

odyssey oracle

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Contents

What's in a Name?.....1

Wandering With
William Wordsworth....6

Reflections of
Odyssey Alumni.....7

Noticing Nature.....8

What's in a Name?

Bonita Nichelle Freeman Greer

Where I come from, I am my name. It defines who I am.

The origin of Bonita is Spanish, meaning pretty or beautiful, and I am most proud of this name. I am grateful that my mom looked at me and named me what her inner God told her to name me. I feel that I try to live up to this name daily. Beauty is inside and outside.

My middle name is Nichelle, and it derives from Michelle. Its origin is Greek, meaning Victorious People. In Hebrew it means like God, and Black people deemed it to mean victorious maiden. However, I think my mom got it from Nichelle Nichols (Lt. Uhuru in *Star Trek*). I am victorious, so I know I live up to this name daily.

Marvin Lorenzo Pratt

I have no knowledge of why my parents chose this name for me. I wasn't raised by my mother or father. I was left as a child at age two with an aunt, so the only thing my parents gave me was my name.

I used to be Marvin Lorenzo Pratt because it was my name. Now I am Mr. Marvin Lorenzo Pratt because that is who I am. The name used to define me. Now I define it!



*Romare Bearden's
Roots Odyssey*

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Eleita Britise Florence

My first name, Eleita, has no meaning I could find. I'm not sure where my mother got the name from. She probably made it up after having eight children before me. My name is unique, as am I.

I think my name fits me. It is different, special, and a conversation starter, as am I. I don't think I was supposed to have one of those mass-produced names like Shirley or Barbara. My name gets me noticed and makes people ask questions. When you say the name Eleita Britise Florence, people want to see who that is.



Dennis Listenbee

At one time in my life when I had hair, I was called George Jefferson. Indeed I continue each and every day to "move on up."

While growing up and still to this day, I am called Dennis

da Menace, but I flip it and say St. Dennis because of my life changing.



Kian Cunningham

Honestly, Kian! I never liked my name. I really wish I had money to change it! I just want to be me and not my mother's child. I always wanted to be named Keesha. My name has brought me nothing but turmoil!



Kathann 'Kat' Marie Jackson

When I was born, my mother named me Kathy Ann Jackson. I never liked the name Kathy because it sounded to me like a name for a white girl. Although she named me "Kathy Ann," she always called me "Kathann." . . .

When I turned about 26, I started using the name "Kathann" and would not answer to "Kathy" from anyone. I took it in my hands to change all of my legal documents to "Kathann" and changed my middle name to Marie. . . . I say my name means "very unique."

Those who had trouble pronouncing it called me "Kat." I didn't mind because it fits my personality!

Kathann helped me to overcome my rejected lifestyle from my childhood that always made me feel not accepted. At age 26 is when I dedicated my life to having a relationship with Christ Jesus. He accepted me when I started using my name Kathann. So to me my name is Kathann because that's when I became born again.



Dalonte Rashaad Nobles

I used to think there was nothing to a name—it was just something people would call you so you'd know they were talking to you.

Dalonte: It's a relatively easy name to pronounce, but you'd be surprised how often it's mistaken or misspelled (Dolante, Delante, Diante, Dante, Durante, etc.). I jokingly say I'll respond to anything that starts with a D and ends in -te. The name comes from the car Cadillac Allante. My mom's name is Danette and my sister's is Danielle. I guess we needed to be a matching set of D names.

Rashaad: My dad is one of those militant brothers; you know, the Black Panther type. He didn't stick around but the name did. Rashaad: It's pronounced with a strong emphasis on the double

a's. Nobles was also his name. I think the meaning is pretty self explanatory, but it's quite the opposite of the way I view myself. Aristocracy's not my cup of tea. Now Hilliard or hill yard (my mother's father's father's slave name) would make sense. I grew up in the projects of Joliet, Illinois, and this place was nicknamed The Hill.

For a long time, I hated my name. I wished it were something more common like Donovan or David. Like my big nose and mismatched hair type, I began to embrace it. In high school I started to define myself as an individual. It was weird at first being the black guy that's into counterculture. It's weird to be at a punk show and somebody says the name Dalonte, which is obviously black. A black dude at a punk show is rare but shouldn't be. After all, black people invented rock and roll and even punk, for that matter. Listen to the band Death and Bad Brains.

