

A learning tool for students of the UW-Madison Odyssey Project

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Student Profile Edition

Meet the Odyssey class of 2008

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Multitasking Justin Wilson does it all for daughter Gianna By Ozanne Anderson

Justin Wilson has the makings of an accomplished screen-play writer / film maker. Justin has interests in story telling, historical romantic novels, and romantic comedies. With aspirations of

attaining a career in the film-making field, Justin has started his journey by participating in the UW Madison's Odyssey project (a program with an emphasis on reading, creative writing and courses in Humanities). Along with the demands of class work, Justin also juggles two jobs and



is raising his beautiful daughter Gianna.

Gianna, now six years old, is the apple of his eye, and she is also the motivation behind all of Justin's hard work. He is working to provide a better life for her and considers it all worth it, to see her happy and taken care of. Justin knows education is the key to unlock the future he's been dreaming of

Working two jobs, caring for Gianna, and going to school leave Justin with little time for personal endeavors. In his spare time, he enjoys reading; he says he can read and watch a good flick at the same time. He calls this the gift of multi- tasking. He can remember details from a movie scene for scene, clip for clip, along with the sound tracks for each scene.

Ozanne Anderson: an educator of unusual talents

By Justin Wilson

She is a childcare provider, the assistant director of her church's



youth group, and a university student. Ozanne Anderson is also an accomplished musician who is particularly talented with her voice and as a piano player.

Born and raised in Milwaukee, WI, Ozanne has devoted her life to the improvement of education that is being handed down to our youth. An advocate for a more diverse learning experience, her goal is to redo the curriculum in the public school system in America.

Blessed with a high level of spirituality, Ozanne is often guided by her strong feelings and prescient dreams—skills and abilities she uses daily in raising her own three kids, Jonah, Noah, and Micah, in her work and in her personal life. She has been married for nine years.

Ozanne truly believes that children are our future, and she uses all of her abilities to endow them with the skills and knowledge that they will need when the time comes.

She admits that she has known her share of misfortune and that she will not allow anything to get in the way of her dreams. This is why her personal motto in life has always been, "Trouble can't hold me; I'm a stallion."

Severn Anderson: You thought you knew him

By Valerie Williams

Severn Anderson was born in New Mexico, by the Four Corners, in a small town called Shiprock. Legend has it, Sev explains, that when the Navajo were fighting the Apache, a ship came down from heaven and took the Navajo warriors to a safe



place. This place was Shiprock, so named because the nearby mountain is shaped like a giant ship.

Sev is the second born of five, two brothers and two sisters, one of whom is deceased.

He has a love of computers, does crossword puzzles when time permits, and is an avid bike rider.

Sev has lived in Las Vegas, Houston, Anaheim, Kansas City, and Milwaukee, on his own since age 21, but ended up back here in Madison, where he began. He worked as a service associate at St. Luke's Hospital in Kansas City.

Sev's favorite movies are *Pan's Labyrinth* and *Children of Men*, and he is a fan of British comedy, such as Mr. Bean. He's a cat lover and listens to Indie rock, a form of alternative and still a bit underground.

With so many things going on in Sev's life, it is awesome to see him here every week.

Valerie Williams: “Sunday’s Best Capricorn”

By Severn Anderson

Valerie Williams, 35, is known to many as an Odyssey student, a CNA student at MATC, a homemaker, and a great friend. She was born and raised and currently resides in Madison. She is part Black, French Creole, and Native American Indian.

Val’s father passed away of a massive heart attack, literally dying in his daughter’s arms, when Val was just 25 years old. He was a sharpshooter in the Korean War and was a good man, whom Val loved and looked up to with great respect. And if losing a father wasn’t enough, she also lost her older brother to heart disease.

On a lighter note, Val was a serious Michael Jackson fan, with over 300 photos, until “Jacko went wacko.” Val also sings and writes and has two of her own Gospel CD’s. *Goodfellas* is her favorite movie, and she has a special interest in mobster flicks.

She likes them because, “they are smooth, and the mob will wine and dine you before they take you out.” Val recently tried out for a BET TV show called “Sunday’s Best.”

This compassionate Capricorn has been through a lot, losing her father and a sibling. She is friendly and an overall good person who cares about the well-being of others. She may have lost family members dear to her heart, but she still has many friends and family members who love and respect her.

Rockameem Bell: Three-year-old musical prodigy still drumming to his own beat! **By Tara Wilhelmi**

At the first meeting of the 2007-2008 Odyssey class, the most outspoken member was easily Rockameem Bell. As more of us got comfortable in our new surroundings, this Chicago, Illinois native jumped right in with insightful comments.

Rockameem, born Maurice

Eugene Bell, is no stranger to the spotlight. He started performing at age three and is now an avid drummer and poet.

At 23 Maurice received his name, Rockameem Ben Elhim, in a naming ceremony held by the Black Hebrew Israelites. This name holds spiritual meaning for Rockameem and guides him every day.

Born January 6, 1949, he is a devoted husband and father. He and his wife have raised five children—one daughter and four sons.

Rockameem is active in his community. Since his first performance at three, Rockameem has enjoyed sharing his talents with the world.

