

Odyssey Oracle

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*"If you have come to help me, you
are wasting your time. But if you
have come because your liberation
is bound up with mine, then let us
walk together."*

Lila Watson
(Australian aborigine activist)

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Finding Plato's Cave Today



I have experienced childhood caves of abuse at home, teenage and young adulthood caves of street life, gang affiliation, criminality, drug addictions, alcoholism, and ultimately incarceration. It was a circuit in my own life that just in very recent years I have acquired the power to resist and fight back against. I am still fighting to this day. . . . It was a very dark and painful cave, a time of imprisonment that could very well be compared to death row, with the only difference being that there

was no specific set day of execution by the courts. That day could come at any time, if not by the hands of another then by my own hand, intentionally or unintentionally, directly or indirectly. This is how it felt day-in, day-out, non-stop. If God had not been there for me and with me, it is no secret I would not be here today, running from the cave of all I knew. (**Juba Moten**)

Although not real people, the prisoners in Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" represent the ignorance of human beings, relaying the idea that in one way or another we can all be prisoners to our own ignorance about the world. . . . There was a time where my own emotions and mind formed my own personal cave of darkness. As a teenager I was diagnosed with clinical depression, which made my teenage and early adult years very troublesome and challenging. I fell into a deep pool of self-loathing and regret fueled by constant marijuana smoking and suicidal tendencies. When reflecting on those times now, I see I had several opportunities to escape my own cave, but for whatever reason chose not to. I'd become accustomed to emotional anguish and in a weird way became comfortable with it. My own misery became an undesirable yet familiar security.

(**Brandon McCarey**)





Arriving in the United States as an immigrant was like being in Socrates' cave. I thought it would be easy to find work and earn lots of money. I also thought people in the United States would be kind, generous, and honest. My first job was as a dressmaker. I worked

from 7:30 AM to 6:30 PM, six days a week. It allowed me to earn 40 dollars a day. I had to sew 40 nightdresses to earn that money. I always took them home to finish, and I worked until midnight. Doing this allowed me just to survive, but I couldn't save money. For my next job, I worked in a meat packing plant at night. I worked 12 hours per night six days a week. Choosing this job allowed me to save a little money for my sick child and for his education in Peru. The owners of these companies showed exploitation and disrespect for human beings by paying low wages for our long hours at work. It wasn't an easy life having these terrible jobs. Also I wasn't able to write, read, or speak English. With all the time that I spent in these jobs, I wasn't able to socialize with my friends, go to school, and enjoy my life as a human being. I couldn't return to Peru to visit my family because I was not a permanent resident. If I decided to go to Peru, U.S. immigration law wouldn't let me come back in. This is why I felt I was in a cave. I had a hard life, too much work, not enough money, and not enough sleep, with employers exploiting me. **(Beatriz Mairena-Kellman)**



My own cave was my looks. Ever since I was a little girl, I have always felt that I was ugly. My cave was a very lonely place. I always would talk down on myself. . . . I would go to the store, shop for new clothing, take it home and try it on

again, and tell myself, "You're still ugly." Then I would take the clothes off, go back to the store,

and return everything. It wasn't until I was in my forties that I finally received my deliverance in my mind and heart on what I really thought of myself. I received revelation at work one day. While washing my hands, I looked up in the mirror and for the first time in my life finally saw what God saw. I remember telling myself, "You are beautifully and wonderfully made in the Image of God," and tears just flowed down my face, as though I was filling a pot. The cave has openings now where I am able to breathe and able to see light down another path. Now I know who I am. When it feels as if I'm being closed in, I remind myself of who God says I am. **(Lorraine Garrett)**



My allegorical cave is that of an overweight girl told to lose some weight if I ever hoped to marry someday. I was told there are few opportunities for big people and that I should accept the fact that I was heavy and slow. I married at 23 years old, and my ex-husband was very abusive. Verbally:

"You're getting too big" (I was four months pregnant.) Emotionally: "No one will ever want you but me. You're stuck because you're too heavy." (I filed for and was granted a divorce.) Physically: He fought me daily. (I called the police, and he was arrested.) I could not allow myself to remain trapped in an abusive relationship, without any hope for a bright future. **(Phyllis Anderson)**



When I think back to my life being in a cave, I would think of my Hmong traditions. Being born in the United States was probably the reason why I disagreed on most of the important rules in Hmong tradition. One of the most important rules was not being able to

move out of your parents' house if you were to be married. I moved out on my own even though my parents were really upset with me. **(Linda Thao)**



The image Socrates describes to Glaucón reminds me of the opening scene of *The Simpsons* where the whole family is sitting on the couch staring at the TV. Another example would be today's news. Group A says Obama is wrong, Group B says he is right, but instead of doing

our own research we follow one group and say the other is wrong. The message to me is to escape the false reality, read between the lines, and don't be a slave. People become victims of a superficial world that only few have broken free from. . . . At the age of 14 my friends were into the trends—clothes, shoes, going out on the weekend. I heard them talk about how cool it was to have the new pair of "J's." In an attempt to keep up, I got a job at Copps for \$7.15 an hour. I spent every dollar I earned but still couldn't keep up. . . . I think we all were chasing the dream of the friend in front of us. If one person would have said, "This is stupid; we are going to grow out of everything we are buying," then that one would have saved a lot of money and time while the rest of us remained stupid.

