love My Son by Precious LaShore

I really like this. I love this essay because I can relate to her emotions so much.



Like Precious, I also feel my child is my motivation. My daughter gives me so much strength, even when it feels like all the love in the world is gone. I also feel like my daughter, Isabella, is amazingly

smart and will one day change the world for the better. (Leah LaBarre)

I Love... by Trendell Johnson

Trendell and I share many of the same views. I



too grew up without parents, raised by my aunt. I often wondered "what if?" Could my life have been any different if I had been raised by my own parents? I too look for love from God but often have thought "why me?" What is the reason I was made to go through

this life alone?

(Marvin Pratt)

Kian's Reflections by Kian Cunningham

While reading the 13th issue of the Oracle, I



found my attention caught by Kian's reflections. The seriousness of her husband's illness at his young age made me think of how we need to share our stories. This is how we educate one another on issues, especially health and wellness. This story hopefully will

encourage others, especially young Black men, to do a wellness check with their physicians. Blood clotting issues are not uncommon in the north. I do pray that Kian's husband and Eleita along with their families continue to thrive in good health as Odyssey moves forward.

(Bonita Greer)

Paraphrasing Gandhi by Marseills McKenzie

I like what Marseills had to say about violence and non-violence. He said violence is weak and is done by man. Non-violence is the weapon of God and it is strong. I say that Marseills' comments about this stand tall and are right on.

(Marie Hill)

Black Swan Review by Shardetra Ofori-Anim

I saw the preview to this movie and want to go watch it, but I also hear it's even better if you watch it with a friend or family member. I'm saving it for my birthday present with two others sisters whose birthdays are also in March. Thanks, Shardetra, for

a short summary. From the sounds of it, I'm going to like it! **(Diance Lor)**

Martin Luther King by Eleita Florence



I love this poem. It feels like Eleita took the thoughts and feelings right out of my head. My favorite line, "From one gun blast, so many hearts would bleed," is really true. So many people were in shock and torn apart when Dr. King was shot. I wish he could have seen the progress that we've made, and I'm proud to be a part of his legacy. Eleita has inspired me to write poetry of my own. **(Leah LaBarre)**

I really love the Martin Luther King poem by Eleita Florence. She gives well deserved compliments to a great man. The reader can tell that she holds him in high esteem, and who can say she's wrong? Martin Luther King was a fearless man who lived in a fearful world. If only there could be more men and women today who would say "I will be an extremist for godliness, righteousness, holiness, and integrity." **(Trendell Johnson)**



Well written poem by Eleita—very strong and passionate, opening the door to the truths of the Civil Rights Movement. She writes about Coretta Scott supporting her husband during such tragic times. I like how Eleita takes the reader inside the life of Martin Luther King. **(Helen Montgomery)**

Mental Intimacy by Stephanie Pamperin

My response to Stephanie's Mental Intimacy poem is that intimacy is a powerful tool that most don't take the time to understand. You see, for me this term references an important part of women's and men's interactions—spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically. I define intimacy as into-me-see. When you truly take the time to navigate the innermost being of another, you'll find the true character of the other person. . . . It takes a lot of patience when seeking a life partner. This

process is vital. To all who are on this journey, I'd like to say God Bless. **(Bonita Greer)**

Teen Pregnancy by Takeyla Benton



I really liked Takeyla's editorial in the new Oracle. She got pregnant and was so scared to tell her mom. She used her bus transfer to the East and West side of Madison until it ran out. Her mom was upset but got over it. Takeyla got two jobs and did everything she could for her baby, even if it meant Takeyla not eating. I liked her essay so much. **(Kian Cunningham)**

I also walked in those shoes. I walked across the high school stage as my then two-year-old daughter cheered me on. Determined to be a good mother, provider, and teacher to my child, I kept focused, though I do wish that I'd gone straight to college instead of working right out of high school. Fear is what held me back. I was accepted to Texas University but made the decision not to go.

Sixteen years later, my daughter did not hesitate to take her opportunity. She is now a UW Platteville graduate, single, without children, who is going back in August to pursue her graduate degree. I am very proud of her. I, too, am going back to get my bachelor's in nursing.