“At first I thought my life was full,” Rockameem says, “but after having the beginning of [this] Odyssey experience, it showed me how incomplete it was, not negatively but positively. At the same time [it showed me] there was more of me that I can become!”



Tara Wilhelmi: Family is what she is!

By Rockameem Bell

Tara Helen Wihelmi was born in La Crosse, Wisconsin on November 26, 1974. She was somewhat of a rebel as a youth. She was very popular and a good student, but she moved from home when she was 16. She supported herself with a job, went back to high school, and got her diploma from La Follette High School in Madison.

Now Tara is a mother herself. She has five children that she



loves very much. "My kids make my life full," she says.

But I think that there is much more to Tara. She likes to write poetry and to mix music and do some promotion of musical shows. In the Odyssey class, you can see what a thoughtful and caring person she is. Time will tell what else Tara has for this world.

"I wouldn't change a thing about my past," she says, "because it made me the woman I am today."

Sherri Bester jumps back into college

By Albert Watson

Sherri is a 45-year-old strong black woman, and since 1999, she had lost over 200 pounds. She rides her bike every day and grew up with a love of gymnastics as well as liturgical dance and ballet. Sherri can still tumble and do certain gymnastic moves with the best of them (as long as they're 45 or older).

Sherri is a returning adult



student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She's the mother of six kids and has been happily married for six years. She's a homemaker and spends a lot of her free time volunteering at many organizations, such as the Boys and Girls Clubs, Parents of African American Students, and Girl Power.

Sherri was born in Mississippi and grew up in Milwaukee. She moved to Madison in 1980 to attend UW-Madison. Her major is community leadership, with a minor in early childhood education. She is now on a new odyssey toward her ultimate goal, a doctorate degree.

Losing 200 pounds was a great achievement for Sherri. Graduating from college will be great as well, but to be called Dr. Sherri Bester will be her ultimate achievement. "I just want to prove that a person who was diagnosed as a mentally disabled person can earn an education," she says.

Absolutely Amazed About Albert Watson

By Sherri Bester

Albert Watson is a determined and intelligent returning adult student of the Odyssey Project. He is a wonderful and proud father of a twenty-two-month-old baby girl named Miraya. Albert's eyes glow with sunshine when he speaks of his daughter. He faithfully provides for Miraya by working, hard and diligently, two jobs to supply her needs. Albert is an after school supervisor at John Muir Elementary School. He also works at "Real Chili" on State Street.

Albert is a former small business man. He owned a food cart in which he sold Southern Barbecue Ribs, Italian Beef Sandwiches, and Hebrew National Hot Dogs, to name a few. On the side he catered food also. In fact Albert still does catering.

Albert's talents and passions keep him focused onward. He is a wise young man who uses



his gifts to give back to society and gain more knowledge along the way. He earns a living with productive and positive positions of passion.

Albert is the oldest son from a family of four boys. His parents' names are Catherine and Clarence Johnson. Albert was born in Memphis, Tennessee while his parents were on a family vacation. He returned home to Kankakee, Illinois to grow up with his family. Albert is an eligible bachelor, a handsome, intelligent and focused black male! All his brothers are married with children.

Albert expressed to me in great power and clarity how much he loves to cook. Although he is no longer a small business man with his own food cart, Albert still uses his cooking gifts to earn an honest living with creativity and wit.

I'm absolutely amazed about Albert! He is quite the jewel. It is a great pleasure to dwell in conversation with him. At this point in Albert's life he is seeking to finish his education to better the life of his daughter and himself financially. It is his desire to be paid what he is worth and have an education to back him up professionally in his goal to become a social worker and community activist.

Albert is a strong, devoted, wise black man and a father who will reach his educational goals. He is diligently running and faithfully striving directly down the pathway to the finish line. When I spoke with Albert he made me feel so proud and encouraged that my four sons

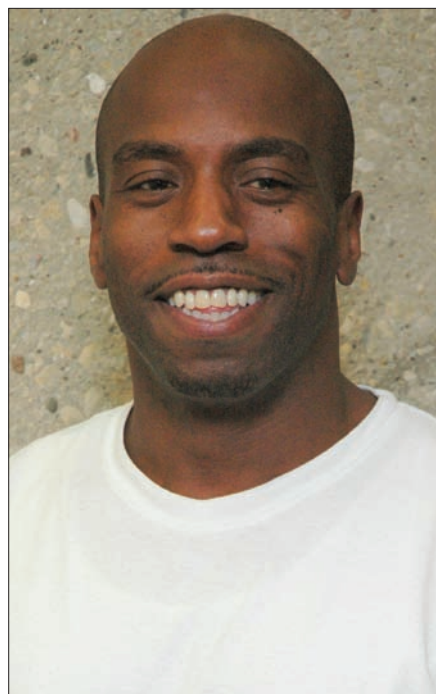
have him as an example with in this struggling society. Albert's a good, old fashioned, hard working, young black male of great leadership. Yes! I am absolutely amazed about Albert!

Dwayne Blue survives a life of running a game to become a positive influence **By Maria Torres**

Dwayne describes himself as a man with low esteem but modest, outgoing, and friendly.