(Run Barlow)

I have been in a cave; in fact, I'm in a cave now. I'm fighting a battle against myself now. I have to



learn to love myself and take care of myself. I don't know who I am. All my life I have based my life around others, living the way others thought I should live. I have done things others wanted me to do or told me to do. . . . When I was accepted into Odyssey, it gave me a different

perspective on my life. I'm trying to look into the future. **(Nkechi Johnson)**



I have been in a cave. As a child, a lot of older friends and family told me the only way out of this hood is sports or drugs. So to the basketball court I ran. I was good at sports, and I saw black people doing well in sports on TV. I was brainwashed. I had a thirst

for sports. A whale with no water, I had to have it. I told my mom I was playing so I could make it big and give her everything she ever wanted, but she told me to play because it made me happy.

(Donta Starr)





For African Americans, just a few generations ago the caves were the South and the conditions of servitude. Slavery is what bound us in ignorance. After 400 years, the results of servitude and slavery still exist in the minds of many. I would argue that it's possible Mr. William Lynch's blueprint

for conditioning slaves' minds was taken from Socrates. . . . As African Americans, we make up about 10 percent of the country's population but half of the death row executions. One third of us are in prisons. Do the math—something's wrong. . . . Today you must pay for justice or rely on a court-appointed attorney who lacks training and critical resources to defend the poor.

(Abraham Thomas)



People are and do what they see. If a child is raised by a single mother that never worked a job and receives food stamps and a welfare check every month, when that child becomes grown and has a child/children out of wedlock, she will expect the same handout. I was raised in the projects in

Chicago and witnessed this firsthand. My friend's mother raised five kids on her own. Every time she became pregnant with another child, the amount of her welfare check and food stamps increased. My friend saw this and couldn't wait until she had a baby so that she could get food stamps and a welfare check. She started having babies every year after her first child. . . . People seem to pattern their lives on what they are familiar with. I wish that more people in this world would aspire to make an intellectual and conscious decision to expand their minds to make a positive difference in this world.

(Marcia Hampton)

For eight years I was with a man who was addicted to heroin. I worked all eight years, while he



continued to lose job after job. . . . He physically, mentally, and verbally abused me on numerous occasions. Family would always come to save me. They wanted me to release myself from this "cave" that I was in, but I refused. I continued to believe that he would change and that

we could/would have a normal life. This never came until I pulled my own self from out of that "cave."

(Arnell Royal)



The prisoners in Plato's cave are those who are bound in Hell. The ones who walk into the light are those who accept Jesus' message and Him as Lord and Savior. It's important that they get free so they can live eternally with God their creator. . . My cave was Chicago, Illinois, and the gangs that took over the

neighborhoods. I grew up watching them terrorize the neighborhood (selling drugs on the corner, gambling, getting high in broad daylight, rival gang shootings, innocent people becoming victims, getting attacked and bullied at school with no one stopping these fools). You grow up in fear and hate and despise them, yet as you get old enough (10 or 11 years) you are recruited and forced to become what you hate. At some point you become the monster you hated and hate yourself even more. Only by the grace of God I escaped. Most only escape through a wooden pine box. The gangs teach you that prison is a rite of passage. Because I didn't know how to think for myself, I was looking forward to prison.

(Eugene Smalls)

We live with invisible handcuffs on that limit us from going too far out on a limb. Working is like a cave: you're limited to what you can do by what you know. Then you have racial caves here



today. Some are shielded from seeing the world and exploring new life somewhere else due to not having a green card. . . . They are stuck to a cold gate reading, “You’re prohibited from going any further.”

(Bradley Barner)



When I was living in Chicago, I saw and experienced gangs, crimes, drugs, fights, and everything bad you can imagine. I decided when I was ten I would move out when I started high school and go to Texas to live with my aunt. I saw a different way of living.

I went from an all-African American school to an all-white school. It was hard at first, but I became a different person within a year. I still acted kind of bad due to my upbringing, but not for long. I also experienced the dark side of the light in Texas with racism. I was living in an all-white town and was treated differently than others. Today I see that same darkness with people in Madison, but since I already experienced that early in my life, I can deal with it now.

(Jesse Hamilton)



As a child I was stuck in a cave of someone else’s making, and it felt terrible. I could not see any immediate way out, and it didn’t appear to me that anyone could help, not even God. Fortunately there were books in my cave. I read everything I could get my hands on. The books

were my temporary way out of the cave. At age 12, I found that science fiction could take me the furthest. It didn’t matter what, when, or where—I

was on that spaceship. One week I read 15 books... Today I sometimes feel cave walls closing in, yet I can tell that they are not real. I can also see truth and beauty and light, even in the dark. I no longer need to read science fiction for escape.

(Billie Kelsey)



My allegorical cave is marriage. I left one family and went into another one, not knowing how to live on my own. I let others make my life choices. I would not speak up for myself. Lack of education was my chain. I was too afraid to go back to school, fearing that I was too old, had young children,

and didn’t have the money. I was afraid also by the way I looked, being a Plus-size woman. I didn’t think I would fit in with the younger students.

