

Odyssey Oracle

Created for and by the students of the UW-Madison Odyssey Project

Volume 3, No. 9 November 29, 2006

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Welcome back! I hope everyone had a wonderful, plentiful, prosperous Thanksgiving. If you have a free moment during the hustle and bustle, please remember to check out our website.

Does anyone have some suggestions for what they'd like to see in the Oracle? Let me know!

-KRC

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City Council must not neglect duty to help the vulnerable

Editorial from **The Capital Times**

Nov. 11-12, 2006 **Voice of the People**

By **Brian Benford**



Dear Editor:

I read with great despair about some of my colleagues' plans for budget cuts. Over the last three years I have participated in city budget deliberations. Each year I have left the table filled with resentment and complete dismay, on how some alders use the budget as a venue for political games.

You might recall that I called some alders "clowns"; the following year I pleaded that we examine term limits (which I plan on revisiting) because I am so disgusted at what I have observed.

When you become a

While I think it is prudent to be fiscally responsible, I feel my most important duty is to protect the well-being of those whom I govern.

politician, you develop and hone a political persona or identity. This is what you offer up to convey what you want people to think about you. Campaign teams craft messages, slogans, sound bites and visual images to cast the politician in a positive light. Some alders (Ald.

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Zach Brandon) have successfully fashioned themselves as the noble protector of the taxpayer — valiant champions of poor widows and seniors on fixed incomes, courageously fighting off the evil tax man with gimmicks pulled from their tax caps each year right before budget time.

There are other alders, such as myself, who work in organizations dedicated to helping people reach their full potential. Daily we see the insidious realities that many in our midst live with.

Working at the Neighborhood House Community Center, I see the poorest in our community facing horrendous challenges all the while searching for hope. But they find little hope, as their most basic needs are pitted against the concerns of a few taxpayers for political stock.

While I think it is prudent to be fiscally responsible, I feel my most important duty is to protect the wellbeing of those whom I govern. Over the last three years I have received less than five calls from constituents who felt troubled by their taxes. Not that I'm naive to the sting we all face when we open that tax bill, but for each of these calls,

The budget is a direct reflection on the soul of our community. It shows the whole world what we hold dear and true.

I have seen thousands who have struggled because of our indifference as a community.

Some alders banter about numbers, percentages, levy impacts, tax rates and other empirical details with their blinders on to the real life implications of their actions. They are somehow dense to the fact that if we spend money on preventative measures now, it will save the taxpayers countless dollars in the future.

I can't stand by and bear witness to this without speaking out. The budget is a direct reflection on the soul of our community. It shows the whole world what we hold dear and true. Are we to be known as the city that continues to turn its back on its citizenry or a compassionate, wise community?

Brian Benford
Madison

Writer Spotlight: *Louise Erdrich*

Louise Erdrich's parents encouraged her to be a writer from the beginning.

Louise Erdrich was born in Little Falls, Minnesota on June 7, 1954. Her father was of German descent, and her mother was an Ojibwe Indian. They both worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Erdrich grew up in Wahpeton, on the plains of North Dakota. Her grandfather was the Tribal Chairman of the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota. Erdrich is a member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe.

Her father gave her a nickel for every story she wrote, and her mother wove together strips of construction paper to make book covers for them. Erdrich later said, "At an early age, I felt myself to be a published author earning substantial royalties."

She attended Dartmouth College and received an M.A. degree from the John Hopkins University in 1979. She married author Michael Dorris.

She's the author of eleven novels, volumes of poetry, children's books, and a memoir of early motherhood. Erdrich's fiction and poetry draws on her Ojibwe heritage to examine family and sexual relationships among full and mixed blood Native Americans in white American culture.

She's best known for her series of four books that follow three generations of Ojibwe Indians in North Dakota during the twentieth century: *Love Medicine* (1984), *The Beet Queen* (1986), *Tracks* (1988), and *The Bingo Palace* (1994).

She lives in Minnesota with her daughters and is the owner of Birchbark Books, a small independent bookstore.

Sources:

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Excerpt from *The Master Butchers Singing Club* by Louise Erdrich

He sat down at the edge of the bed. On a thick shelf set into the wall, his books stood in lines, or stacked as he'd left them, marked with thin strips of paper. For a time, though his occupation was assured, he'd cherished the vision of himself as a poet. Therefore his shelves were stacked with volumes of his heroes, Goethe, Heine, Rilke, and even Trakl, hidden behind the others. He looked at them now with dull curiosity. How could he ever have cared what such men said? What did their words matter?