He had the courage and honor to serve the rough battles of the Army for three years as a pediatric nurse. While enjoying his time as a nurse, he didn't feel it was the road to his future, even though he enjoyed working with the children.

Most people wouldn't have ever guessed that in his younger years his life was all about "running the game" on people. All he knew back in the day and all he thought he was good at was robbing, stealing, and conning people. But the combination



of jail and feeling guilty about hurting so many people changed his life to a positive one.

A graduate of Madison's Memorial High School in Madison, WI, Dwayne never thought that he would actually enjoy reading, writing, and most of all pursuing a higher education.

He was born and raised in Madison. His parents are natives of Mississippi and Chicago. He has never married and has no children. His employment is in lawn care and construction.

You wouldn't have guessed that someone that has graduated from M.A.T.C with a degree in building services, attended Iowa Central College and described himself as having low self esteem, would have conned people. But that's what makes Dwayne so unique. That just shows how much we can change for the better as long as we believe in ourselves and try. As Dwayne says, "I don't like looking or moving backwards; I always work and move forward."

Maria Torres makes cakes out of diapers

By Dwayne Blue

Maria Torres is a busy woman. She and her husband, Jesus, have six children, all boys, and one on the way. So it's safe to assume that Maria knows a thing or two about diapers.

The thought of cakes made out of diapers and towels may not sound appealing to eat, but to the expecting mother or someone who just had a baby, Maria's unique and creative idea is practical. Besides making the



diapers look delicious, Maria uses her own special technique to stuff the diapers with all kind of cool kiddie things.

Maria assists in property management and has decided to return to college after spending a few semesters at MATC. Her motto is "Don't give up!"

**Jack Crawford, the man, the father, the Odyssey student
By Brenda Tompkins**

Jack Crawford was born in Tampa, Florida on the McDill Air Force Base. However, he wasn't raised there. He has lived in Wisconsin since he was eight years old.

Jack is the youngest of three and close with his siblings; they do keep in touch with each other. His brother, Tony, lives in Janesville, and his sister, Sandy, lives in Florida.

Jack says he regrets not taking advantage of school when he was younger, and "not growing up with my father in my life was a



grave disappointment, too."

He has two children. Fontane, his son, is 27 years old and living on his own, and daughter Jasmine is 14 and a freshman in high school.

Jack wants to be closer to Jasmine. Maybe that would take the form of father and daughter chats, to find out what's new in her life, or doing some things together. He wants to be there for her.

Although Jack is not a church-going person, his mind seems to speak Christ-like thoughts. He has decided that he won't take things lying down anymore. Life is too short. "I could enjoy things like fishing, bike riding, and just the outdoors life," he notes. "I'll take advantage of that."

After leaving Tampa when he was so young, being separated by geography from his brother and sister, and meeting someone to share his life with, Jack has decided to continue his education.

He has set goals for himself like working harder at the job,

doing some traveling, and really putting forth the effort to connect with daughter Jasmine.

**Brenda Tompkins lets chance
guide her family to Madison
By Jack Crawford**

Brenda Tompkins did something very interesting to help decide where she and her children should move. She closed her eyes and pointed on a map; she pointed to Madison, Wisconsin. Living in Chicago for most of her adult life, she was ready for a change, and that change brought her to Madison in 1994.

Brenda has a strong desire to continue her education. She has visions of success. My short time getting to know Brenda has helped me to form a warm and positive picture of her. She is very funny and caring and a strong-minded woman who wants the best for her children.

Being the fifth oldest child in a family of 10 was not easy. She has six brothers and three sisters. She got an early lesson in



raising a family just by watching her mother raise 10 children. She wants a better life for herself and her children, who range in ages from 17 to 27. Although this move to Madison wasn't planned in typical fashion, it turned out to be a blessing for her family.

Sometimes life has a way of making us see that changes are needed to get ahead, and obstacles that we encounter along the way are challenges that get us one step closer to our dreams.

Loretta Smith: The Defiant One

By Tom Gardner

When I first laid eyes on Loretta Smith, she was standing in front of the South Madison Library handing out advice to her 10-year-old son. He was very attentive while listening over the sound of street traffic and sidewalk distractions.

The interaction reminded me of my relationship with my son as I watched Loretta bend over so slightly to maternally brush his

forehead. While I couldn't hear the conversation, I could tell from the body language of mother and son that mutual respect and understanding existed between the two of them. Sir-Michael Smith's boyish frame had both feet firmly planted while his head was slightly turned up with eyes looking trustingly at his mother, a heartwarming sight to behold.

Her sparkling eyes and bright smile balanced out the stern but loving sound of her voice as it drifted along the parking lot to my truck, where I sat pretending to be involved in my own world. Her stance was one of confidence or protection while instructing him about the world around him.

I later learned that the protection she exhibited was not without a reason. Loretta had steadfastly fought her husband for sole custody of her son just three years ago. She had also defied the quagmire of requirements for a government foster home, which would dare to hesitate to return her son to a flesh-and-blood parent, a birth mother who so much wanted to continue her love, cherishing, and companionship of blood kin.