(Samantha East)



Energy bars and drinks are an example of a cave that people live in. They’re told that all the vitamins and nutrients needed to survive and be energetic and healthy can be found in one neat, convenient package. They believe that picture-perfect idea is true, when in all honesty your

body needs to find its nutrients from various natural sources in order to function at the highest level. You could take that a step further and include all processed “food.” Just because an item is packaged and marketed as “food” doesn’t make it so. It’s what’s inside that counts. Most processed “food” is stripped of its essential elements, reduced to mere calories, fat, and artificial flavor. **(Katie Pruitt)**

The allegory is about people being afraid to see life in a different way, letting go of old mindsets. People who refuse to let go of the old way of life are the prisoners, and their former way of life keeps them in the cave of bondage. My allegorical cave has



been my limited resources. Not having the money to pay for an education in the past kept me working in jobs that paid little or nothing. . . . The willingness to learn and come out of our comfort zone is up to us all.
(**Kenya Moses**)



We, mankind, stay in a state of “blindness” because we are used to being treated as “children,” with others making important decisions for us. It is much easier to sit back and roll with things rather than to challenge the powers that be.
(**Keith Johnson**)



I believe the allegory is about the choice of every human whether to stay a prisoner in the cave of fear and darkness, only to become a shadow of who we were meant to be, or to open our eyes, leave the cave, live in light and truth, and walk on the path that builds strength and character, become all of who we are. . . . I’ve found my truth through my relationship with Jesus. My eyes have been opened, and I have been able to heal, forgive, and take captive memories of my past and painful thoughts. I focus on my path and the journey of becoming whole.
(**Yetta Harris**)

Fear has been my cave since I was a little child. September 1991 when my father passed away was the beginning of my phobias. At school other kids would share imaginative scary stories of dead people, wild animals, and kids being kidnapped. I came to realize that I had fallen so deep into the cave of fear without even noticing it. The worst part was after school, weekends, and holidays



when my siblings and I were supposed to take care of goats and cows in the woods. I became a prisoner in the world of fear. . . . I believed that my home would burn down, killing me and everyone inside it. . . . As I grew older, all my phobias started fading away. There is no freedom, happiness, or admiration in fear.
(**Tatenda Bvindi**)



The prisoners are our doubts and fears, or unanswered questions about ourselves or our lives. We all have restrictions or limitations that hold us back. The cave symbolizes a comfort zone in which we totally limit ourselves. . . I was trapped in a cave until I found the Odyssey program. I knew I had the potential; it was just getting up and going for it. Being in a cave is where I was at because it was comfortable; you could always say or do things for a temporary fix. Now that I’m out of that cave, I feel great. I feel as though I’m in control of this life and can accomplish anything I put my mind and heart to. We all have restrictions we must face; it’s all about having the heart and the will to make something of our lives. Loving yourself is key.
(**Terry Hart**)



Caves that I see around me today are people with drug addiction and with different diseases. You tell people how they can be helped or healed, but they don’t want to hear it.
(**Marilyn Johnson**)



I'm on My Way by Terry Hart

I started this odyssey with an open heart and mind.

I started this odyssey on time.

As I look back, I hold all past memories dear,
For I know in my heart I'm never coming back here.

We've left the shore and started to sail.

Success is imminent, no room to fail.

So as I relax and appreciate this day,
I whisper, "Thank you, Jesus, I'm on my way!"

A Thing Called Hope by Lorraine Garrett

Last night I found myself in a room surrounded by police chiefs, chaplains, business owners, wardens, ex-offenders, and strong, determined people. As I entered into the room I saw some familiar faces that caused a smile to show up on my face. One of these faces, I found out, was a family man who has such a humbling and caring spirit. He is also known as a minister in his church and he believes in encouraging and uplifting others.

As I looked over the well-put-together program, I noticed that this tall, handsome, humble man was being honored for his dedication and determination in this awesome organization. I realized at that moment that I was in very good company. I sat there listening as they talked about this man's dedication, not only to his family and church, but to a cause that is dear to his heart: VBB, meaning Voices Beyond Bars. It is an organization that helps those who are or have been incarcerated and have a desire to start fresh and new with people who do not hold their past against them. It encourages them that yes, you made a mistake, but now you have a choice to stay in that lifestyle or shake yourself off and reach for a higher goal in life.

As I sat there listening to this strong man of character, I remembered feeling such honor to be in the same room with this well-spoken and humble

man. As he stood there before us all sharing his life's story, he told us that he was at a time in his life that he needed to know if God was for real or not. So he asked God to show himself to him and to help him.

Well, his prayer was answered and help found him right where he was. He told us that if it wasn't for the Holy Ghost, and support and accountability partners, he would not have made it. Here you have a grateful man, not ashamed of his past, but confident in his future.

Today, you will find him giving back to those who are in a cave similar to the one he was in. He is offering them real-life lessons as keys to escape their caves.

So, I would like to extend my sincere thanks and honor to Mr. Eugene Smalls for introducing to me a thing called hope and determination. You have truly touched my heart, and it is a pleasure to know you.



Responding to Francisco Jiménez's "The Circuit"

At the end of the story "The Circuit," Panchito goes home to share the good news with his family that his teacher offered to teach him how to play the trumpet. When he gets "home" he sees that his family belongings have been packed, signaling that it is time for them to move on to the next labor camp.