Thank you for sharing, Takeyla. I only hope people understand that it is much easier when a child is raised in a loving home with two loving parents who want them and are ready for the odyssey of parenting. **(Bonita Greer)**

Make a Pathway to Citizenship by Danielle Rosales



I was glad to see Danielle's editorial on immigration. Right now this issue is very personal for me. I am very close to the family of my girlfriend, Sarah. Her sister Katie's husband, Jorge, is an immigrant from Mexico. Last December, Katie, Jorge and their two kids got

an appointment for a citizenship application and had to relocate to Mexico. They are currently wrapped up in racist bureaucracy, and it seems pretty bleak right now. Danielle also brings up the old argument people use against immigrants taking jobs. This, as she states, is nonsense: they are actually being often used as slave labor. **(Dalonte Nobles)**

Homelessness in Madison by Catina McAlister

I really agree with Catina McAlister's editorial about homelessness in Madison. I say this because I can SO relate to what she is talking about. I am one of the 3,500 people experiencing homelessness. As the woman said, "A homeless person is NOT just a person that's out pushing a cart and drunk all the time!" I get up and go to work every day and to school every Wednesday, and I make sure my son is fed and asleep by 8 PM!

(Precious LaShore)

Being homeless when I first came to Madison, I can relate as well as understand the struggles of many of Madison's homeless. There aren't enough programs to help overcome this problem. Now that Governor Walker is cutting a lot of programs, it's only going to get worse!

(Marvin Pratt)

Walk on By by Oroki Rice



In response to Oroki's editorial about the homeless, I really feel I want to do more. That is why I have gone to my pastor at the church I attend and have offered to open up my home. I find it indeed hard to just sit back and not do anything. I presently help out with feeding the homeless, not because I feel sorry but because it's the right thing to do. I feel great to be blessed to help.

(Dennis Listenbee)

Black History Month Needs More than a Month by Marvin Pratt

Marvin Pratt expressed his anger about Black History Month. He let it be known that he was unsettled about the shortest month of the year being Black History Month. He feels that more

time should be set aside for African Americans to express, explain, and present issues for Black History. . . . Frankly, I would not complain because the Irish only get one day, March 17th!

(Eleita Florence)

Marvin Pratt's "Black History Needs More than a Month" had me thinking and questioning some things even more than usual. Why is Black History Month the shortest month out of the 12? Why can't we celebrate it and other cultures every month? Who decided to make February Black History Month? Marvin has brought attention to something we should be questioning.

(Catina McAlister)

I found it interesting that Marvin pointed out that the month chosen was in fact the shortest. It actually does seem like subtle racism. There are also very strong points in Marvin's editorial about the issue of why black history has to be segregated from history and how a month to focus on it trivializes the history. **(Dalonte Nobles)**

Pimping the Media by Kegan Carter

I can relate to this because Hip Hop used to energize your mind and its thoughts without putting others down. Today a lot of it is disrespectful and people pick up on the words used in those verses.

(Marvin Pratt)

Understand My Disease Instead of Staring at My Skin by Pamela Lee

This article gave me a bigger outlook on psoriasis. I did not know that people in the community could be so cruel when it comes down to a skin disease. In this article, she made me have psoriasis, which gave me a different outlook on the disease. I better understand how she feels.

(Tracy Cunnigan)

I decided to comment on Pam's "Understand My Disease" because of my son's skin condition, which is Eczema. It touched me because I could somewhat feel her pain. Out of ignorance, people stare at my son's legs and arms. At times I find myself blurting out, "It's not contagious!" and "It's not polite to stare!" **(Catina McAlister)**

Editorial Corner

Affordable Education

by **Morgan Chichester**



Imagine making the difficult decision to go back to college after several years off, only to discover you have student loans from long ago that prevent you from doing so. As soon as you find out, you quickly try to take care of it by making payments but discover it's not that easy. There is a lot of "red tape" you have to get through to fix this, and no one makes it easy.

Many people have expressed that they feel like victims of the student loan lenders when they are not able to make their payments. Some schools fail to fully explain the terms of the loans to the students before they sign on the dotted line. You may face what I personally have faced: being threatened to make large monthly payments you can't afford, having wages garnished, and having tax refunds taken. Having someone call you three to four times a day asking you for money you just don't have is difficult. Knowing this is the only thing that stands in the way of you getting a degree and providing a better life for your family is excruciating.

There has got to be a better way. There has got to be a way people can pay back their loans so they can continue their education. There has got to be a way to keep them from falling victim to these predatory loan companies.

