

Odyssey Oracle

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The Magic of Music

On October 15, Odyssey students listened to the sounds of the viola and piano and to singers as they wrote down their own responses to music.

Music is a way to express yourself and your everyday life. . . . I mainly listen to gospel music when I need motivation and spiritual uplifting. The music I am hearing in my classroom [Schubert sonata for viola and piano] is very new to me. It is the most beautiful and peaceful sound I've ever heard. There are no lyrics, just a sweet melody that relaxes me.

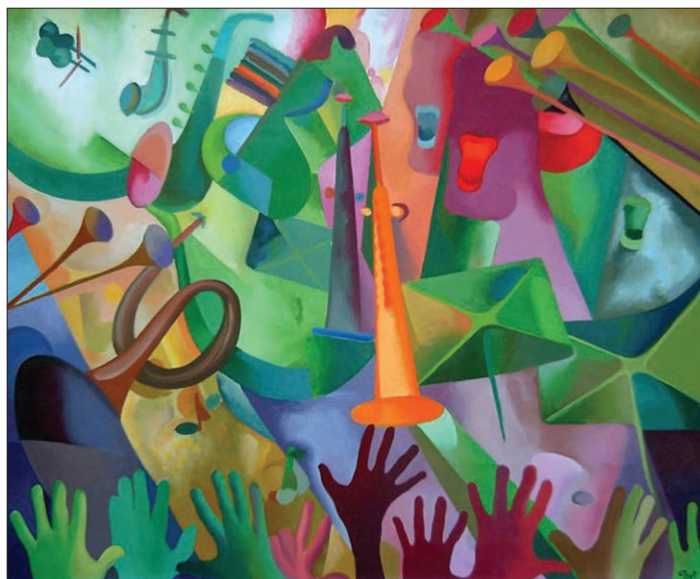
Felicia Anderson

When I'm feeling sad, lost, or confused, music gives me a sense of hope; it makes that half empty cup half full. I get motivated and want to change the way I feel, as if it cleans my soul of whatever negative emotion I'm facing. I like jazz. I'm an instrumental

person. Horns are my favorite. I feel relaxed while listening to music.

Ricky Barners

I look at music as a piece of art in itself. Music sets the tone for many different situations. The music in class was presented in a way of relaxation. Some tones were slow (romantic) and some were high pitched (emotional), but overall it brings my spirit to a peaceful but yet calm place. The music from class made me feel joyful, pure, and happy. It



Magic Music By Constantin Tanasache

somehow made me feel closer to God, like his angels set upon me, leaving me feeling safe and secure.

Nicole Barnett

I love to listen to rap. Inspirational rap makes you think of what he/she is going through or makes you want to try harder on something. Sometimes I can feel the person's emotion.

Samuel Bester

When I'm in church and I hear the choir singing a sad song, it makes me want to cry, but if I'm hearing uplifting music it makes me want to clap my hands and stomp my feet and have a good time.

Lavern Brown

R&B songs . . . allow me to understand why I am feeling a certain way, why I am having a

hard time overcoming something or someone. For instance, when Mary J. Blige sings about a failed relationship or uncontrolled feelings, I can relate to the song. . . . When you listen to R&B songs, it takes you from your current situation into a world imaginable.

Dominique Christian

The music that I hear now takes me back in time and history. When I hear and feel these notes, I'm reminded as to how the times and eras have changed. With these notes I can drift in my mind to medieval times, wearing a white wig and pretending to be someone else. . . . I can remember when I was a little boy. We had no television, only a radio, and I would hear "Embraceable You," or something of that sort. A northern boy, I was raised on jazz, Billie Holiday, Sarah

Vaughan, Nat Cole, and the infamous Duke Ellington. It makes me appreciate life. It gives me a good feeling.

Dennis Cotton

I listen to a lot of R&B. The music gives my life narration because there haven't been too many songs that don't coincide with my life. . . . Music triggers the thoughts

and emotions of my day to day struggles.

Robert Garel

Music, if I could define it, would be the catching away by peace to a celestial home, to rid of all worry and care. The music I hear draws me and takes me on its wings into an "out of body" tranquil land. It causes such great peace that it almost convinces me to slumber. It's as if my mind says, "Take a break!" I have to obey; I am compelled to just relax.

Otis Harris

Music is food for the soul. It has a way of taking you through a lot of emotional situations. . . . I listen to all music: Gospel, Neo-Soul, R&B, Old School, Dusties, a little jazz, country & pop. It can play for your soul. Music talks to me. It makes me laugh, cry, dance, shout, sing along, or just relax. . . . To me all music has something to say, for you, me, and anyone who feels it. Music keeps me peaceful, helps me heal. It is more than just food for my soul.

Tiffany Harston

Music is a sense of expression. Music talks for me, meaning it may say what I can't. [The Schubert viola sonata] is very calming yet also inspiring, meaning it makes me feel like writing. I feel like it is saying to me, "Keep going. Don't stop writing now. Be more imaginative, bring out more creativity. Now Emily's father is playing a different song [Gershwin] on the piano now.



David Auerbach on viola

This song makes me think of memories. It's actually more sad. Right now I'm thinking, Damn, if I would have just listened to my parents, where could I have been? I sure would have avoided bad relationships, children out of wedlock, and poverty. Now Emily's mother and father are playing!! It makes me feel like everything's OK, more upbeat. To be honest, I think that feeling is coming from looking at them. They're beautiful, they made it, they struggled, and look: God preserved them. Resilience. . . .

Antoinetta Hayes

Lament to the streets I left behind all the friends sharing tears and cheers where I partied off my first beers the pain we felt but still maintained the reason now I'm not insane. . . . School was just another turf lines crossed tilt of a hat color of shirt it was hard to just sit still when the next moment you could be killed. Mom was gone. . . I yearned to grow become a man but I'm reminded of my "so called place." My skin color does not dictate my race! In short, music makes me reflect, feel happy and sad.

James Horton

"Music soothes the savage soul." I would have to agree. There is some sort of music for every type of inner being within all of us. There is something wrong with a person who doesn't like any music. That type of person needs to do a lot of soul searching. The music I'm hearing now makes me want to go home, get all of my CDs together, and set a day and time when to play and listen

to each one of them one by one. I feel maybe something beautiful in the music I have missed.