This is sad to me personally as I have had similar experiences in my life. My mom came home one day as I was getting ready to go to work and told me to take off my uniform as we were moving out of town. I had less than an hour to pack what I could. We also lived in many homeless and battered women's shelters. It wasn't surprising to be woken up in the middle of the night to leave as a result of violence.

The story shows that the life of a migrant worker is one where you work for little to nothing, and your children's education and happiness will always be compromised as a result. Furthermore, you are powerless to control this. My natural father was a

migrant worker who left town before my mother could tell him she was pregnant with me.

(Hedi Rudd)

After a few weeks of learning new English words during his lunch hour, the boy learns that his teacher is willing to teach him how to play the trumpet. The boy can't wait to go home and tell the good news to his parents. When he gets home, he sees all his family's belongings packed away in boxes. This story is an example of some of the many hardships Hispanic immigrants overcome every day in this country. In order to supply the basic means of surviving life, they face the constant torment of uprooting the family and have to decide to deny their children the proper education that every child in this country has the right to have. For this family, it is clear that growth will never take place until this pattern is broken.

(Run Barlow)

The story's ending is painful to us as readers because we know how important an education is. If you don't get it during the moment, you may never get a second chance. For me it took going to prison.

I think the message of the story is to go to school while you can and miss no opportunity to learn, for a second chance may never come.

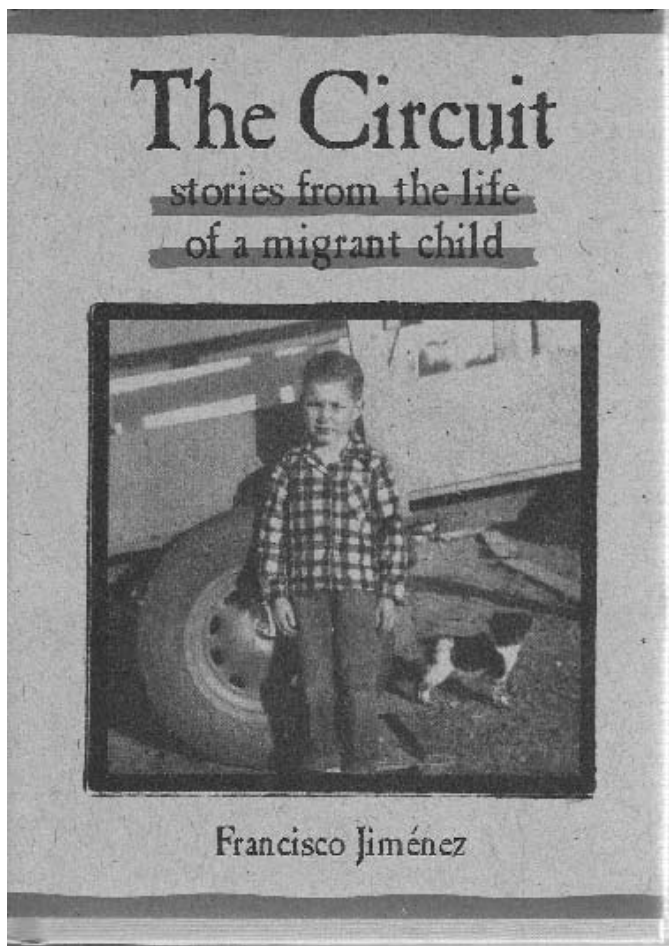
(Eugene Smalls)

The story ended the same as it started. Francisco's family seemed to be unstable, extremely poor, and most of all transient. . . . Francisco's life of constant moving is a never-ending story. The same old, same old situation leads to the joy constantly being ripped out of his life.

(Juba Moten)

This family had to travel and keep moving to look for work so that they could survive and provide for each other. Every time Francisco finally came to a place in his life where he felt he was a part of something or had some normalcy, it abruptly came to a halt because he had to leave once again.

We take so much for granted when it comes



to learning in this country. We have had so many opportunities to explore knowledge and engage in social activities, while others have had to fight and make sacrifices just to get through the next day.
(Lorraine Garrett)

The ending was so painful because Panchito was finally able to go to school and learn new things, such as reading and speaking in English. Right when he was going to learn how to play music, he headed home and found out they had to move again.
(Linda Thao)

To me one of the messages is that you should always try your hardest, and if you're scared, ask for help. . . . This kid is learning and working, but it's all going in a loop to nowhere. It's a continuous process with the men of the family, like his brother, who will work until cotton season is over before going to school. This path will repeat itself until it's broken.
(Donta Starr)

When Francisco's family had to move again, it is painful because it was the beginning of hope for Francisco at the same time that it was the end of it. It gives you the idea of needing to stop something that is going over and over in your family. The title "The Circuit" fits because his whole family has been in the same circle.
(Elvira Rodriguez)



Childhood photos of Jiménez



The sixth grade Mexican boy and his family had to leave Fresno, California, to go to another place to work because grape season was over. The ending was painful to read because I could feel the boy's disappointment. He mustered up enough courage to open up to someone that could befriend him, but he could not stay to see what will become of the friendship. The message is that if you are a bracero, don't expect to have a permanent place to live.
(Marcia Hampton)

The ending of the story is painful because the family does not have any permanent place to call home; they are struggling to survive. They live in shacks and work from farm to farm enduring hardship in the hot sun. By the time the writer got the opportunity to start sixth grade, he struggles to speak English and to read because moving from place to place every season interrupts his education.