From my vantage point, I could see the orange glow of positive energy that exhibited the wonderful bond between parent and child and mother and son and student and teacher. The maternal bond was easily recognized as unconditional love between two entities whose human chemistry is understood in every culture.

Besides providing the essential requirements of warm food, clean clothes, and constant shelter, Loretta provides comfort

and security to a child who has had little of that the past three years. Each evening is greeted with eager anticipation as they complete the chores for the day and prepare for a night's rest; Loretta and Sir-Michael read books to each other as part of a bonding ritual that will always be remembered by a mother and never forgotten by a son. At the end of each day Loretta says to herself, "Because of Sir-Michael, I have become a better parent. I have the incentive to do well because of how my son appreciates me for being with him."

Tom Gardner is a stand-out on the Madison campus

By Loretta Smith

Tom Gardner is 54-years-young and very smart. He's a student in the Odyssey project and also attends school at the UW-Madison.

"After 35 years, I have returned to school," Tom says. "I decided to take classes that interest



me.” These include art history, journalism, the psychology of exercise, intermediate swimming, and, of course, the Odyssey class.

He’s the proud parent of 22-year-old Tristen, who is currently a junior at Seattle University majoring in bio-technology. Tom misses his son very much. “We would bike together on mountain trails, go swimming, play chess, and talk about life as a teenager and a middle-aged man,” he says.

Tom is a veteran of Vietnam. It has taken quite a while for him to recover from the experience, but he is still going strong. “Every day is a struggle,” he says, “but I keep moving on.”

He says he really sticks out on campus “because I’m as old or older than the professors, and I’m a black male, a rarity on campus.”

John Shields: Father, student, and a man with many trades
By Candy Gonzalez

From the few weeks that I’ve known John through the Odyssey, I’ve known him to be soft-



spoken, a great listener, and approachable. Aside from him coming to the Odyssey Class, he has four jobs that require many talents: beautifying lawns, taking care of emergency maintenance for an apartment complex, making desserts, and restoring old toys.

John collects stuffed animals, particularly teddy bears. He has approximately 20 bears. How cute is that!

When he was approximately six years old, he was relocated from Chicago to Wisconsin. He later went to MATC to study Fire Science (fire inspector) and Building Maintenance/Custodial Service.

John has had some ups and downs in his life and may not have always made the best or correct decisions. He has 2 teenaged boys and is trying to be a part of their lives. He knows he can’t change some of the things he has done, but he does say, “Today I’m fortunate to have been through the things I’ve gone through because of who it has made me today. I’m right where I’m supposed to be—I do believe that!”

Candy Gonzalez makes a new life in Madison

By John Shields

Overcoming childhood obstacles, Candy Gonzalez is a productive member of society and living the life she always knew was possible.

Candy is a 35-year-old single mother of three kids, ranging in ages from eight to 17. She has one boy and two girls. She is also taking care of and allowing a



friend’s 16-year-old son to reside with her family.

Candy works for a property management company and oversees many properties throughout the Madison area.

She grew up in Chicago and had lived in some 60 foster homes, group homes, and shelters. At age 16 Candy was emancipated and from that point lived her life as an adult.

She’s lived here in Madison for eight years. “I came to Madison to make a new start,” she says.

Kevin Schoen:
My Father, My Hero
By Mandisa Hayes

Kevin Schoen is currently working in the home remodeling business, but that does not begin to the scratch the surface of the man that he is. Kevin is a fantastic writer who hopes to use the Odyssey Project as a launching pad to success. This father of four is planning to have a career as either a teacher or a counselor.



Who could have known that a visit to a doctor's office with his son would turn out to be a major turning point for Kevin? While filling out a questionnaire to determine if his son had ADHD, he realized that many of the traits applied to him. He was later tested and diagnosed with ADHD.

Kevin has a deep desire to help others. He spent five years as a volunteer parent educator for Family Enhancement. For reasons even he cannot explain, Kevin seems to attract the attention of many troubled people. Perhaps they can sense his caring nature. He has even had complete strangers confess to him that they were contemplating suicide.

Kevin always felt that he was destined to accomplish something big in life. With his caring nature and desire to help others, he has already affected many lives. However, he realized that his greatest accomplishment was raising his four children.

"My 18-year-old son told me

I was his hero," Kevin said. It seems that Kevin is well on the way to meeting all of his goals.

Mandisa Hayes: "Sucre"

By Kevin Schoen

Mandisa Hayes' first name means "sweet" in the South African click language known as Xhosa. How fitting that this woman whose name means "sweet" has a reputation for making the best sweet potato pie in the county.

In addition to being a great cook, Mandisa is a devoted mother to three daughters. When she speaks of them, one senses the strength and stability she brings to their lives. Behind Mandisa's serious side is the joyful side that revealed a giant smile as she told how her kids are really at fun stages in their lives. When I think of Mandisa Hayes, I see Motherhood wearing the apron of integrity, standing over the fire of life, and cooking up big batches of smart choices, good examples, and Love with a big L for her children.