Roberta James

Music means so much to me. I am so grateful for music and the life it brings to my soul. There are times in my life when I want to celebrate a small milestone. Even when I am alone, music helps me celebrate. For instance, there are times when I am able to accomplish every task on my to-do list. I am so happy about my accomplishment that I turn the radio up as loud as it will go. . . . Soft or emotional type music allows me to cry and in a sense the song cries with me. Music is a healer and a cleanser to my soul. I enjoy classical, jazz, and the blues. I also love the 60s, 70s, and 80s classics because it reminds me of growing up in Detroit during the Motown era. Music calms me, uplifts me, and encourages my heart.

Rhonda Johnson

I can feel every human emotion when listening. I can cry to certain notes and beats. I can be happy and joyous. I can relax and just be. Some music makes me want to just dance and clap. . . . I even feel that the sounds in nature



The Staples Singers

are music to me—the sound of the ocean hitting the shore, the sounds that crickets make, the noise of frogs: it's all music to me.

Felicia Jones

Music . . . brings emotions out of me that nothing else can. It calms me when I'm angry, uplifts my spirits when I'm feeling down. . . . It makes me think of a warm and breezy summer day, with a cold glass of lemonade, fresh baked cookies, and no shoes on. Kids are laughing while women are in the kitchen preparing dinner. Old men are out on the porch drinking and telling old war stories.

Shanita Lawrence

It makes me feel like I'm in a romantic scene in a movie, real relaxed and at ease. It kind of makes me want to dance with a woman gracefully. . . . I can see myself in the country, looking off into the sunset in a daze, enjoying

*Mongolian Singers*

the outdoors. I can envision an old movie without people talking, and the only thing you can hear is the music. Now I've got the feeling like in church with the up tempo beat. It makes you want to jump up for joy. I could pick one of these songs as a theme song for myself.

Shannon Lawrence

The music that's playing is a mixture of love and hate. I feel as though I'm in a crowded room full of chaos but beauty. The music is a comfort but a warning. I love how it begins. When it begins, my heart jumps a beat, as if there is something about to happen, like in a movie.

Sherice Lewis

Music is a way of expressing your innermost thoughts. It's a way of communicating your feelings. . . . The music in class tells a story; it takes you on a journey—the joys and sorrow of people trying to find a life away from all of the struggles they have gone through; happier times ahead; relationships.

Alice McDaniel

I listen to just about all genres of music; there's something beautiful about every single kind. Music means unity to me. No matter your origin or what language you speak, music reaches, touches, and inspires everyone who hears it. . . .

Sometimes when I hear certain music or songs, I can remember where I was, who I was with, and sometimes (scary as it is) the hair styles at the time of that particular music and what I was wearing down to the accessories. I don't remember what I ate for breakfast this morning . . . but play a song and I can see, hear, smell, and taste everything that went on at that time. It's like I'm transported to a specific moment in time.

Mary Moore

My mother loved music. She always had something playing in our

home almost from the moment she woke till we went to bed. She also sang and played the piano. . . . My mother exposed us to classical, jazz, blues, Crystal Gale, and man did she love her some Tina Turner. The most prominent memory of my mother's love for music was Koko Taylor and BB King. . . . Music has mended many different aspects of my life. Music is my life.

Betsy Pelto

Music . . . can be relaxing and soothing to the heart, the mind, and the soul. When I'm feeling down and out, music uplifts me from whatever it is I'm going through. I also listen to some rap which at times makes me mad and ready to fight. It tells you that there are a lot of haters out to get you.

Emily Robinson

Music means to me a mixture of emotions as well as vivid passages, and it also lets you

*Travis Barker*

know about culture and human relationships in the society at the time. The history of a community is in its music. . . . I like to listen to all kinds of music. Just like books, each kind of music helps you learn something different.

Erika Rosales Serate

I listen to all types of music, from classical to hip-hop. I would even listen to opera or a Buddhist chant if given the time. . . . I'm most fond of Rock-n-Roll, though; the whole history of it moves me. . . . I like that piece from Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue." It always puts me in the mind of the song "Manhattan." I was also moved by that song "Summertime." That woman [RJ Knight, Odyssey '08] sang so beautifully, but it reminded me of Billie Holiday's song "Strange Fruit." It has that awful truth in America's Negro history that bleeds my soul.

Charles Sallay

Music often brings a tear down

my cheek. I listen to Gospel, and it's such a joy to sing as a group. Praising the Lord uplifts me, warms my heart, and makes me feel calm and secure. It also makes me feel closer to my creator.

Debra Scott

I get a feeling of a song paying tribute to someone; it's somewhat romantic; something of honor and respect. Music means to me an expression of culture, moods, and occasions. I listen to R&B, jazz, some spiritual, hip-hop, not so much gangster rap. . . . Some songs also bring up memories of good times, sad times. Music can set the mood.

Edwin Shumpert

Music can control me. It can calm me when I'm angry, it can get my adrenaline pumping when I'm bored or calm, it can make me feel alone, and it can make me feel happy. I listen to mainly rap and R&B. For the last few months I've been introduced

to rock and pop. It gives me different feelings, and I can't describe them either. It's like a child meeting their long lost sibling. You feel something and it's strong, but you don't know how to explain it.

Stephen Taylor

Music means everything to me. Without it we would have no joy. It's a gift given to us by God. It's so great a gift it was often given back to him in biblical times. To this day when we make a joyful noise unto him, he is pleased. The music I'm hearing now reminds me of one of my favorite movies (Tombstone). When Doc Holiday was playing the piano in the bar, one of the cowboys walked over to him and said, "Can't you play anything else? Frederic Chopin?" That's where I first learned the names Frederic Chopin and Stephen Foster.

Wynetta Taylor

I see a candle reflecting on the face of one tear; tears of confused emotions. Eyes look up to see flashing images from the combination of the moonlight and the shadows beyond the glass. Silk scarves of many colors are dancing with the changing of the winds. Life is beautiful. There are top hats and bow ties, flared beautiful alabaster evening gowns. Through all of the elegance, there is trouble lurking. Suddenly the trouble changes to folly and jester-like behavior. Everything is happy. I see Charlie Chaplin. He's dancing around, entertaining each person in this room. He tips his hat to all the ladies. I close my eyes. For once



Sheet music



in a long time, I am at peace.