More than Black and White

by **Michael Lozano**



First and foremost, I would like to say I'm not racist. I'm just a person with questions.

I don't understand why we celebrate Black History Month and publicize just this one culture. I feel if we have a month for a certain race/culture, shouldn't we

also celebrate other cultures like Asian History Month or Hispanic Month? I thought America is the land of the free. If so, why do we isolate everyone else who's not black or white?

Some may think I'm wrong, but I feel we should really be treated equally and not just focus on two groups (white/black) and glorify them. When Martin Luther King Jr. was giving his "I Have a Dream" speech, I know he wasn't just talking about black and white folks coming together. I'd just like the same respect as is given to black and white people.

Same Sex Relationships

by **Ray Migizi Hopp**

I think and feel that people in same sex relationships



should be allowed the same freedoms and rights as others have, no matter what! This includes legal marriage. LGBTQ people are the same as everyone else. They deserve to be treated respectfully and equally. They love just as much as non LGBTQ persons. They love themselves and each

other. They should not be discriminated against because they like or love the same sex. People are hated just for being LGBTQ. It is so unjust and so unfair. God loves all his creations equally!



Make College Education Affordable by Marseills McKenzie



I strongly feel that education should be either more affordable or free, like it is in many countries. Knowledge is powerful, and learning has been priceless since the beginning of time.

How do you expect people to excel and prosper in this country without a proper education beyond middle school or even high school? Having a basic

education isn't good enough anymore in today's job market; employers expect their employees to be more versatile and well-rounded.

Whether you are a new or a returning student, the cost of obtaining a higher education is quite expensive. Paying for your tuition, books, and student loans is like having to pay rent or a mortgage each month.

I believe we need to have more need-based scholarships or even more programs like the Odyssey Project for one year of free college for all qualified Wisconsin residents under a certain income level.

Additional financial aid will most likely come in the form of an American Opportunity Tax Credit, a fully refundable credit program that would cover tuition costs in exchange for community service. This plan from Obama would ensure the first \$4,000 of a college education is free for most Americans, a sum which would cover two-thirds of the cost of the tuition at the average public college or university. Students who receive the credit would be required to perform 100 hours of community service.

These accessible and affordable educational plans will allow each and every American to pursue a higher degree of education, getting them a step closer to achieving the American Dream.



Double the Minimum Wage! by Marie Hill

Minimum wage is \$7.25 per hour. Minimum



wage should be raised to \$15 per hour to help people and families who are struggling.

People making minimum wages . . . are struggling because they are losing their homes, apartments, and cars, and families are falling apart.

It is hard to pay your rent when you are making minimum wages. You may be trying to support five children or one child or just yourself, with all the necessities that come along such as heat, lights, phone, water, car insurance, etc. You are worried about how you're going to pay them. You have dental needs, health needs, maybe mental health needs and medication needs as well, but you don't make enough to cover the cost for health insurance at your job.

You can't feed or shelter your family, especially nowadays, on minimum wage. The cost of living is way too high, and rent is up the roof. Food is awfully expensive, and gas is way over the top. Personal hygiene items are ridiculous in cost. It is a very big strain on your wallets and pocketbooks. There are other things we need for our upkeep such as household cleaning supplies. Many of us at times do without many items because the money just isn't there.

. . . Somebody please listen and help all those making this little amount of money! Countless people are starving, homeless, angry, and depressed because they can't support themselves and their

families.

If the minimum wage were raised to \$15 per hour, that sure would make things a lot better and far more bearable on the hearts, minds, stomachs, and households of men, women, and children.

Give Us Health Insurance!

by Trendell Johnson



Today I bring forth a serious matter, a crisis that must be handled. Today millions of Americans are facing unhealthy conditions which have left many to die. Illnesses that can be cured are not being prevented due to people being denied proper care at earlier stages.

I myself do not receive health care. Why? I do not have the necessary funds, and I am not disabled. I speak out of experience when I state it is unjust to allow anyone to suffer poor health due to lack of money. It is a responsibility of any country to ensure a good health care plan for all its citizens, whether poor or rich.

I am a young, intelligent, hard-working black man who can't afford to go to the hospital when severely injured. I recall talking to siblings, friends, and family members about how their bodies were giving them so much pain—their backs, their hips. Not knowing if your mom's or brother's conditions would take a turn for the worse is a position no one should be forced into. Please take a moment to picture yourself in my shoes. How would you feel?