I'm Dalonte Rashaad Nobles, a black vegan hipster punk rock indie kid that doesn't like the government. Like my name, none of these things really define me.



Takeyla Benton

My name doesn't mean anything special. My nickname is Keyla, which is what most of my close friends and family call me; Takeyla is more formal. There's nothing exciting or special about that except that everyone always says, "Oh, so it's Takeyla like

the drink—Ha! Ha!—I can remember that." Then they still pronounce it wrong.



Ray Allan "Migizi" (Gougé) Hopp

I will discuss my Native American or Indian name "Migizi." "Miigizii is an Ojibwe word meaning Eagle. The Eagle is our most important animal, spirit being, totem, and clan, our messenger to and

from the Great Spirit, the Creator. Miigizii sends our prayers up to Gitchi Manito (Great Spirit). We use a sacred medicine tobacco to assist in prayers, in ceremonies, in giving thanks, talking to elders, etc. Eagle has the most ability to "reach" the creator.

I was in a bad car accident in 1998, and my life flashed before me. That is when I believe my life was saved by Eagle Spirits. I always have loved the eagles—they are my favorite. That same night I went to jail, which lasted six months. Shortly after being jailed, I had a spiritual dream about eagles, and during that time the name "Migizi" came to me. I believe the name came to me in that car accident, so I have the Indian name Migizi.

Traditionally we have naming ceremonies. An elder, usually a spiritual leader or medicine person, gives you your name. I feel I have been blessed with this name from Gitchi Manito or from some spiritual experiences given to me. I am very grateful and thankful for this name, Migizi! I feel I am closer to the universe, Gitchi Manito, Mother Earth, and my ancestors, relatives, friends, and others. I am close to life and spirituality with this name.



Danielle Sarah Richey-Berliner Rosales

I was born with the name Danielle Sarah Richey-Berliner. Danielle was chosen for me because of my father's father, David, who passed away before I was born. The name Sarah was chosen because that was the name

of my mother's grandmother. Richey is the last name on my mother's side of the family. Since my parents were never married, I was given two last names. Berliner is my father's last name.

As a child, I felt my name was a bit large. I often had a hard time fitting it in the spaces provided on papers in school. When I was an adolescent I decided to stop using the name Berliner due to the anger and resentment I had toward my father. For about five years I was known as Danielle Sarah Richey. I proceeded to have some encounters with the law, and I was known by that name.

When I was 22 years old, I decided to get married. I questioned myself what to do with my name. My mother, even though she had been married for over 20 years, had never changed her name. Should I keep my name and add my husband's name to it? Change it completely? I wasn't sure.

Then I had a feeling of a new beginning. Being pregnant and getting married, I wanted a fresh start. So I decided to say goodbye to Danielle Sarah Richey and all the mistakes she had made. I eagerly took my husband's name, Rosales. We have passed that name on to all three of our children.



Catina McAlister

When my mom was pregnant with me, she loved watching soap operas. While watching her favorite soap opera, she heard that one of the characters was named Catina. She liked it so much she named me that.



Morgan LaKaye Anderson Chichester

Morgan is actually my mother's maiden name. They decided to name me Morgan because everyone in the family was having girls, so they gave me Morgan as a first name to keep the family name alive. I used to really hate my

name. I got picked on a lot for it. I was either called Morgan Morgan or told my name was a boy's name or a white girl's name. . . .



Precious Lynnette LaShore

My name came about in such a complex way. First, the name Precious came about four days after I was born! Yes, I was nameless for four days after birth. All

the nurses would walk past and say, "Aww, this baby is so precious," so four days later that was my name.

My middle name Lynnette came from my birth father's and my mother's middle names put together (Lynn + Annette or LynnAnnette or Lynnette).

My last name came from my mother's marriage to my stepdad. She told me the story of my stepdad's last name and that it is supposed to be spelled "Leshoure." My mom also told me that he had a misspelled identification card and has recently gotten it changed.