I think the story teaches perseverance in difficult circumstances, family unity, and determination in whatever we choose to do in life.
(Tatenda Bvindi)

The message of this story is you always have to be ready for change, no matter how good or bad things may be. You can't control what life brings you every day.
(Jesse Hamilton)

A message I got out of the story was to stop and think about how someone else's life may be, like Panchito's teacher did. If the teacher hadn't taken the time to reach out to the boy, Panchito may not have



discovered that there is more to life than work.

It would've been a completely different story if the teacher had dismissed him as a poor Mexican kid who will be gone and forgotten in a few short months. Another message may be that good things can happen if you reach out for help. After all, the boy did ask the teacher for help learning the words that were unknown to him. It would've been much easier to give up, but he took a leap instead.

(Katie Pruitt)

For a family of migrant workers, education was a luxury that often took a backseat to field work. It's not as though schooling wasn't important to migrant workers; it's that survival through hard work took priority, considering they were already living in impoverished conditions. I believe the message that the author was trying to convey is how valuable education can be and how many of us take it for granted. For many people it's not as simple as waking up and hopping the school bus for a day of education. **(Brandon McCarey)**

The end of the story was sad because this young migrant worker has had a very hard life filled with work and sacrifice for mere survival. He experienced little that was either comfortable or leisurely, while we Americans of my generation are infused with leisurely comforts. **(Keith Johnson)**

It is painful because children should be enjoying their childhood, not spending their days working like adults. **(Tai'Kiah Phillips)**

You see the boy is glad to learn and has someone that is willing to help, but before you know it someone snatches his chance away right before him. The title "Circuit" means always moving and ending back in the same spot you started. **(Shaquida Johnson)**

I think we can all relate to the disappointment of a child whose wants and needs are secondary to the needs of the family. This is what poverty looks like for some families. **(Billie Kelsey)**

He was happy that he was learning to read and finding a friend. Just as he was fitting in

and learning music, he had to pick up and move again. It was painful because it was a child with little education who hated moving around. He just wanted to live in one place and go to school. **(Samantha East)**

It seems that when something good happens, something not so good comes behind it. If you're in a hole or pit, it can keep getting deeper. **(Marilyn Johnson)**

This story somehow reminds me of living a military life, always being shifted. Many children experience this. **(Arnella Royal)**

The story's title fits nicely because it becomes a way of life for this family—working from season to season, moving from here to there. After awhile it becomes routine for them. **(Terry Hart)**

The message in the story is about a child's resilience. The family has lived this life, and Francisco is old enough to understand they only had a certain amount of time in each place. His childlike hope forgot what was to come. **(Yetta Harris)**

The pain comes from seeing this boy being so happy and then just as quick having it all taken from him. Most readers have felt this all firsthand, either being the child or the parent. The family was very easy to relate to, as many of us have been in this situation (homelessness, army, etc.). **(Michele Withers)**



Reactions to 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.*

The poem “My Heart Leaps Up” is the reflection of Wordsworth’s connected lifetime of feelings when seeing rainbows. First, he tells us that rainbows make him happy. Next, he tells us how these views of rainbows connect him to his past. He also wishes to feel this connection in the future. He calls this “natural piety.” I think that means a spiritual feeling from nature.

My reaction to rainbows is more sad than Wordsworth’s. When I read this poem I thought about my dead brother-in-law who was always looking up at the sky and trees. I hope that I can see a rainbow forever to make my life longer.
(Beatriz Mairena-Kellman)

As I read “My Heart Leaps Up,” it brought a strange feeling over me. I don’t know what it was; it was like contentment. I didn’t want to move. I watched the rainbow and I was relaxed.

I think that was part of what Wordsworth was feeling when he lay on his couch vacant in a pensive mood, caught up in his thoughts. The same thing comes over me when I focus on the rainbow and daffodils as well as other forms of nature such as a still lake. There’s just something so peaceful about that. Maybe that’s because these things are God’s creations. They don’t harm anyone or judge anyone. Their only job is to glorify God by doing what they were created to do: bring us joy. **(Eugene Smalls)**

It seems like William Wordsworth is glowing with happiness about awaking to the beautiful signs of nature every day. The line “So be it when I shall grow old or let me die” seems to me to suggest that he would love for this feeling to stay that way and



never change until he dies.
(Donta Starr)

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...
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance...
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.*

The poem “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” made me think of a herd of sheep because of the shape of clouds. The line “That floats on high o’er hills and vales” makes me think of sheep on a hill underneath a tree dancing with the daffodils from the breeze. **(Linda Thao)**

The brightness and colors of the earth moved Wordsworth. He was faithful to his love for the earth. This gentleman was very in tune with the newness and changes of the world. Wordsworth seemed to take pleasure in what his eyes could see in the earth. **(Kenya Moses)**

Journeying into Nature

I love water and waterfalls. I have felt since I was a child that being in or under a cascade of rushing water was the ultimate experience for me. Six years ago, I had the good fortune to visit a remote town in Mexico that had two completely different waterfalls for me to experience.

The first I visited was located in the center of town. A cobblestone road led the way to a 60-foot narrow stream of water falling from towering moss-covered rocks into a knee-deep pool of tepid water. It was a relaxing bathing experience.