Cameron Travis

Music that describes things that happen in everyday life means a lot to me. It tells me a little something about the musician and the life he or she has lived. I like to listen to all kinds of music, but the music I like most is jazz and the blues. . . . Some music makes me relaxed, and other music can pump me up.

Charles Tucker

The music playing now reminds me of the symphony. It takes me to my memories of concert halls. I think music can take you anywhere you want to go. . . . In high school I played in the Concert, Marching, and Symphonic bands. . . . Music can tell a story with more emotion and drama than any words. Though I haven't played my clarinet in years, I still love the orchestra. Hearing this music makes me want to go get a couple of reeds and open my lungs to my woodwind.

Lea White

Music helps me to do a lot of things, like clean, think, and get my emotions out. Depending on how I feel at the time, I might be ready to bust someone's head, lie down and sleep, or just party. . . . I once had a dream of becoming a singer until I started to draw. When I do write my book, I will list the music that everyone was listening to at the time. Music can lift you, make you feel sorrow, or go off on the deep end.

Jaunté Willis

Robert and Wanda Auerbach donate frequently to the UW Odyssey Project because they know firsthand the importance of free access to higher education. Both attended Berea College, which has as its motto the Biblical saying "God has made of one blood all peoples of the Earth."



Robert and Wanda Auerbach

Coming out of a Musical Cave

By Lea White

I was born in 1970, plopped out as a genuine product of Motown music. I'm not good at naming the artists, but I can sing along with any of the songs from this musical era. I knew then that I had a love for Rhythm and Blues.

In the sixth grade I joined my middle school band. As I learned how to read music, I also learned how to listen to music.

I learned about all types of music. I developed a love for jazz, classical, opera, and country. The love of music has released me from my cave of just R&B music.

Music teaches while being able to entertain. It transforms moods and emotions. Music can open your minds and hearts. It took me out of my urban town and has sent me around the world to visit many cultures. I am out of my musical cave. I can not imagine not knowing about all the different music of the world. Music has no boundaries. I don't want any either.



A Citizen at Last

By Erika Rosales Serate

Becoming a citizen was an Odyssey for me, including years of waiting, a lot of paper work, a lawyer, and a lot of money.



Because my husband is a citizen, I was able to apply for residence. We got married in September of 2003 and started the process then. After a few months, immigration sent a letter with my permit to work in the USA, as well an appointment with immigration to check out my fingerprint with the FBI.

It took a year to get an interview with an immigration officer, who wanted to know if my marriage was 'real' or just so I could be a citizen. Thank goodness everything was okay. They even told me to bring my son to the appointment.

They gave me a conditional residence permit, which means that if after two years I was still married to my husband, I could apply for permanent residence, but if not, they would send me back to my country.

After three years of marriage, I was finally able to apply for citizenship. They gave me a book of the history of the United States to study as well an interview with an immigration officer again to quiz me about history and to make sure I learned English.

After that the final step came a judgment in court, and they gave me the amazing paper— my citizenship!

I was so excited, I was shaking from head to toe. I'm proud to be a Mexican, but the United States is my country the way the mother who loves you and cares for you is your real mother even if she isn't your birth mother.

I am so lucky to be a citizen. I hope God helps me give back to this country for the help it has given me.

Profiles of the Class of 2009

Dominique Christian changes for the better

By Stephen Taylor

For 23-year-old Dominique Christian, it was tough growing up. After being incarcerated, she joined the service in 2002 “because I needed to,” she says, “to change the direction my life was going.” She was in the service for four years, serving as an armor specialist.

“The military shaped my outer truth,” she says, “and strengthened my desire to change.”

She’s raising her two-year-old daughter by herself and working investigating fraudulent

unemployment claims. “The life of a single mother encourages me to fight for a better life,” she says.

Stephen Taylor learns from early mistakes

By Dominique Christian

Helping raise two sisters wasn’t easy for a young man searching to find himself. What people could see was a quiet boy, but inside, he was raging with hurt.

Stephen Taylor began to lash out at life at the age of 14 and was forced to go to boot camp. That experience didn’t change his outlook on life, he says, but growing up has.

“Most kids like being called a beast, a goon, or a thug,” he notes. “As somebody who got some of those titles, I’d rather be called a man.”

He’s focusing on school and work and hopes to help children with their problems one day, but he hasn’t forgotten his past. “When you mess up, learn from it,” Stephen observes. “To me a

mistake isn’t a bad thing; it’s a learning experience.”

Debra Scott overcomes childhood fears

By Rhonda Johnson

Debra Scott says that reading relaxes her and takes her mind to a new world of people, places, and things. She appreciates this new-found adventure.

Debra grew up in Madison along with her younger brother, Kevin. Throughout her young life, her dad bounced in and out of the prison system. This left Debra feeling scared, confused, and hurt. Her father died when she was 11, leaving her with even more questions.

“I loved my dad,” she says, “and at the time, I couldn’t articulate everything that was going on inside me. I was scared all the time, and I didn’t trust people.”

Although it took many years for Debra to understand her beginnings, she decided to break the cycle of abuse when she had





her own daughter, Francesca. She says that, unlike herself, her daughter understood the importance of an education at an early age. Debra now has two grandchildren, Alana and Amberlyn.

Debra has now found a new love and freedom in her life through reading books. She has overcome her fears and inability to trust others. "I am now a secure person," she says. "I am more mature, and I am smart. I know now that I can do anything I put my mind to. I am hopeful because I know where I started."

Rhonda Johnson finds happiness, security in Madison **By Debra Scott**

Now 37, Rhonda Johnson came to Madison from Detroit in 2000 with her family. She says her husband was verbally and emotionally abusive, and she divorced him in 2005. She's happy and secure now with her four children, ages 16, 14, 12, and seven.

She has five sisters and two

brothers, one of whom died. She says she lived a sheltered life in Detroit, with both of her pastor parents being very strict.

She loves to sing Gospel, jazz, and R&B and to roller skate with her children. She's a writer for *UMOJA* and is working as a stage manager for a play that will debut in May, 2009 at the Overture Center.