I love my name a lot more now that I know that it was so hard to come by it. . . .



Diance Lor

Diance doesn't mean anything, from what I know. When I was born a nurse just picked out a bunch of names for my parents to choose from. They didn't know which one because they all sounded good and pretty, so then the nurse just

picked one out of a hat and they went with it.

I can't really say how my name has changed me or what difference it made in my life. I do know this: I am my own person with my own thoughts, goals, and dreams, and only that matters to me!



Nikyra Monae McCann

I love my name! I love how it flows together! I don't know the meaning to my name, but I have my own personal meaning for Nikyra. Nikyra to me means sky. It means that the sky is with me. To me the sky represents God, and I love him so much.



Edwina Robinson

Edwina means
“prosperous friend” and is
English/Scottish/Welsh. To
me, the name means this:
E=everlasting
D=devoted
W=willingness
I=important
N=narcotics
A=anonymous

This is just the way I see me now, but I never gave thought to this before because I felt I was not worthy of anything. So now my name means God saved me, and for this I’m very thankful. Now I’m learning I am a beautiful flower whom God has blessed to bloom, to open, and to search to find the essence from which she came.



Tracy ‘Black’ Wynette Cunnigan

My mom gave me the middle name Wynette because her favorite country singer was Tammy Wynette. She did not like the name Tammy because she said in the 70s all Tammy’s were big. Because of that, I received

the name Tracy because my dad’s niece was named Tracy. I looked up the meaning, and it’s “a form of grace which is a derivative of the Latin word ‘gratia.’”

My nickname is “Black.” I got the nickname as a toddler because of the complexion of my skin. However, black has many meanings, such as dirty, evil, wicked, sad, black color or pigment.

My first name does not make any type of difference. In life, however, I like that it is short, and it’s easy for children to pronounce as well as yell. My nickname is a name I have never really liked because I know I’m dark and everybody around me does too. My middle name I really like because not very many people have the name Wynette.



Marseills McKenzie

The definition of Marseills is:

M=magnificent
A=articulate
R=realistic
S=suave
E=essence
I=intellectual
L=life
L=loving
S=soft-spoken

The name Marseills came from a strong, beautiful black woman named Alethea McKenzie who had always loved the name Marseills and found it to be sophisticated. I am proud to have a name which I share with a city in France. Oh, how my heart would prance at the sound of how my ex-girlfriend would say my name.

The uniqueness of the name Marseills gives you an idea who I am, as I am mixed with Osage, Blackfoot, and Cherokee Indian and Black with a hint of green flowing through my veins. I have the gift to create verbal graffiti to help keep my mind steady to overcome life’s heavy woes.

For those who mispronounce my name and continue to do so, I don’t know how I feel. . . . All I can be is just me, who won’t change himself for anyone. . . . Marseills, a black king in his mind that the world will love and get to know.



Helen Montgomery

Helen means light. I was named after my father’s mother. I never met her but I did meet her twin sister, Eloise. Helen died at age 36 giving birth to her eighth child, who also died.

I like the name Helen because it’s plain yet beautiful, like the rest of

the Helen’s I meet.

The good thing about my name, besides being my grandmother’s namesake, is when my father’s relatives see me, they say I remind them of her. To me that’s a good thing to know.

Wandering with William Wordsworth

“My Heart Leaps Up”

*My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky.
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I grow old,
Or let me die!
The Child is father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.*

Wordsworth gets a childlike excitement when he sees this rainbow. He wants to keep this kind of excitement all through his life or he has no interest in living. Children are more suitable to guide adults through life than vice versa. Wordsworth wants his whole life to be filled with awe and a devotion to nature. **(Danielle Rosales)**

It seems that William Wordsworth is a very happy person. He loved being a kid and seeing rainbows. The poem reminds me of my childhood and seems like a wonderful dream. For some reason, this poem makes me really happy. I love daydreaming, and this poem is kind of like a daydream. **(Kiara Hill)**

“I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud”

*I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.*

*Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line*

*Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.*

*The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed---and gazed---but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:*