The second waterfall was an hour's ride away by horseback. The trip was rocky and treacherous with plunging, forested hills on one side and nowhere to go but up on the other. I could hear the waterfall before I could see it, and its thunderous roar let me know of its power. Unlike the first waterfall, this loud and powerful force was quite cold and too dangerous to take a chance being engulfed under its rushing cascade. Still, it was satisfying to swim in the bracing current of its river. **(Billie Kelsey)**

I visited Jamaica in 2000, and rather than stay in a hotel or resort, I stayed in a friend's home on Bogue Hill in Montego Bay. To get there, we had to drive a small car up a windy hill, overrun by wildflowers and thick vine-covered trees. Standing tall along the way were banana trees that yielded beautiful purple flowers and spider lilies that wove a web of soft white petals in the underbrush.

While I was there, the water was not running and a truck came up and down the dirt road to deliver water to the people living on the hill. A conventional shower was not possible, so I sought

out waterfalls where I could wash my hair and bathe. The water was always warm and soothing, and the pink, yellow, and bright orange audience that peeped out from behind thickly veined leaves helped me not to miss a shower at all. I spent as much time as possible at the beach and remember the taste of sweet piña colada and salt water on my lips as being an aphrodisiac to me. I lounged with the cool beverage near the shoreline, sand finding its way into every crevice and providing a natural exfoliate for my now-preferred natural bathing treatment.

(Hedi Rudd)

This past summer at about 10 am on a sunny, hot, and humid day, I was in my huge backyard sweating and dying of thirst. I was attempting to cut my dark green, very thick grass. The grass was thicker than usual because of three days of heavy rain. There is a two-stories-high line of dark green furry trees that smell sweet like fresh pine on one side of the yard. On the other side there are plants and flowers with brilliant colors: orange, yellow, and purple. These flowers are beautiful but they attract yellow jackets. There are also roses that smell bitter and musky. They attract big black bumblebees that live in the ground under the roses.

As I attempted to get very close to the bitter, musky roses, I disturbed those big, black bumblebees. They came from the thick grass and chased me screaming, sweating, and dying of thirst



all around that huge yard and to my front door. Needless to say, my yard work was done for the day. **(Phyllis Anderson)**

I'm a big fan of free running. One place I enjoy running is a bike path in Shorewood. The path is windy and is always branching off to a new path like a never-ending vein taking you to endless beauties. One path is hilly and smooth and takes you to a sea of huge sunflowers. Another is a steep, long path of branches like cobwebs that poke and prick the whole way through. If you can overcome the rocky path and its thorn-filled shrubs and climb all the dead trees to the end, you are rewarded with a view that overlooks the glasslike lake with the perfect reflection of the Capitol and the Union; definitely my favorite place to run. **(Run Barlow)**

I've always felt kindred to nature in its various forms. I am awestruck by the amazing patterns in nature, like the rays of white light shining through the dark green leaves of a tree, or watching a spider spin its web into a complex pattern. However, stargazing has always been enjoyable to me: allowing my imagination to drift into the night sky, trying to ponder the endless universe. I wonder,

"Are we alone? What am I missing from down here? How much more about the universe will we learn? Will the human race be around thousands of years in the future?"

Science has gathered strong evidence that humans are chemically made up of the same elements found in the cosmos. The earth itself is the byproduct of the universe. If we examine theology, we see that most if not all religions talk about how man was pulled from the planet in one form or another. I believe that the universe and the earth are humankind's original ancestors. This connection has shaped my perception and personal interactions with nature. **(Brandon McCarey)**

I remember the time when my children and I were invited to go choose and chop our own Christmas tree. The first things I noticed were my children's faces. In their eyes I saw a gleam, a sort of twinkle. I also saw courage as well as fear. The second thing I noticed was the air itself. It was filled with a deep, deep woodsy smell that could only be brought out by an array of pine trees.

It was a sun-filled day. Not one cloud took over the rich blue sky! The air was crisp, as I knew it should be around that time of year. Some snow had accumulated on the ground and on the branches of the trees. The pines had this appealing healthiness to them; you could see that nature did not wimp on



providing them with nurture. It affected me so much that I thought that it would be wrong of us to tear from this environment. Going to a real Christmas tree farm was the most beautiful scene that I've experienced thus far. **(Arnella Royal)**

There is a little-known area outside of my work that I visit nearly daily. It is a patch of grass blessed with a maple tree, surrounded on one side by a tall semicircle wall of wildflowers and brush. On the other side is a trio of pine trees.

In the summer you can lie underneath the tree using mulch for a pillow, a soft blanket of grass underneath you, and watch the sun streaming down through the blowing leaves. There is a fullness of nature in the summer.

Fall has a sense of urgency; all the plants and animals that plan to stay through winter are preparing so they will survive. Animals gather food and secure their homes. Plants shed unnecessary leaves. There is change in the air in autumn.

In the winter the snow-covered pines create a sound barrier to the outside world. Snowdrifts can be seen all around and become hiding places for rabbits and tunnels for mice. There is a crispness present that can only be found in winter.

Spring is the best time to watch for birds of all kinds— red-winged blackbirds, hawks, killdeer— all anxious to rebuild their nests and replenish their families. There is new life all around you and you can finally sense it in spring.