His childhood history was also in this room, his toy soldiers still arranged on the sill. And his young man's pride: his diplomas and his guild papers framed on the wall. These things did matter. These papers represented his future. His survival. In the closet, his bleached, starched, and pressed white shirts hung ready to embrace him. His polished shoes waited on the shelf beneath for the old Fidelis to put his feet into them. Gingerly, Fidelis tried to slide his feet into the open maws of the stiff shoes, but they wouldn't go. His feet were swollen, tender from frostbite, peeling, painful. Only his hobnailed boots fit, and they were green inside and stank of rot.



Profiles of Our Peers: Part Two

Dwayne Bland: From Sommerset to Now By Brian Benford

"I'm a goal oriented person," Dwayne proudly states. When he wanted a car, he made it happen with hard work and determination. He wants to apply that same passion to the Odyssey Project.

This twenty-six-year old was "born and raised right here in Madison," which we agreed was rare. As a child Dwayne and his family lived in the infamous Sommerset housing community off Badger Road. Sommerset was known for its rampant crime and drug activity during the 1980s. "Sommerset was an eye-opener," he says. "I saw things no kid should see." Despite a turbulent youth, Dwayne without doubt comes across as someone who has a tremendous future.

Dwayne has set a goal on owning his own home soon.



"I've been attending first time homebuyer workshops," he says. "Someday I'll have my own place."

In addition to working full time at Sitel Tech (an international technology company), which he enjoys, he notes, "I have an interest in music and traveling." Someday he hopes to explore Jamaica, Amsterdam, and Africa.

Dwayne says his mother led him to the Odyssey Project. "My mother was a graduate last year," he says. "She said I had to do this, and here I am." His pride was evident as he spoke of his mother. "She has been my main motivation in life," he says. After the Odyssey Project is over Dwayne hopes to continue on with his education. "I didn't come just to do this program when I could do more," Dwayne states. "I'm going to continue on."

Dwayne says most folks are surprised when they find out that he is an eligible bachelor and has no kids. Ladies, read that again.

In the short 10 minutes I had to spend with Dwayne, I felt empowered by his example. I couldn't help but think that he has indeed come a long way from Sommerset.

Juanita Wilson: A strong woman by Nou Yang

When bad things happened to her, she always knew what to do.

Juanita had everything she needed as a child. Her father died when she was 12, and things started changing. Her family

became very poor and had to move from place to place. This made her brother drop out of school in 7th grade, but Juanita kept on going.

Many times, she didn't have clothes to wear, but wearing the same clothes wasn't going to stop her from going to school. Teachers wouldn't want to help her with anything because she was a poor girl, but that didn't stop her from trying to learn.

At the age of 18 she got pregnant and dropped out of school. She had to think about her kids and not about school.

In 1967 she went back to school and got her G.E.D., knowing that she needed a brighter future for her and her kids. She has three girls, and she says they make her stronger every day knowing that two of her daughters graduated from college. She says she seems stronger than ever knowing she never gave up on herself and her family.



Lily Komino

by Kathleen Brown

Lily Komino was born in Tanzania, Africa along with her four sisters, one of whom still stays in Africa with her parents. The other three sisters live in England.

Lily's son went through some medical issues in his early childhood; through many sleepless nights watching over her son, Lily's desire to help people shone out more and more, and she decided she wanted to become a nurse. Working and taking care of her son left little time to focus on her education.

Education is very important to Lily because she felt she was getting behind and also because education can help her achieve some of her goals. The Odyssey program plays a big part in Lily's life. It's a chance for her to get her foot in the door, to go beyond her limitations, to show her hard work, and to make her family proud.



Lily also enjoys shopping, painting, and designing flower arrangements. If she decides not to become a nurse, her second career choice is interior design. The best present she has given herself is continuing her education.

Melissa Plasky

by Roslyn Phillips

Melissa in her young life has faced many health setbacks, but she keeps on keeping on. This is one strong, focused, beautiful young woman. Melissa deals daily with multiple illnesses that afflict and hinder her young body. When Melissa was 16 years old, three years ago, she was diagnosed with cervical cancer and later had surgery. After beating the odds against conception, Melissa was blessed with a beautiful, healthy baby girl.