Roberta James doesn't want pity!

By Mary L. Moore

Roberta James has been through so much, and she's still standing. Her obstacles include divorce, depression, and a current breakup with an abusive boyfriend. She struggles with frustration when she's alone and idle for extended periods of time.

To combat some of those obstacles, she crochets and knits for adults and children. She even has her work being displayed and sold at a neighborhood gift shop.

She has two adult children and five grandchildren and is a

student.

"I refuse to accept pity," she says. She's happily divorced and happily single, independent, and full of determination for the future.

Mary Moore wants to serve you dinner

By Roberta James

Mary Moore wants to own a supper club, where she plans to work right alongside her employees. After graduating from Odyssey, she plans to earn a degree in business management.

She's 43 years old and has two adult children. She says she's not anticipating marriage any time soon. She'll devote her time, energy, and ambition to becoming a complete small business entrepreneur.

Sammy Bester turns injury into opportunity

By Cameron Travis

Sammy Bester holds a silent power within himself. At 18, he possesses inner wisdom that

supersedes his age. Learning from a personal injury that left him out for the season, he decided to learn more about his injury rather than becoming a victim of it.

Born January 8, 1990 in Madison, Sammy was a soft-spoken child with a love of sports that continued into his high school years. Unfortunately, in his third year Sammy sustained an injury to his right knee that left him unable to participate, but that downfall became the birth of his calling. Wanting to learn more about his injury, Sam took a class in career development and is pursuing his education in the Odyssey Project.

Cameron Travis finds awareness in adversity

By Sammy Bester

“You never really understand yourself,” Cameron Travis says, “until you’re faced with difficulties and find your way through.” This awareness has led him to want to study family law.

Cameron was born in Chicago on February 20, 1973. His father was born in Cairo, Egypt and his

mother in Tennessee. He collects swords, daggers, knives—and tattoos. (He has 29 tats!) He likes to produce, write and perform music using the stage name Babylon.

Because of a bad courtroom experience in the past, Cameron wants to study and practice family law.

Dennis Cotton makes a good second life in Madison

By Edwin Shumpert

Dennis Cotton had it all—a wife, two children, and a good job at the Chrysler plant in Kenosha, Wisconsin. But then his wife passed, Chrysler went under, and he moved to Madison with his daughter to make a new life. He’s doing well, with a good job, and he’s found a woman he hopes to marry.

“Odyssey is one of the best things to happen to me,” he notes. Ironically, the class has brought him in contact with someone he grew up with, classmate Edwin Shumpert. “His brother and my brother grew up together,” Dennis notes. “We pretty much grew up in the same neighborhood” in

Chicago.

Edwin Shumpert takes advantage of “opportunity from heaven”

By Dennis Cotton

Edwin Shumpert hails from Chicago and attended Forestville grammar school and Dunbar High School. “There were some bumps along the way,” he says, but he was able to bounce back and get his life on track. He came to Madison in 1978, attended MATC, and got his first apartment.

He speaks of Odyssey as a “wonderful opportunity from heaven.”

In class one night he met Dennis Cotton, who had grown up in the same neighborhood. In fact, their older brothers were best friends.

Edwin plans to marry his soul mate next year.

Alice McDaniel doesn’t let obstacles stop her

By Shanita Lawrence

Imagine if you will a young woman determined to have the riches that life has to offer.





Venturing out at the age of 12 to support herself, while most children were playing, Alice McDaniel set out to conquer the world, knowing that as long as she believed in herself, she could achieve anything.

Alice would later have three children, a daughter and two sons, and begin a journey to make their lives better. She overcame many obstacles, including the difficulties of being a single mother and surviving a stroke. Exhibiting strength, courage, and determination to her daughters and her three grandchildren, she went back to school.

"Sometimes in life you are given that second chance," she says. She's determined to make the most of that chance.

Shanita Lawrence: Growth of a woman

By Alice McDaniel

The birth of her son "opened up the world" for Shanita Lawrence.

Shanita's son, Markerth Da'quan Lawrence, now 10, was born six days before her birthday and three days after his dad's. She had her son while serving a

seven-year term in prison. One day after he was born, Markerth was taken from her.

She had been seeing the world with tunnel vision, she says, and "couldn't see the light." Knowing that she could love and be loved freed her in many ways.

She says she wouldn't change a thing about going to prison, because it "made me the woman I am today."

Lea White wants to be a writer

By Ricky Barners

Lea White has been working for the State of Wisconsin for six years, the last four with the Department of Revenue, but writing is her real passion.

She was born in Harvey, IL, the youngest of three kids with a brother and a sister. She lost her father in 1997 and saw her life circumstances change for the worse. So she left Harvey and moved to Madison to make a new start.

She has three children of her own, two girls and a boy. She heard about the Odyssey Program from a friend and is now on her journey, pursuing her dream to

become a writer.

Ricky Barners looks to the future

By Lea White

Ricky Barners is embracing the change in his life despite the tragedy he has endured.

He's a Chicago native with five brothers and four sisters. When he was 13, his dad was murdered in a bar fight. Seven years later, his mother was slain in a drive-by shooting. He sought comfort in drugs and alcohol. He has moved around a bit: Chicago, Rockford, Milwaukee, La Crosse, and now Madison.

He's not sure what field he wants to pursue. He just knows that he wants to contribute to society. He's thankful for his Odyssey chance and is focused on the future, although he says, "I'm still contemplating what I want to be when I grow up." He enjoys sports, fishing, and golfing.

Sherice Lewis makes a fresh start in Madison

By Felicia Jones

A 31-year-old mother of two daughters, four and eight, Sherice

Lewis grew up in Chicago as an only child. Faced with many obstacles, she moved to Madison with her two girls in August of 2002.

Since moving, she succeeded in getting her first job (as a customer service rep), first apartment, and first car. She's made positive life changes for herself and her daughters.

Moving to Madison has given her a chance to turn her life around and to have her daughters avoid the difficulties that she endured.

The revival of Felicia Jones By Sherice Lewis

Felicia Jones is astounding.

She was born and raised on the southside of Chicago, the fourth from the youngest of 16 children. She attended William J. Bogan High School, where she was a straight A student in the gifted program, but she decided to drop out her senior year after obtaining a job at the post office in 1986.