I urge you to answer this question: who in this country has the right to say that money is more valuable than life?

Rethink the Economy

by Dalonte Nobles

"I believe that banking institutions are more dangerous to our liberties than standing armies," wrote founding father Thomas Jefferson. It has never been truer for this country than today. The world I have been born into resembles that of the totalitarian models suggested in George Orwell's *1984*, a novel positing a government that uses constant war



as a means of controlling the people. To some this may seem unlikely; however, when you consider the driving force behind war is profit, it becomes clear that the root of the matter is wealth.

In a system where a select few make the rules of conduct and the people that serve as the body are exploited, marginalized, oppressed and pitted in miniature civil wars as distractions from the real issue, we have become commodities to be used and discarded as easily as table scraps. Jefferson feared that if we let the banks (privately owned) have their say in matters of security, they will always provoke war for their own selfish interests. I believe this holds true today and can be visibly seen in the brainwashing of the masses through corporate trickery, the corruption of the currency, and sheer insanity of the bizarre world game of Monopoly we call an economy. Much like the feudal system that preceded it, I believe that the current model of capitalism has run its course as an experiment. We have learned a lot about ourselves in the process; however, with the current environmental and social catastrophes, I say it's time to rethink the economy.

The idea of an exchange economy in its purest form makes sense: you have something I need, and I have something you need; therefore, we have a mutual stake in each other's survival. It seems simple enough; however, when you look at it in the way our country does business, the sheer unfairness of the system means that only some people have a say over the terms of the trade. The gap of wealth is unfathomably immense and appears to be the underlying cause of most if not all of our social problems. It creates a caste system of privileged and impoverished people. This is partially instigated through right-wing ideologies of trickle-down economics, laissez-faire, and free market. In theory, these ideals propose that the unrestricted practices of private businesses (laissez-faire) will self-regulate in the market (free market) and invest and grow the capital and redistribute the wealth to the lower classes (trickledown economics). That

could sound reasonable to some, but to me all I hear is, "I have the money so do whatever I tell you to do and maybe we'll pay you."

It gets even creepier when I think about how so much time and energy is spent to create markets. In my opinion, if a market is needed it will create itself. I often argue with my libertarian friend about the distribution of wealth. I cannot understand how he could feel that it is the poor person's fault that they are poor. My friend is considered middle class, and I feel too often that the rhetoric spewed pits the lower class as scapegoat for all the problems in society. This is a distraction from the real issue of money as a weapon of power. . . .

Alan Greenspan argues, "If men did not have some commodity of objective value which was generally acceptable as money, they would have to resort to primitive barter or be forced to live on self-sufficient farms and forgo the inestimable advantages of specialization. If men had no means to store value, i.e., to save, neither long-range planning nor exchange would be possible." Mr. Greenspan seems not creative enough to imagine a way of life different from the way we live currently. Why should he? After all, his company was the Federal Reserve, a privatized banking institution that controls the finances of our entire country.

Humanity has been around for more than 50,000 years, and I highly doubt we arrived on the scene doing what we are doing now. If we continue this trajectory our world will start resembling the world of Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*. In *Oryx and Crake*, the world exists as a set of privatized corporate colonies that control all aspects of life. This isn't too farfetched when you consider the new legislature in Michigan that states that the governor can assign a privatized company to replace the elected officials of the city. I'd rather not go to Pepsico Junior High or Exxon University, thank you.

The world is constantly evolving and it's time for us to get creative. I'll end this argument with an excellent Ella Baker quote: "In order for us as poor and oppressed people to become part of a society that is meaningful, the system under which we now exist has to be radically changed. . . . It means facing a system that does not lend itself to your needs and devising means by which you change that system."

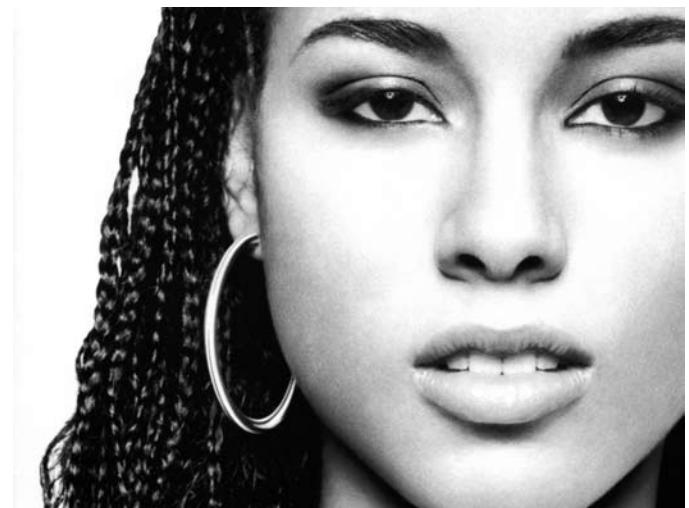
A Response to Alicia Keys

P.O.W.