Aveyau'nna is the driving force in Melissa's life. She never knows when her epilepsy will flare up, and she is alone the majority of the time with her baby. But with a beautiful smile, she says, "I do not worry. God knows the ultimate plan of my journey in life."

When she speaks of her baby girl, her eyes sparkle, her face glows, and only another mother can look at her and see JOY.

Melissa is the third youngest child of four. She has two older brothers who ironically share the same name, "William." Melissa also has a younger sister, Tiffany, 18. Melissa has raised herself, not having a real close relationship with her parents.

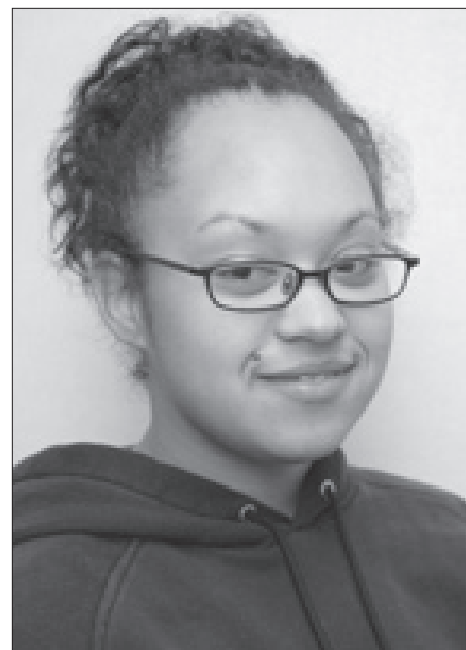
She was born in Janesville, WI. but grew up all over

Wisconsin, never staying in one city more than two years.

She couldn't care less about the perils of being a single parent—not that she doesn't want the home with the husband, two kids, a dog, a career, and a white picket fence. She says "I will achieve and receive. I can do it all by myself." Melissa is one grounded sister who knows what she wants.

She is spiritual and knows her life has meaning and purpose. As she says, when you have to deal and have dealt with the physical and mental abuses in life, you put your trust in God to see your through. Melissa knows she can do all things in life, for the Lord is her strength and salvation.

Melissa's primary goals in life are to continue raising her young daughter properly and to continue her education. She will not be influenced by any obstacles or anybody who does not have a positive effect in her life. Her ultimate goal is to become a behavioral counselor, working to give back to young children what was taken from her.



Sandra Ramirez by Tiffani Puccio

Sandra Ramirez most admires her paternal grandmother. She wasn't aware that she even had a grandmother; when Sandra was six, she and her mother were at the bus station, and her mother caught the eye of this man. She had a strong feeling that she knew him. It happened to be Sandra's uncle (the brother of her deceased father). Sandra then met her grandmother, whom she considers her angel. Even though her grandma lost five of her children in the war, she is still a strong woman.

Sandra was the first of five children born in El Salvador. Due to a war within her home country, her family was torn apart. Her father, showing extreme courage, was defending one of his friends from the soldiers fighting in the country. The soldiers murdered him and his friend.

Sandra was sent to live with a family in Guatemala that adhered mostly to Indian cultures. Her new family spoke a completely different language and had different customs. Her world was turned upside down; she was in a far different place with people she didn't even know.

She recalled a seemingly funny event as she was going for a walk one day.

"I was walking down

the street," she recalls, "and I saw two women lift up their skirts, because they didn't wear underwear, and relieve themselves in the street." She says it was a normal occurrence there. She was definitely glad to go home to her family.

Sandra has many loves in her life; food ranks a close second to her family. She is particularly fond of vegetables, but she doesn't like spicy foods like wings or curry.

Another one of her loves is dancing. Her favorite types of music to dance to are salsa, meringue, and cumbia. She also loves to watch movies.

Her all-time favorite is "The Pianist" because she is very fond of the lead actor. (She thinks he's cute.) She also loves the TV show "Sex and the City" because the women are crazy (in a good way).

Sandra has a deep love of and understanding for children. She babysits for two families. Her dream is to

become a child psychologist so she can help children with any problems they have in life.

Sandra is a spiritual person. She feels as though she may have been Japanese in a past life. She feels a strong connection to Japanese people and culture. Even in meeting a Japanese person, she feels as if she knows more about them than the name.

Sandra keeps in touch with her family on a regular basis and speaks to her grandmother every week. She hopes to save enough money to go home for a visit.