"The money was good," she says, "and I was raising myself."

She married in 1990 but separated and moved to Madison in 1996. She has four children, a girl and three boys. She's very active in her other three kids' education, but her oldest son, 19, dropped out of school because she wasn't around for him. He started making money and, like his mom, decided school wasn't important right then.

Her decision to go back to school inspired him to return to school, too.

"We both believed that we could always go back later," she says. "Although it's never too late to go back to school, I didn't want him to wait until he's 40."

Robert Garel believes in himself because of his kids

By Shannon Lawrence

Robert Garel's two kids are his life. "My family is proud of me," he says, "because I never gave up."

He was born in Little Rock, Arkansas and moved to Madison when he was four. He played football for the Westside Pee

Wee League, then went to West High School and was All-City in football, Back of the Year, and co-Most Valuable Player in the NJCAA Pepsi-Cola Bowl.

He wants to earn a bachelor's degree and become a civil engineer. And he wants to teach his 12-year-old son and four-year-old daughter to never stop believing in themselves.

Shannon Lawrence will always be there for his daughter

By Robert Garel

Shannon Lawrence may seem quiet, but his presence speaks volumes. He grew up without his father in his life, but he has triumphed over his tribulations.

He was born in Madison 34 years ago, the son of Christina Lashore and Val Lewis. He went to Memorial High School for two years, moved to Minneapolis for a year, and finished high school at East in Madison. He has a beautiful daughter named Janelle, age seven.

He says being in Odyssey "is putting me in a better situation to better myself" and adds that his





family “is behind me 100 percent and believes in me.”

He plans to go to MATC and study to be a music engineer. He wants to show his daughter that she can “be anything she wants to be and that I’m always here for her.”

Although he didn’t have a father growing up, his sister Shanita notes that he “exemplifies what a father should be and is.”

Wynetta Taylor puts her boys first

By Lavern Brown

Wynetta Taylor says she always tries to stay in good spirits, “because things can always be worse.” The most important element in her life is her two boys, Kennedy, five, and Keyshawn, eight.

Wynetta is a customer service representative for Metavante, where she’s worked for about three years. She has two sisters and a brother. Her youngest sister is a doctor in Chicago, and her brother is a pastor in California. Her parents have been married for 45 years.

Lavern Brown conveys her strength to her daughters **By Wynetta Taylor**

Lavern Francelon Brown is expecting her fourth child in March. She has three girls—Taliya, 10, Xuan, six, and Mykaela, three.

Xuan (pronounced Swaun) is a Vietnamese name, reflecting Lavern’s strong liking for Vietnamese culture. She has a tattoo of her initials written in Vietnamese symbols.

Lavern has been in pharmacy for 10 years and aspires to go further in the medical field, perhaps becoming an RN. She’s a strong woman who takes pride in her job and instills that strength in her children.

For instance, her youngest daughter wanted to know if she could have a different name than Xuan because people always have trouble pronouncing it correctly. Lavern explained to her that her name couldn’t be changed. “Your name is who you are,” she said. “You are beautiful, and so is your name. If someone can’t pronounce it, you teach them how!”

Erika Rosales Serate finds opportunity in America **By Nicole Barnett**

Born and raised in Mexico City, Erika Rosales Serate is a mother, a wife, an employee, and a student.

She came to the United States and Madison in 2001, along with a brother and two sisters. “Stay in the U.S.,” her father told her. “There’s opportunity for you.” She has followed her father’s advice.

She became a CNA (certified nursing assistant) in Madison and started working at a nursing home. She enjoyed her work and loved learning about others. Her passion for caring for others grew. She attends MATC, studying to become a registered nurse.

Erika wants to better her life for her family, with her three-year-old son looking up to her. She has the loving support of a loving husband.

“Becoming a mother, a wife, and a college student has been the most rewarding gift in life,” she says. And on October 9, 2008, she became a citizen of the

United States.

Her children give Nicole Barnett's life its purpose
By Erika Rosales Serate

Nicole Barnett was born in Chicago, the third of four siblings. (She has a twin brother.) She moved to Madison in 2004 because her mom got a job opportunity and because they knew that Madison is the city of opportunities.

She's a single mother of two little girls, ages two and three. She likes to spend as much time as she can with her daughters, "my reasons for life."

She describes her life as "on-going" because she is always trying to accomplish something. She works for the UW Medical Foundation in the patient business resource office, is a Certified Nursing Assistant, and was on the waiting list for the nursing program at MATC but had to quit because she couldn't schedule classes with her job and full-time motherhood. She's trying to get back to school seeking a degree in medical

administration and management.

She says her little girls and her mother give her the fortitude to keep fighting.

Betsy Pelto finds her future in Madison

By James Horton

Betsy Pelto was born a Uper (YOO-per, a native of the upper peninsula of Michigan) but was kicked out by her parents when she was 16. She bounced from town to town, living in Albuquerque, Detroit, and even Isle Royale on Lake Superior, before settling in Madison.

Her life was forever changed by the birth of her daughters, Camellia, now five, and Remy, four. Having children "made me realize life is too short not to have long term goals," she says.

A former student introduced Betsy to Odyssey, and she decided it was the place for her.

For James Horton, 'all the world's a stage'

By Betsy Pelto

James Horton, 30, a native of

Chicago, is the loving father of a seven-year-old daughter, Lakaya, and a nine-year-old son, James, Jr. He moved to Madison when his daughter was born, hoping to expose his family to a more diverse environment. He and his wife have been married for 10 years.

He performed in over 100 plays in Chicago. "I'm a writer, actor, and human rights activist," he notes.

His mom, Yasmin Horton, graduated from the Odyssey Project in 2006, and James is pursuing the class out of his interest in the "creativity of the human spirit."

Otis Harris inspires the young to find their voices

By Charles Sallay

Otis Harris is a man of strong religious belief. He's been a member of Madison Pentecostal Assembly since the age of two.

Otis was born in Madison 22 years ago. Through his faith





and his church, he has uplifted the children of his congregation and community by working with them to find their voices. He lets them know that they don't have to go through bad experiences to learn. He makes sure they know that there are positive people in their midst.

He's been married to wife Felicia for a year. His father, also named Otis, passed away in 2006, but his mother, Brenda, is still with him.