*For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.*

While out walking one day to no place in particular, a man came across a field of daffodils. He watched as the wind blew them back and forth. To him they seemed to be dancing. He was mesmerized by their beauty. He didn't realize how deeply this scene had touched him and how it made him feel. Now when he is lost in thought or feeling low, he can bring up the memory of the daffodils and lighten his spirit. **(Eleita Florence)**

One of the things I like about the poem “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” is the rhyme scheme, and I love the imagery and metaphors. It's very vibrant and vivid. He truly takes you beyond his mind and what he sees as if you were up in the sky alongside him, staring down and observing the world from a deep and unique perspective. He can truly appreciate God's beauty because of viewing it so clearly from above. **(Marseills McKenzie)**



Reflections of Odyssey Alumni



If not for The Odyssey Project, I would not be a returning adult student at UW Madison or the writer of stories and recipes in Meals and Memories cook book... My children are excited about my educational experiences.

(Sherri Bester, '08)

My daughter was proud of me when I graduated from the Odyssey Project. I told her that she can do anything she puts her mind to. She tells all her friends that 'my mommy is in college.' This makes me very proud,

and I cannot wait till she tells her friends that "my mommy is a lawyer" or something along those lines... If not for the Odyssey Project, I would not have been able to complete my courses in order to be accepted to UW-Madison. I would have been in a dark place. Instead, the

Odyssey Project shed a light into my life and I am on the road to success. The Odyssey Project is my passport to a higher education and I will always cherish its blessing.

(Josephine Lorya-Ozulamoi, '08)



Odyssey alumni Anthony Ward ('04), Josephine Lorya ('08), and Sherri Bester ('08) all won Returning Adult Student Awards from the UW-Madison and are working on their bachelor's degrees.

Noticing Nature

Roses are my favorite flowers. Each delicate petal has its own intricate details. Rose petals are soft as newborn skin. They have so many beautiful colors. Each individual flower has its own distinct smell. I can barely contain myself when I walk into a beautiful garden filled with roses. I have to look closely, feel each petal, and embrace the different smells. Red is my favorite color, and the pink rose holds my favorite odor.

I like roses so much that I told my family when my soul escapes my body, cremate my remains and bury them under a beautiful rose garden. (**Bonita Greer**)

My favorite event in nature is rain. I love to walk in and watch the rain. The raindrops on my skin feel like tiny taps from God. Each drop is a reminder that He is up there watching over me. (**Eleita Florence**)

A little over three years ago, we chose as a family to move to the country. We rented an old farm house about 30 miles outside of Madison. This was an amazing experience for us. We were nestled on over 350 acres of hilly prairies and wooded areas. We were on the top of a ridge and couldn't see anyone in any direction.

I felt so in touch with myself and my children. We were creative and resourceful. I didn't feel the constant need to run around and do things the way I do in the city. I felt like a human being, not a human doing. We had room to run, play, hike, explore, garden, and pick berries. My children were content and deeply connected to themselves. They were not so concerned with what others thought or did. We would watch the sky at night, and the stars felt so close up

there. We saw deer out our front window and heard coyotes howl at night.

When our lease was up, we knew we had to move back to Madison but [we still] hold that peace and love for nature within us. (**Danielle Rosales**)

September 2005

Silent but loud, dark and cold, I try to appear strong and calm, but inside I am scared to death. As we lie under the bed, branches beat up against the house, and I pray the entire roof doesn't blow off.

My son buries his face in my side and cries, "Mommy, when will the hurricane leave?" I hold him as tight as I can and whisper, "Soon, baby," but I really have no clue.

When the storm died down and we came out of hiding to investigate the damage, I discovered the back of the house had been knocked down by the beautiful shade tree that had brought us relief from the blazing Texas sun. The foundation of the house that we called home was buckled and completely destroyed. Walking down the hall was like walking down a cobblestone street. Most of our worldly possessions were destroyed and could not be saved. I stood there devastated for a moment, looking at everything we had lost.

At that moment through the back of the house (where the roof used to be), I saw a gorgeous blue sky without a cloud in sight. Flying through the air were birds singing a song of praise as they passed.