*I'm a prisoner
Of words unsaid
Just lonely feelings
Locked away in my head.
I trap myself further
Every time I stay quiet
I should start to speak
But I stop and stay silent
And now I've made
My own hard bed
Inside a prison of words unsaid*

I love this poem with everything I have inside of me. This is my favorite poem and probably the first poem I fell in love with. I am quite envious that I could not put my feelings together to come up with this first. I like this poem so much because I can relate to it so strongly. I always keep everything to myself because life is honestly better this way.

(Shardetra Ofori-Anim)



Alumni Profile: Josephine Lorya

Josephine Lorya remembers something that her dad used to say: “Struggling is the real meaning of life. Victory and defeat are in the hands of God, so everyone must enjoy in struggling.” This was printed on a plaque that hung on her wall in Nairobi, Kenya, and it remains in her heart as a motto.

Originally from the Sudan, Josephine and her family moved to Kenya following an accident which left her mother severely burned. “She was in a Kenyan hospital for five years. It was hard for me because I was the youngest. My aunties came and helped out. I don’t remember everything, but when I see pictures of my mom in the hospital bed, it just makes me want to make her happy. And the only thing she wants from me is to get an education so I can better myself. She says that’s something that no one can ever take from me.”

Josephine uses the word “different” to describe her life before Odyssey. “In my journey, there were no smooth roads, definitely bumpy ups and downs,” she recalls. “I was not focused on school as much. I knew I wanted to finish my education, but financially I wasn’t able to. Before, I wasn’t really focused on my grades. I was running track and playing soccer. If I got a C or a D, I’d say, ‘Oh well, I’m passing.’”

Ultimately, she put her academic career on hold after her freshman year when she got pregnant with her daughter, Zawadi. “There was too much stress around me. Everyone was pulling me to different sides. I decided to just take a break.”

Working as a hair-braider, Josephine heard about Odyssey through Oroki Rice’s sister, Adrienne Rakina. “Since then, everything has been going on an uphill climb, getting better and better,” Josephine smiles. “My first day at Odyssey, I was really nervous because I didn’t know what I was getting into. I saw all these different people from different backgrounds. I’ve never been in a classroom with a lot of black people. I was nervous because everyone was so opinionated and open-minded. I was so impressed by that. Classes were fun. I was looking forward to classes. Childcare was there, so I had no excuse not to come.” Josephine graduated from the Odyssey Project in 2008 and became a US citizen in 2009.

“No excuses” is the mantra Josephine lives by as she pushes through her Legal Studies major at UW-Madison, where she expects to graduate in the fall. “I’m more focused on putting hard work into my grades than before.” Since Odyssey, she describes herself as more confident and determined. “I go for what I want. I’m not hesitant. I used to be scared. Right now, I’m in school, I’m a mom, I’m a wife. It’s hard, but I do it. There’s no excuses.”

According to Josephine, Odyssey played a significant role in her acceptance at UW. “I knew the value of education, but I couldn’t have imagined that I would attend UW.” She credits Emily with being a strong support system in the Project. “She’s just... I don’t know if there’s any words to describe how nice Emily is. She’s always there for me mentally,” Josephine says. “I call her for pep talks before tests and she always says, ‘You’ll be fine.’ She’s always there to offer help.”

Odyssey is “the best thing that’s happened to me,” Josephine says. “It’s a movement. It gets you going. It’s something you have to experience to understand. It’s not just classes; it’s the environment that you’re in. Most people that attend Odyssey have never dreamt of going to college. I



never knew who Walt Whitman was or that there were so many Black writers. It's definitely a great experience. It's something that you're always a part of. Even when you graduate from the class, you'll always be a part of the Odyssey family."