Experience has taught Charles Sallay well

By Otis Harris

Born in 1964 to Bernice and Freeman Sallay, Charles Sallay began an adventure, to "learn through experience" whatever life might throw his way. He was raised on the streets and went through the Chicago school system.

"Experience is the best teacher," he says. "If a person actually deals with something,

it sticks with you." He dealt with drug addiction and endured prison for three years. "I thought I was going to get 10 to 15 years," he says, "but I got blessed."

On June 4, 2003 he was arrested for armed robbery. That day, he says, he had a change of heart. Today he's using his experiences as a stepping stone to move forward in life. His future includes his fiancée, Odyssey graduate Annette Bland.

Antoinetta Hayes—a woman with a purpose

By Emily Robinson

Antoinetta Hayes has been through some good relationships and some bad ones. She comes to Odyssey seeking that second chance for a new life for herself and her kids.

She was born on the Westside of Chicago and grew up close to her mom and dad. She moved to Madison when her parents did in 1995.

She's the mother of two, a son, two, and a daughter, eight. She works as an accounting assistant but doesn't like her job. She says she'd like to leave Madison, as there's nothing to do here. "I'm ready to move on," she says, "mentally and physically."

She likes to read and take long, soothing baths.

Emily Robinson seeks something different **By Antoinetta Hayes**

The eldest of seven girls, Emily Robinson was born March 13, 1977 in Chicago. She grew up nurturing her siblings and saw from an early age that life wasn't easy. When she was 17, she gave birth to a girl and continued to build her family with three boys.

She's a working mom who carries the torch of caretaking for her family—nothing short of a phenomenal woman. She enjoys stepping at clubs in Chicago on her weekend getaways.

The class is her door to something different. Because life can be hard and unwavering, Emily—daughter, sister, and mother—wants peace, stability, and happiness. An education can help free us, she notes, or even give us back our mental stability.

Jaunté Willis—a mother's ambition

By Felicia Anderson

Jaunté Willis is an independent, motivated single mother of three boys: Raekwon, Rakim, and Azariah Willis. Her long term goal is to become a fashion designer. She has a beautiful, down-to-earth personality and says she has no regrets in life.

She was born in Joliet, IL, December 19, 1982. When Jaunté was two, her mother moved to Madison. Jaunté attended Midvale and Lincoln Elementary and graduated Memorial High School, on the west side of Madison.

She's determined to become the most phenomenal fashion designer anyone has ever seen. "Everybody is not straight down," she notes. "Everyone has different curves. I would like to make clothes that accommodate people of all sizes."

She plans to achieve her goals by organizing a five-year plan, starting a budget, and using whatever resources she can to help her become successful.

Felicia Anderson finds her Destiny

By Jaunté Willis

Felicia Anderson is a positive, self-achieving woman. When you have to raise yourself, as she did, there's not much anyone can tell you about life. She lived from house to house from the ages of 12 to 18, wanting more, having dreams of better things, like becoming an actress, model, or entrepreneur.

In 2002, when she was 18, Felicia had her daughter. She says that Destiny, now six, is a big motivation for her.

Although she moved from Chicago to Madison in July of 2003, she still has contact with her mother. She says there's a real lack of communication, but, as she tells her daughter, "life goes on." She's determined to have a better relationship with Destiny.

Felicia is going to MATC for business administration and plans to go to UW or Spelman College. She wants to start a program called "Making an Impact," become an advocate for children, and write books for all to read.

Tiffany Harston **By Charles Tucker**

Tiffany Harston is a very determined mother of three, Synquar, 12, Syngletin, 10, and Jazzmine, six. She moved from Chicago to Madison in 2001 with hopes of regaining custody of her second born son. When she arrived in Madison, she had been looking for her son for

three years.

She now has custody of her son and her other two children, and they live on the west side of Madison. She also does volunteer work for the Meriter Retirement Center and attends Aveda Cosmetology School. She wants to get a degree and one day run her own business.

"Stand strong," she says, "for we were not meant to fail."

Charles Tucker believes he'll make it

By Tiffany Harston

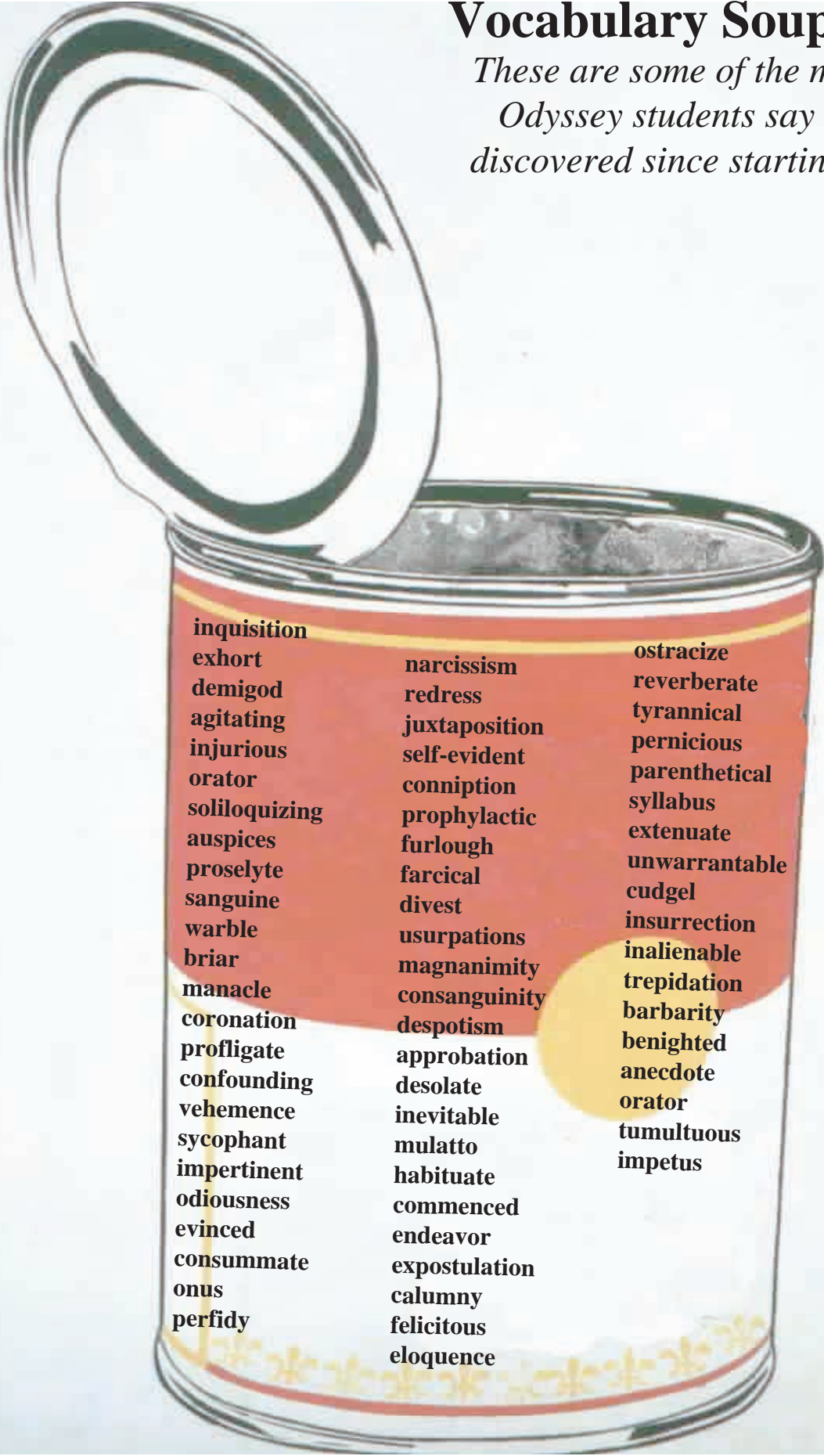
Charles Tucker was born in Mobile, Alabama but moved to Las Vegas at the age of 12, after the death of his mother. While in Vegas he attended Votex Vocational Trade School, aiming to become an auto body technician, but found a different calling at Arizona Bartending School, where he received his license. He also picked up his nickname, "Vegas Mike."