Regardless of how far the conversation wanders, she never strays far from the importance of family. Even one of her favorite authors, V.C. Andrews, writes family dramas based on real life situations.

Few know that as a high school senior in Chicago, Mandisa was only 16 and in the honors program. Ever the adventurer, she ended up going to Cleveland to work with Job Corps, where she received her diploma.

Mandisa's life reveals a refreshing level of focus and a desire to gather and share knowledge. Even the pastimes she enjoys, solving math problems and puzzles, involve mental stimulation. Learning always seems to be a part of everything she does.

"Sweet" Mandisa is not just a very sweet soul: she is the foundation of her children's lives, always setting the example of self-challenge and demonstrating the higher ideals of intellectual pursuit and education. She intends to continue her education after the Odyssey Project.

Ronnie Jones balances single parenting and education

By René Robinson

Her daughter Reina calls her Mom, her Mom R.J. calls her best friend, but I call her the survivor—determined to succeed not for just her sake, but for the sake of others.

Having become a parent at a young age, Ronnie's life has been somewhat difficult; nonetheless, Ronnie says, "Life goes on." Currently attending UW's



Odyssey Project, Ronnie's plans don't stop there. The Odyssey Project is just the beginning of her extended journey with the final stop being UW's Law School.

A graduate of Horace Mann High School in Gary, Indiana, Ronnie was a member of the Gospel Choir and earned a solo part during their Christmas Concert. She was also enrolled in a program called, "Hanging out with the wrong crowd," earning her many trips to the Dean's Office. However, despite all of the negativity around her, Ronnie was determined and made it, not only acquiring book knowledge but a little street knowledge, too.

Relocating to Madison, WI in 2003, Ronnie says this was probably the best thing that could have happened for her and her family; new surroundings bring new beginnings, and new beginnings it is. Goals and a future are now what are ahead for Ronnie. Mistakes, failures and poor decisions are behind, and

"Life goes on."

While Ronnie is continuing her education, she hopes to work with her Mom, who's designing a Respite Center for Teenage Girls of Color. Ronnie says her lessons learned won't go to waste: "A lot of teenaged girls hang out with the wrong crowd because they have no one to talk to, and I really want to change that; I want to make a difference; I think they just might hear me."

For René Robinson, life hasn't always been a crystal stair
By Rhondalyn Jones

At 48 years of age, René Robinson is a woman whose personality, gorgeous dimples, and love for life and people set her apart from any other. She attends Mt. Zion Baptist Church and is also a member of the Mt. Zion gospel choir. René is the mother of two sons, Terry, age 32, and Andre, age 30.

Very few people know that René's brilliant voice has afforded her the opportunity



to sing background for Tracey Nelson at the opening of the Overture Center and also with Lyle Lovett at the Grand Ole Opry in Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin.

Born and raised in Chicago, IL, René is the 11th of 14 children. She has seven sisters and six brothers. René is an aunt to over 80 nieces and nephews. At age 16 René became a teenage mom; by the age of 17 she was married and a mother for the second time.

René is an avid, passionate, and excellent bowler. For two years in Madison, she held the high ladies' bowling average, 214 in both 1999 and 2000. (She averaged 228 bowling part time in another league.) In 2001 René also held the highest series average for women, 786. René's favorite sport is skating.

If there is one person in René's past that she could be compared to, it would have to be Harriet Tubman. Like Tubman, René is also a selfless and caring person who has a zest for helping people.

Life for René ain't been no crystal stair. "It was a struggle," she says, "but I made it!"

Rosalyn Jones-Knight shares her radiance with everyone she meets

By Ivonne Ramos

We all know her as R.J.; she sits quietly in the back of the class. Even in her silence you can sense her inner glow and warmth extending past words.

What thoughts accompany her smile, and where does that radiance come from?

Rosalyn Jones-Knight was born in Gary, Indiana, one



of seven children. I think this may be the root of R.J.'s inner spectrum and diverse experiences.

Her brother, Parris, shared what the family cherishes about R.J. She has a natural gift for elevating people, he says, especially younger generations. As a mother of two, she is a natural. Her work in the past rewarded her with winning Miss Indiana Black Expo 1982/1983. She used this honor to continue her promotion of a healthy self image in women for many years after that by being an active promoter of the pageant. She was a key force in meeting well-known entertainers, which of course created more of an appeal to young people.

One of the most intriguing things Parris shared with me was R.J.'s love of music and beautiful voice. She attributes her gifts and talents to great parenting and a special closeness to her mother.

R.J. is a quiet force in class who carries a light that shines

through her voice. I hope we can be honored with one of her favorite songs in class. Parris is especially fond of her and speaks of his sister very highly.

Through her presence in the Odyssey Project, R.J. plans to continue her schooling and share even more with the youth in Madison.

So next time you see R.J. you know a little of why her natural beauty and warm smile comfort anyone who chats with her.

**Ivonne Ramos:
The lady with the Technicolor
Dreamcoat**

By Rosalyn Jones-Knight

Picture these colors in a rainbow— red, blue, grey, yellow, pink, purple, and maybe even chartreuse. Now think of Ivonne Ramos. Ivonne, a young woman in her mid-thirties, has traveled the world, gaining valuable knowledge about different cultures. She was born and raised in Reading, Pennsylvania. Fluent in Spanish



and seeking to learn more about her family and their culture, Ivonne at a young age traveled to Panama in Central America to live with family members.