Josephine wants those that contribute time and donations to the Project to know that their efforts are not in vain. "You're not just helping someone get an education, you're potentially changing someone's life," she says. "Anything helps; it's for a good cause. We appreciate everything that you do. The proof is in the success rate."

Josephine serves as a role model for all current and future Odyssey students. Though her success seems effortless, she reiterates that it is not; the hard work begins in the Odyssey classroom. "There's no such thing as an easy ticket to anything. Everything takes hard work. There's going to be days when you're down, but just know that there's a light at the end of the tunnel, like with the *Allegory of the Cave*."

Speaking of her own current frustrations, Josephine says, "Financial struggles are always there. Keeping up with classes and home life is hard, especially if my kids are sick. Some professors understand and some don't. But when I was pregnant, I did not miss a class. I wasn't going to use my kids or my pregnancy as an excuse unless it's an emergency." Josephine is a recent recipient of the Bernice D. Kuney scholarship, a scholarship offered to returning adult students attending UW-Madison.

Josephine especially credits her husband and her supportive family members for helping her along the way. As a 25-year-old mother of two (ten-month-old Zion, and six-year-old Zawadi), Josephine is aware of the necessity of quality time with her family. She tries to maintain a schedule that allows her to balance school and home. "Tuesday is my crazy day, but Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, I'll come to campus around 9 after I drop Zion off at daycare. Then I'll do work-study for an hour. After that, I'll do my homework in the library until class starts. That way, when I go home, I can review my notecards while carrying Zion on my back, like we do back home. My husband helps out a lot. He's pushing me; he wants me to finish because he wants to finish, also.

But it's definitely hard. There are days when I get so exhausted." On the weekends, Josephine turns off her phone and focuses solely on her family. "On Saturdays, I like to chill in my pajamas all day and hang out with my kids, watching cartoons. If they take a nap, then I'm right there with them."

Thinking about her long-term goals, Josephine continues to keep her family at the forefront of her plans. "Hopefully, when I finish school I can get a job and take over the bills so that my husband can finish. If I don't go to law school to study immigration law, I want to get a good job in order to avoid living check-to-check. Hopefully I can get a job in the immigration field and work with Homeland Security because I want to do something I love. I definitely want to graduate so I can show my kids that it's possible. I wouldn't recommend having kids before finishing, but if it happens, it happens. Just own it and get on with it."

Josephine's father was very influential in many of her decisions in her life. "My dad was the coolest. I still talk about him like he's still here. He was so hands-on. He would take us to parks and buy us ice cream. He always took us to Uhuru Park in Kenya. He was the most awesome person ever.

"My dad passed away in 1993, before we came to America in 1996. My mom said that his last words were, 'Make sure that my kids get an education.' That's all he was saying."

Certainly, Josephine's father would be extremely proud of his daughter's accomplishments and the fact that she is keeping his legacy alive. Josephine applies the quote from her dad to her uphill journey toward success: "The struggle continues, day by day. It's the real meaning of life."



A Visit by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

Famous African American scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr. visited UW Madison on March 24 to present the Nellie Y. McKay Memorial Lecture. Craig Werner explained to the crowd of hundreds in attendance that the late Nellie McKay was a distinguished literary critic and dedicated teacher at UW who served as the co-editor along with Harvard's Professor Gates of the acclaimed Norton Anthology of African American Literature.

In his talk on Genetics, Genealogy, and African American History, Professor Gates spoke of his own yearning to discover his roots. He discussed and played video clips from his PBS documentary "American Lives" tracing the family trees of famous African Americans such as Oprah, Don Cheadle, Tina Turner, and Chris Rock. Celebrities appeared moved and astonished to discover their complicated paths back to slavery and across the ocean to Africa. Genetic research has shown that almost all African Americans are admixtures of black and white ancestry.

At a reception, Professor Gates learned about the UW Odyssey Project and pronounced it a wonderful program. He kissed the hand of 75-year-old Juanita Wilson (Odyssey '07), who made MATC's



Dean's List last semester, congratulated Kegan Carter ('04) on her UW degree, complimented Brian Benford ('07) and Sherri Bester ('08) on their progress toward UW degrees, spoke to Josephine Lorya ('08) about her Sudanese origins, praised Mary Wells ('07) and Rene Robinson ('08) for being Odyssey graduates, and said to Professor Emily (whom he labeled a "proud mother hen" because of her obvious pride in her alumni), "You're my girl."