Charles obtained employment at the Arizona Biltmore Hotel Resort. Four years later he moved to Portage, WI to detassle corn and stayed because he thought Wisconsin was beautiful. After six months of homelessness he received a scholarship to attend Grass Roots Leadership College.

With the motto "Everyone's a listener, a learner, and a teacher," Charles found himself on an Odyssey and here he stands. "Faith and determination keep me positive that I will make it," he says.

Vocabulary Soup

*These are some of the many words
Odyssey students say they have
discovered since starting the class.*



inquisition	narcissism	ostracize
exhort	redress	reverberate
demigod	juxtaposition	tyrannical
agitating	self-evident	pernicious
injurious	conniption	parenthetical
orator	prophylactic	syllabus
soliloquizing	furlough	extenuate
auspices	farcical	unwarrantable
proselyte	divest	cudgel
sanguine	usurpations	insurrection
warble	magnanimity	inalienable
briar	consanguinity	trepidation
manacle	despotism	barbarity
coronation	approbation	benighted
profligate	desolate	anecdote
confounding	inevitable	orator
vehemence	mulatto	tumultuous
sycophant	habituate	impetus
impertinent	commenced	
odiousness	endeavor	
evinced	expostulation	
consummate	calumny	
onus	felicitous	
perfidy	eloquence	

Excerpts from the “Why Vote?” Essay Contest

Rhonda Nicoel  Johnson (First Prize)

To some people, voting is simply an option. It has become something we choose to participate in or not. Voting has been compared with other issues such as freedom of religion, freedom of speech, or freedom of where we choose to live or work. Some of the excuses used to validate reasons that voting isn't necessary include the belief that our government is corrupt and that our votes don't count.

I don't argue with any of the statements above. I believe that each holds some truth. However, I don't believe we should use any of these reasons for not voting.

First of all, voting is important because it is an honor and privilege to do so. We should partake of the honor and pass it on to our children and the generations to come. It is our

duty to encourage this generation of children on the importance of voting and standing up for justice. If we don't, we may end up with a future generation of passive leaders. In order to raise strong leaders, we must lead by example. Our future generation is watching us. We have to give them a good example to follow.

Secondly, it is important to vote for the purpose of accountability. There are many people who don't vote but then complain about our government and its leaders. If we choose not to vote, we should not complain about it. If everyone held themselves accountable and allowed their voices to be heard, we would witness less accusation and finger pointing. It is time to look at *our* choices and not those of our neighbors. As the old saying goes, “*Nothing beats a failure but a try.*” We have to take on that same notion. We can't change the unfairness or the corrupt acts in our government. However, we can do our part by voting for leadership of change.

Lastly, voting gives homage to our history. Consider the tears and blood that were shed from the achievements of trailblazers such as Medgar Evers. Medgar was a civil rights activist who advocated for Black people so they could vote. His dedication paved the way so that women and immigrants could have equal rights as well. He was killed only because he stood for justice and equality. It has been 45 years since his untimely death. Is his legacy so far removed that we

have forgotten what he advocated for? When we choose to vote, it means Medgar didn't die in vain. It means that we care about justice and equality as much as he did. We shouldn't allow our distaste for the unfair government we serve taint our judgment and the memories of Medgar and others who fought diligently for us.

In our ever changing world, we can't afford *not* to vote. Let's be accountable, honor our history, and set positive examples for our sons and daughters. Voting is an *honor* we can't yield to the next person. Why vote? Because we *can* make a difference.

Edwin Shumpert (Second Prize)

I address this open appeal to the doubtful, the undecided, the curious. In my opinion, heart, mind, and soul, there should be no question of whether or not to vote.

Throughout history there have been many arguments about voting rights, voting, and if it matters. Regardless, when you make this personal decision, remember that voting is your right as a citizen.

It is true that in this country “We the People” are of very diverse backgrounds, cultures, religions, and opinions, all of which should be respected. Respect rightfully due is an important key here in answering this question and making the right decision.

As a person of African American heritage, I consider my



right to vote seriously in light of history and my own experiences. I feel it is a precious right which must be exercised to be secured. In fact, I myself have been converted to this point of view.