She went to the Pennsylvania School of Muscle Therapy in Philadelphia in 1994. She traveled to Boston in 1996 to study Ayurvedic Medicine— an ancient system of health care native to the Indian subcontinent. Ivonne describes it as healing through spirituality, thought, sound and vibration. Dr. David Frawley translated Ayurvedic from Sanskrit, a classic language of India. Ivonne doesn't profess to have all the answers, but she is knowledgeable in the area Ayurvedic medicine.

Ivonne became aware of Kabbalah, the study of universal laws, while at a healing expo. In Los Angeles to talk with Karen Berg, an author and pioneer of bringing Kabbalah to mainstream society, she sat across the table from Madonna, also a Kabbalah student. Ivonne's strong belief in Kabbalah led her to think about conforming to something very similar to being a nun. Life in Kabbalah to Ivonne seemed black and white.

"I wasn't ready to choose a different path at that time," she says, "but now I see things more clearly." She continued to study Kabbalah.

She went to Egypt in 2002 to study Holistic Medicine. She traveled to Cairo, took a cruise, and traveled the Nile River. One of the best experiences, Ivonne recalls, was dressing in Arabic women's garb.

Coming to Madison to live,

Ivonne opened the Integrative Health Center.

"I was fortunate to do something I love after leaving Kabbalah," she notes.

She greatly admires former vice president Al Gore. "I became Al Gore's greatest fan after reading his book, *Earth's Balance*, written in 1987-1988," she says.

Life lessons have taught her that life isn't just black and white. It's colorful, like a rainbow, or even a Technicolor Dreamcoat.

"I once thought life could only be black or white, but now I see things clearly," she says.

Sheriah makes time for reading By Naomi Kharrazihassani

Sheriah Quartey spends lots of time reading books. It's amazing how she makes the extra time for reading. In about a month and a half, she's able to read 10 to 15 books, thick and thin, nonfiction and fiction.

She works for U.S. Cellular in the financial service department



receiving payments over the phone. If you don't pay your bill on time, she might be the one to shut off your cell phone service. Of course, it's always better to call her and set up a payment plan. This is one of the hardest parts of her job. Otherwise, she'll just answer the phone, "U.S. Cellular, this is Sheriah, and how can I help you?"

Sheriah was born in Oklahoma City and grew up in Miami, Florida. She had a tough time and was often homeless. She found herself moving from shelter to shelter with her family. Before she finally settled down in Madison, she had moved to several different states and cities, from Texas to Illinois and Florida to Wisconsin.

By balancing job and family, Sheriah is now able to spend time for enjoying reading. In the end, she always gets something special out of each book.

The latest book she really enjoyed was the *Narrative of Frederick Douglass*. "I will read it over and over," she says, "and still have the same passion for reading that book. It's so interesting."

Naomi Kharrazihassani: The incredible spirit of a woman named Naomi By Sheriah Quartey

Living on the west side of Madison, Naomi Kharrazihassani is a student, CNA, and translator for the Madison Police Department. Family and friends know her for being happy, smiling, and compassionate. She has been in Madison for 12 years and has two kids, a boy and a girl,



ages 13 and 11.

As quiet and soft spoken as she is, few people would think that she would be willing to do almost anything to help others. The assumption that she is so shy keeps most people from approaching, let alone asking for help. Naomi let me know that in order to see a smile on someone else's face, there's not much that she wouldn't do. With a compassionate heart like hers, she finds herself always going the extra mile. Naomi was most recently honored for five years of CNA service at Meriter Hospital.

As a young child growing up in Central America, Naomi never thought she would end up in Madison, WI going to school. She has one brother, Morris, who took care of her when she was growing up.

Since Naomi is a student, LPN, and translator, you wouldn't think that she would have time to be such a great humanitarian. But it is something that is embedded in

her soul to help others.

Naomi says: “The best part of my life right now is that I am pursuing my goal in getting my education, so that I might make even more of a difference in people’s lives.”

**Perseverance, literature guide
Debby Loftsgordon
By Josephine Lorya**

Currently an Odyssey student, Debby Loftsgordon is a passionate reader of books. She has been a published writer since she was in high school and college. She was born on the East Coast and raised in the Midwest. Debby’s parents instilled tough love values in her, which prepared her to work hard for everything in life.

A self employed, book-loving individual, Debby attended two governors’ inaugurations and is a good friend of Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle. Some of her favorite authors are George Sand and Louisa May Alcott. George Sand was a writer of

French literature who was born in France in 1804 and died in 1876. Debby’s favorite book by George Sand is titled *Marianne*. Louisa May Alcott was the daughter of a noted transcendentalist Amos Bronson Alcott. She was a novelist who wrote during the Civil War period. Debby’s favorite book by Alcott is titled *Little Women*.

Debby lives by the motto, “Never give up.” Her parents did great job instilling positive values in her because even to this day, Debby has a great outlook on life, and I know that she will never give up.