(Katie Pruitt)

Autumn River

Cool is a wind, altered from a hot summer breeze
A melody of a new song, sung from the branches of
green orange brown and golden yellow leaves
A chorus from creation harmony, such delight to
my ear I quiver

Yet, dancing with the notes of nature, welcoming
the arrival of Autumn River

Leaping on rocks in the womb of the woods is
where I be

Captured by earth's essence, a place where I am
free

Pass me not, hasty you travel, where is it that you
go

The mystery of your entrance and exit is something
I want to know

Streams of a symphony, uphill, through the valley
galloping the brooks, I arrived in this time too,
Even when I was young and now I'm old.
Arrest me in your orchestra; never depart
Let's become one soul.

(Yolanda Cunningham)

On clouds of white up to heaven's gate
Soaring high above the Rockies' blight
An eagle's splendid and lofty flight.
The glare of the sun shines bright and sweet,
And its magnificent rays warm my brown weary
feet.

(Keith Johnson)

As I sit and gaze at the stars,
I wish on each one,
hoping it comes true.
As the moon gets brighter,
the shadows at night become clear.
When the sun rises,
so shall my soul
into another day of blessing
that helps me survive.

(Jesse Hamilton)

As I sit in my rocking chair on the back porch
Watching in awe as a summer shower
Blesses with its kiss of love

The trees dance one crazy dance
As if in competition with the wind and rain



If I close my eyes slightly
The rain pouring from my overhang
Carries me to a place of peace

With the waterfalls that drown your sorrows
The blades of grass kneel down
Beaten by the rain's power
Only to rise up again
As the sweet warmth of the sun arrives

Drying the tears with a gentle kiss.
(Michele Withers)

I heard birds twitter in the trees,
Singing joyous tunes all day free,
The melody of their songs was a lullaby to me,
While I enjoyed the breeze, beneath the trees

As I lay in the carpeted woodlands,
Sprinkled by the grace of its sounds,
I marveled at the clouds,
That seemed to be chasing each other in harmony,
Giving me joy and rights
To soothe my soul

I exercised the power of vision
What I saw was a feast to my soul,
Dancing lilies, buzzing bees and rustling leaves,
All seemed to be glorifying their maker
In one accord.
(Tatenda Bvindi)

In the Country
Lying under summer's
Black sky.
God's Diamonds just burst,
Summer's sweet scents
Of bonfire and booze.
I drift off in wonder.

Can this be the same sky
under which Jacob wrestled God
all night long to become Israel?
Yes! Wow, Amazing, I thought.
As sounds of popping, smells of sulfur,
And biting, worrisome mosquitoes
Disrupt my revelation.
(Yetta Harris)

When I came home from work one day,
A woe my eyes did see.
For in the hall there lay a frog,
As helpless as can be.

Its life was put to tragic end,
From feet of whom unknown.
And although my scaly friend was gone,
I couldn't help but moan.

I walked away in silent grief,
And paused in front of my door,
Then glanced one last time at my green friend,
Who lay dead upon the floor.
(Tai'Kiah Phillips)



What's in a Name?

My name has been a shell-breaker for me in school because the teachers always mispronounced my name. Then everybody would laugh and tell me it's spelled wrong. Since everybody had already laughed at me, what more could happen? The laughter was okay; it helped me to be myself and get to know people.

(Donta Starr)



My full name is Billie Ovale Kelsey. I usually tell people that I was named for the singer Billie Holiday, but I think I'm named for my dad, whose name is Billy. My middle name is from plasmodium ovale, which is one of the stages of the malaria virus. My last name is Scot/Irish. I'm not sure how the African-American side of my family got that name but I like it. I like being a woman named Billie, and I liked it as a girl, too. I think my name suits me.

(Billie Ovale Kelsey)



Where my last name originated, I have no idea. My true thought about it is that it is surely man-made. This name is from my grandfather. Why a person would choose Whiteside for a black family concerns me. The name was created in the early 1900s. I assume that there is a Caucasian bloodline through my family.

My middle name had to have come from a Mexican woman my mother must have met while living in Pasadena. It means "consolation," and I find this comforting. My first name is a mix of half



my mother's name (Stella) and a part of her sister's name (Henrietta).

Growing up, I always thought my name was Arnetta (with "T"s crossed) because everyone called me Netta. It wasn't until I got my first job that I saw on my birth certificate that the "T"s were not crossed...

(Arnella Consuella Whiteside Royal)

My name is of African origin. It means animal horn. Years ago, animal horns were used to sound for dance or war. My name is a constant reminder that when I open my mouth to speak, my words have power and can echo. This encourages me to say positive and uplifting things about others.

(Kenya Moses)



My cousin Michael P. Burns is the origin of my name. He was a soldier in the Special Forces Green Beret, stationed in Laos during the Vietnam War. In July 1969, while watching for a helicopter to leave the area, he and his team were ambushed. From that moment on he has been listed as MIA. About five months later, with Michael missing, I was born and meant to carry his name.

I feel my name is very important and strong as his memory is always with me, which strengthens my family ties. I have now passed the name to my oldest son and hope the name and memories will always remain as well as carry on.

(Michele Withers)



My name was given to me by my grandmother. She was from a black tribe of Seminole Indians.