That's when it dawned on me that rather than

being sad about what nature had so quickly taken from me, I need to remember what God has blessed me with. No amount of wind or rain can blow or wash that away. (**Morgan Chichester**)

I was once in a warm and sunny place called Idaho.





When I arrived, I saw green grass and clean, cold water, brown sand, and four wild horses, all crossing the cold water. I heard the rattling tails of the snakes that lived there. In the warm sunny place, I saw baby brown bears protected by big brown bears. . . .

At night I saw a juicy moon filled with brightness and stars bigger than quarters. In this amazing cold night, I saw still water and I heard chirping crickets. This time was so sweet, and everybody was so young. (**Precious LaShore**)

On the weekends after coming back from the farmer's markets, my parents would make my sisters and brothers go to the ground to pick weeds. On one of the Saturdays, it was a perfect sunny day with a cool breeze and birds flying and chirping. Around us were fresh growing vegetables and flowers and the smell of the air. (**Diance Lor**)

I never went camping in my life until I came to Madison, Wisconsin. It was very challenging to me. I remember trees, walking trails, and cabins. We had a campfire and roasted marshmallows. It was so different. I grew up in a big city—Chicago—and there was none of that.



I remember I wanted to conquer my fear of being out at night in the woods. I thought all sorts of things like bears eating me and owls saying “whoow.” . . . But I felt like God was right there. Wow, it was beautiful! When it was time to go, I didn't want to leave that place. I connected there spiritually. Now I understand a little about Nature and myself and also the God that made everything beautiful that I never saw before. (**Edwina Robinson**)

Summer Block
summer slipped in
after the snow an' slush
the blues blew in again
an' then
blank white pages
reminded me I hadn't written much
it seems like ages
the grey sunless days seemed to last
distracted by dark depression an' self ruinous rages
the days an' weeks passed
then summer slipped out again.
(**Takeyla Benton**)



I relate to nature like a child to his mother.
 The connection is strong,
 It doesn't matter if I am right or wrong.
 I look at the trees and lakes, birds and bees,
 And all I ever see is a reflection of me!
 Created in their likeness, I can relate.
 That's how I know it's never too late.

(Marvin Pratt)

I opened my eyes to see a beautiful blue sheeted
 background with a huge shiny penny in the
 middle of it
 I say penny because of its rays shining so bright, but
 from where I am it looks like a person is in
 it.
 Being held so close to my grandmother's breast,
 I can smell the sweet scent of sunflowers
 coming from her.
 She looks down at me with a warm smile that sends
 chills through my little body, tickling me
 like fur. . . .
 I feel my sandals touch the green grass beneath me
 as I run to a big pole shaped like an N
 With chains hanging from the top connecting black
 pieces of leather that look like saddles.
 I'm anxious to jump in.
 Grandma picks me up and sits me on that small
 saddle while I'm holding both chains;
 She swings me back and forth.
 As I burst into laughter, the wind is blowing my
 tiny corn rolls with bright white, pink, and
 clear beads, making an intimate roar.
 It looks like I can just reach up and touch that huge
 penny in the sky.

What a beautiful day, just Grandmother and I.

(Michelle Bozeman)

Every day when I run I see God's beauty in my eyes
 Rise of the sun, crystal shallow blue skies
 Where some days are warm as apple pie
 And birds fly through a broken sky.
 All shades of color walking on pavement
 Where I greet them through urban and suburban
 landscapes. . . .

Reddish brownish leaves fall from the trees
 Say goodbye to the bees and hello to "achoo!" just
 sneezed

Time to keep isolated from winter freeze
 Where one who comes up underground gives us
 hope

If he sees a glimpse, a shadow of himself, only
 means

That now we can kick back and enjoy
 That good ole spring homeward bound breeze.

(Marseills McKenzie)

An Eagle's Flight

Standing by the deep violet blue
 Ocean nestled neatly in the sand
 The sun bearing down on my face
 In a burnt orange haze, Ah,
 I inhale the smell of clean
 Cut grass, beads of mist sparkling
 On its blades. Illuminating
 Stars explode from the heavens,
 Under my wings, I exhale—
 And fly away.

(Helen Montgomery)