Josephine Lorya: Enjoying the struggle

By Debby Loftsgordon

Josephine Lorya is awestruck by the universe. The History Channel is her favorite. She especially enjoys the stars in the sky, which WOW her extremely.

Josephine also writes and reads famous authors, including William Blake and Longfellow.

She was born in Sudan, Northeast Africa, and raised in Kenya. She came to America when she was 12 years old.

During her high school years she played soccer—her position was center—and was on the track team.

She adores music. Her brother is a reggae musician, and her favorite artist is Lauren Hill.

She keeps a sign in her bedroom that displays her favorite quote:

“Struggling is the real meaning of life.”

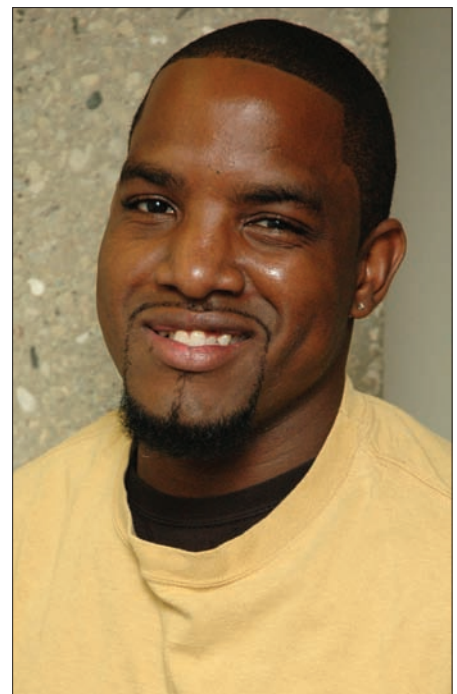
Victory and defeat are in the hands of God.

So everything must enjoy in the struggling.”

**Charrod Miller:
A mother and a glitch that
furnished a dream**

By Haroun Omar

Resilient, ambitious, humorous, alacritous Charrod (Rod) Miller has already achieved what most young people, or maybe most people, strive to encounter:



an epiphany, a turning point, a new start, a moment of enlightenment—that moment when our path is paved.

Presently a student of UW-Madison with the prestigious Odyssey program, Charrod was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on March 29, 1981 to Daphne Renée Miller. Charrod enjoyed a rich childhood, in the warmth of a loving mother, father, and five siblings, an elder brother, Dalon (30), and an elder sister Cyrena (36), who both share the same father with Charrod, and two younger brothers, Cameron (21) and Chandler (19), and a younger sister, Caitlynn (13), who are Charrod's stepfather's children with Charrod's mother.

He was always loved and protected by his nurse bee, soldier bee, worker bee, and queen bee—his mother, Daphne. She worked hard to graduate cosmetology school when Charrod was just a baby but never compromised raising and educating her kids; she tried to instill in Charrod love, good work ethics, good morals, but like most parents, she had to compete with the streets for her son's attention.

Rod's inclination to the streets ended up in a stint in the Madison County Jail. It proved to be the eye-opener, the volcano that created Hawaii. His time in jail made him realize what his goals should be and whom he should be emulating.

"My mother worked very hard every day," Rod says with a sense of pride. "She did whatever it took to nurture us, shelter us, and make us happy, and she still does. She recently returned to

college, to pursue another degree in nursing."

Now Rod aspires to be an activist, an advocate for family values and education and—much more! He enjoys spending a nice, tranquil time with friends and family or playing a pick up game of basketball. Charrod remains true to his goals: the love of family, the march to self-improvement, and a better life. He says, "If my mother could go back to school at her age, I'll never stop! I'll never stop!"

Haroun Omar: a well-traveled young man

By Charrod Miller

Haroun Bala Omar was born to the former Rakuya Sani and Abdul Salam Omar on September 10, 1980 in Lazos, Nigeria, which is in southern Nigeria. Haroun's father Abdul was born in northern Nigeria and raised in the Muslim faith. Haroun's mother, also Muslim, was raised in southern Nigeria and attended Catholic schools as a child. Haroun has

three brothers. Abdul (33), Sadiq (23), and Mohammed (29), and two sisters, Fatima (30) and Hadiza (32). After raising six children, all of whom are Muslim, Haroun's parents are still happily married and have been for 30 years.

Haroun moved to the United States at the age of 20. The trip started out as a vacation, after Ahmabubello University, the school he attended back home, went on strike. Haroun traveled to Florida, Maryland, Washington D.C, New York, Atlanta, Chicago, Milwaukee and his current home of Madison, Wisconsin.

When he is not in class on Wednesday nights, you can catch Haroun playing or watching basketball, football and soccer. He loves spicy food, especially Indian, and loves reading or writing poetry. Haroun does not have any children of his own; however, he is a father figure to his girlfriend's one year old daughter, Kemaya.



Nosihle Lukhele: A breath of life

By Jeff McCarroll

Nosihle Lukhele, born in Swaziland, came to the United States at the age of 15. Nosihle is a beautiful, dark-complexioned woman with teeth as white as snow. Her bright smile reflects her caring heart and desire to end other people's suffering. Nosihle has four siblings, she being the oldest. Nosihle went to Nazarene High School, a boarding school she enjoyed attending for two years. She is a very shy woman seeking to complete her



education, eventually earning a degree in respiratory therapy.