She adopted the name “Abraham” from a leader of the Seminoles in the 1800’s. According to history, Abraham and John Caesar led an assault on 21 sugar plantations. Some scholars described this as one of the largest slave rebellions in US history.



I have learned the name “Abraham” is a strong, honorable name. At this point I can’t explain what difference it has made in my life because I believe that chapter is evolving now. I believe its origin is Hebrew, like the prophet Abraham according to the Bible. The story goes that Abram’s name was changed to Abraham with a promise to save his descendents... I believe my name has power and integrity associated with it, and I think of it as a name for a leader. My last name is more likely the name of past slave masters. I’ve never had any curiosity about it.

(Abraham Thomas)

Marcia, pronounced mar-SEE-ah, is Latin. It means “Roman Goddess.” It is also pronounced mar-SHUH, but I prefer mar-SEE-ah, because it sounds exotic.



When I was in the 6th grade, my teacher Mrs. Johnson refused to pronounce my name correctly. She thought that my name should be accompanied by an accent over the letter “C.” When she called on me to participate in class discussions, I would not respond if she mispronounced my name. Eventually, my mother was called to school for a conference. My mother told Mrs. Johnson that if she continued to mispronounce my name, she would be reported to her supervisor. From then on, Mrs. Johnson pronounced my name correctly. I love my name. It is different and unusual, just like me.

(Marcia Hampton)

Tatenda is a unisex Shona name that is locally used in Zimbabwe. Tatenda translated into English means “thank you.” It can also mean “we thank you” or “we are grateful,” depending on the context in which the word is being used. The singular word for “Tatenda” is “tenda,” which means “thank.”



Talent means a special natural ability or aptitude. The word “talent” originally described an ancient weight or money used for the payment of goods and services...

I did not realize that I carried the name Tatenda until I was getting ready to write my seventh grade exams. Talent had been the name I used from birth. I had both names, but nobody called me Tatenda at all. When I was born, my parents had given me both names but due to the imperfection of records, the first name Talent was omitted. They used Talent so that the name will not be forgotten. I grew to love both names especially because of the meaning they both have. Just thinking that I was a gift that made my parents thankful made me want to do great things and be a blessing to them and to those I interact with...

(Tatenda Bvindi)

Growing up I was so sensitive about my name and used to hate it. The name Run is so uncommon. Even my best friend called me “Ron” until we were in high school. There were so many jokes about my name that if I had stayed touchy about it I would have never made it through middle school. Eventually the jokes became the same and got old, so I didn’t care.



People ask me all the time, “What’s your real name?” or “How did you get that name?” Truth is, when I was born I was born feet first and strangled by the umbilical cord. I was flipped and pulled out,

still choking. It looked as though I was pumping my arms and kicking my feet for a breath of air. Had this not happened I would have been named “Cordearl Barlow.” I left the hospital “Baby Boy Barlow” because for two weeks my parents could not decide on a name for me. Elijum was a name given to me by the doctor that delivered me.

(Run Key Elijum Barlow)

My name, Yetta Melinda Harris, has many layers. Melinda, my middle name, was “pretty” and went well with my first name. Harris is my dad’s last name. He was in Vietnam when I was born. I’ve read a letter my dad sent a week after my birth asking Mom, “Yetta? What’s that from?”



My mother proudly told me, “I named you after Jomo Kenyatta, First President of a free Kenya.” She moved a few letters around and voila, Yetta. It turns out Yetta is an old Jewish name.

Having the name Yetta in grade school was not fun, especially when we studied “The Yeti.” As an adult, I’ve had more than a few experiences when I’ve spoken with someone over the phone only to meet them in person and see the most bewildered and confused looks. I’ve wanted to say so many times, “Yes! Yes! I’m Yetta Melinda Harris and my name has as many layers as the person who named me, the people I’m named after, and myself.”

(Yetta Harris)

My mother named me Hedi LaMarr after an actress named Hedy Lamarr. Hedy Lamarr was famous for many things including her starring role in a 1933 foreign film entitled *Ecstasy*, which was sensational at the time for depicting nudity. She eventually moved to the States, where she starred in many Hollywood films including *Samson and Delilah*, produced by Cecil



B. Demille. While best known for her acting chops, it was actually her contributions to science that make me most proud of being named after her. She and a friend, George Anthiel, co-invented a method of frequency hopping which eventually became the basis for Wi-Fi and is also used in cordless phones. Sadly, her contributions were not recognized until much later in her life. She would never profit from the patent and died almost penniless.

My last name was given to me by my father, LaVelle F. Rudd, when he adopted me at the age of 22. He helped my mom raise me from the age of nine months old. One day, he asked if I would do him the honor of becoming his daughter. I was thrilled and we submitted a request to Judge Moria Krueger. Upon her approval, he became my father, and I was honored to become a Rudd.

(Hedi LaMarr Rudd)

Elvira is not a common name. It originally came from Russian and is a Spanish name that means “true” and “foreign.” After knowing what it means, I have realized that I love my name. I used to hate it. I was impressed to know that my name means “true” because one of the things that I hate in general is when we lie. The name Elvira is true and foreign. Yes, it is. I love it!

(Elvira Rodriguez)



I would like to explain my Hmong name, which is spelled Ong Thao. The first name is Ong and represents foggy or misty. The last name is the most important because there are different clans, and Thao is one of them.

(Linda Thao)