Nosihle loved her grandmother, whom she lived with from age 8-15 years old. Now living in America, Nosihle was confronted with the devastating news of her grandmother's passing. Filled with the love of a grandchild, Nosihle thought this was the worst news she could receive. Hurt and wanting to pay her last respects to her grandmother, she received news even more painful. Due to the family's financial situation, only Nosihle's father could return home to lay her grandmother to rest.

Nosihle misses her friends and family back home, saying, "This place is not my country, where I'm from." Once her goal of obtaining her degree is complete, she plans to return home to her native land. She wants to help people back home, saying, "So many people in my country have problems breathing, [like] asthma."

Jeffery proves that his background will not define his future

By Nosihle Lukhele

Jeffery McCarroll is working at Sitel, where he got promoted after five months in his job as a qualitative professional. He is also a student in the University of Wisconsin-Madison under the Odyssey Project, a humanities class. His classmates might know him as a friendly and determined student.

They could never tell that Jeffery wasn't always the hard-working student he is today. As a tenth grader, he was in a program called The Fresh Start Program, which enabled him to work part time. Although this looks like it must have been a good thing for him, as soon as he turned 18, Jeffery got out of the program because he thought he needed to take care of himself, and he thought he would do just fine without the program. So he dropped out of school to live in the streets. Out in the streets, Jeffery became a gang member and would always get in trouble and be involved in too many fights.

Today Jeffery refuses to let his background stand in the way of his success. He has set some goals for his life. He is trying to get more education through the Odyssey Project and is determined to establish a better future for himself and his family.

Jeffery grew up with two brothers, one older sister, and his mom. He never lived with his father; he would only visit him once in awhile. Now as an adult, he has three children and is not



married. One of his goals is to make sure that he works hard to establish a better future for his children.

As he was out in the streets, Jeffery got in serious trouble, which led him to spend seven and a half years of his life in prison. While in prison, he lost his mother. As difficult as this experience must have been for him, he decided to take a very important step of his life. After realizing how important education is, he decided he was going to get an HSED while in prison, and he succeeded. He then joined a group where individuals were taught how to run and maintain a small business. He obtained his Business Application certificate, which helped him get a job after getting out of prison. Jeffery proves that he has learned from his mistakes, and he wants to forget about the past and move on with his life.

"I wish people would not tend to concentrate more on my past," Jeffery says, "but would realize

my life has changed and look at what I'm doing with my life now."

Gypsy Justin Wilson has settled in Madison for now

By Jessica Bhan

Justin Wilson works at the South Madison Library. The requests for information on so many subjects by so many people are amazing, he says. Figuring out how to access such information makes for a constant learning experience.

Justin's mother passed away last year from diabetes here in Madison. Her illness brought Justin back to Madison three years ago. He had lived in Minnesota, having been raised there after being born in Chicago. He was raised by his single mother, and the family had a nomadic lifestyle, moving from place to place. Justin is 27, the youngest of five children.

After high school, he took on the same nomadic lifestyle as he had with his family, traveling

and writing for six months at a time before moving on to the next place. He's been to Texas, Louisiana, Wyoming, South Dakota, Michigan, Nevada, and California.

Not only is Justin a librarian and a gypsy, but Justin also trained as a CNA because of a tragedy in his family. His sister was a tri-pelagic due to an accident with a drunk driver. Presently she is in a group home in Minnesota. Justin describes her as a woman with sharp wit and mental clarity.

Justin has his own offspring, a little six-year-old girl. She lives with her mother in Minnesota. Though he feels his family is disassociated, he won't allow this pattern to repeat itself in his relationship with his daughter.

Justin also has many hobbies. He's an excellent writer. I've read some of his poems, and his short story sample scared the wits out of me. He also enjoys photography. Apparently, he gets his artistic abilities from his mother, who also enjoyed drawing. Justin is a man of many abilities and talents.

The two lives of Jessica Bhan By Justin Wilson

Jessica Bhan is a single mother of two, goes to school at the university, works at a flower store, and takes care of her mother. Those who know her today might say that she is nice and a very shy lady who seems to have a lot on her plate.

But they don't know the Jessica Bhan of old, the Jessica who is focused and confident, the entrepreneur, the world



traveler, the risk taker, and the revolutionary, the Jessica who lived in the trenches of humanity and desperation, from the slums of Spanish Harlem, to the cash-poor, hardworking towns of Puerto Rico.

No, the few people who know her today are unaware of the many trials and tribulations she has faced and overcome, this dedicated 36-year-old single mother of two very beautiful boys, Joseph, and Joshua, who goes to school at the university, who works at a flower store, and who takes care of her mother.

She selflessly dedicates her life to the pursuit of education so that she might better herself and the world around her, to the family that needs and supports her in all of her endeavors, and to the interaction with all the people who fit in her world so that we may get a better understanding of who we are and how we make this world a beautiful place.