In my youth as a “Baby Boomer,” I considered myself a radical—I rejected the established system. I knew the history of my foreparents, slavery, and those treated as less than human beings, and also knew that education was once against the law for my people—designed to keep us behind and separated from family.

I watched Dr. King “turning the other cheek” as he marched for our rights. He was spat upon, slapped, and even jailed. However, in jail he found the strength and inspiration to write one of the greatest speeches in history. Even though this country’s history has such a dark side, especially for a nation claiming a tradition of high standards, morals, and a

constitution proclaiming equality for all, my people as much as anyone in society should always “keep hope alive.”

As I went through and grew up in the sixties and seventies, I slowly changed to understand Dr. King’s approach, and I learned from many other African American leaders and writers and their different methods of seeking equality for everyone. Each of them spoke eloquently of rights deserved and long deferred. Each spoke of the importance of accepting the responsibility of voting.

Clearly, not voting is electing to have no say in the great issues of our time, examples being the economy, energy, equal rights, or health care for all. I would like to share a story. During a family gathering, a friend stopped by and began to speak about how he didn’t believe in voting. My step-daughter, then 14 or 15, began to tell him how people had been beaten or even killed for the opportunity to vote. He then began to feel as small as a micro-dot. I told him, “Wow, man, it took a child to get you to see the light.”

Also, let us not forget that all women were denied the right to vote and are still battling for equal opportunities.

In conclusion, for a while I was denied the right to vote because of being on probation. Now I am so grateful that time has passed and I can be proud to say I am a registered voter. It is especially great because this election is of such great importance—for the time we are living in and in history.

Cameron Travis (Third Place Tie)

A single voice is more powerful than a silent thought. . . . Have you ever asked yourself, “Am I going to pay rent or go grocery shopping so my babies and I can eat or . . . put dollars in my gas tank . . .?” The taxes that you and I pay have been mistreated by a government grounded in greed. . . . We are paying for the funding of the war, so we are partially responsible for the American and Iraqi lives that have been lost. Find this hard to believe? Don’t worry, I did too; that is, until I realized one thing: The Power of One. It takes the outreach of **one hand** to help an entire family, it takes **one word** to express how you feel, and it takes **one teacher** to educate an entire classroom of students that grow and begin to pursue what they desire to become. It takes **one man**, a single man, to start a war, and as said in the beginning, “A single voice is more powerful



than a silent thought.” . . . So far, I have not mentioned once about why or why not vote because first you (and I) must understand that once you have another who thinks and feels the same about a change, we are no longer one. . . . we form an alliance, a relationship or connection. . . . If we decide to NOT have a say in how the money taken out of our pockets (which takes away from food, gas, clothing . . .) is spent, then we agree to everything that makes our lives hard in relation to the government. Do you accept this as living? . . .

Our decision to vote or not affects the chance for a better life—for you and your family, mine, and many others. Remembering the old adage, “A closed mouth doesn’t get fed,” how would someone, anyone know when you need to eat, nourish yourself, or replenish yourself? Hence a single voice is more powerful than a silent thought. Until you voice what you feel to the rest of the world, it does not exist. You exist, so why is it that what you think and feel shouldn’t?

Vote. Change comes when you decide it does.

Shanita Lawrence (Third Place Tie)

. . . I have always felt that if you don’t stand up for something, you will fall for anything; I took that concept literally and applied that thinking to voting. If we as a nation don’t start becoming more involved in politics and the candidates that are in office, then how can we complain? We have to get out there and make



our voices be heard, make those in power realize that we will no longer take a back seat and allow their way of thinking and conducting business to continue.

For those that fought and died for our right to vote, we owe them. For that child that is not heard, we owe them. For the future of our country, we have a responsibility to go out there November 4 and vote. Otherwise, you lost the right to complain, to say that things aren’t right, or express feelings of not being represented, if you don’t vote.

Since I can’t vote, I decided that I would get five people to vote for me. I not only succeeded in getting those five, I got my whole block involved. I reached out to friends and family members that had never thought about voting. Yes, I got people who told me, “It’s not going to matter, they’re going to do what they want,” or “What could my one vote matter?” I took those negatives that they threw my way

and shot them down. I told them, “If you don’t vote, I don’t want to hear you complain when they tax you for this or take away this program or cut school funding even more.” I took the negatives and found a way to make it positive, and in doing so, I made my one vote 20. That is the power of voting!

Mary Moore (Fourth Place Tie)

. . . The war in Iraq, bogus health care system, credit/energy crisis, slumped economy, unemployment, failed housing market and crime are all evidence to me that not only is voting a good idea, it should be considered by all to be mandatory. If you’re a citizen of this fine country and your life or the lives of your loved ones have been affected by any of these signs of poverty, this means you!

Sometimes I think about all the people that stood up and fought for us back then. Because of all the rights and choices we



have today, I feel that voting is a responsibility and a duty. Anything less than showing up at the polls is a slap in the face to the ones who paid with their very lives for us to still have those rights today. You've seen the footage, documentaries, and graphic photos of a lot of those who died, and for what?! Should we all just sit, complain, and do absolutely nothing? If you don't vote, then you waive your right to murmur and complain about things the way you are now. We can change things for the better if we all work together for a common cause. Don't let the sacrifice our ancestors made be in vain. Don't ever think that your one vote doesn't count. Most importantly, don't let anything or anyone stop you from exercising your right to vote your conscience in *any* election!

Wynetta Taylor
(Fourth Place Tie)



. . . Voting is a right, and you should always exercise your rights. . . . People were once told that they could not vote. If they were Black or they were women, someone decided their opinions were useless, so there was no need for them to vote. For that decision to have been made, voting must mean something; otherwise, there would be no need to try to exclude one group or another because their votes wouldn't matter anyway. This was a battle in which people lost their lives; they knew that if they voted, it could change things. Were they wrong? Did they die for nothing?

If you could see them now, would you say to them, "What's all the fuss about? So what that you can't vote, that you're treated as an animal. So what that decisions are being made that affect your life but you have absolutely no say in it." Would you tell them, "Just accept disrespect. . . . It's no big deal. Just be quiet, stay in your place, and live how they tell you to live"?

If you said those things to them, this is how they might respond (that is, if you're still standing). They would say, "If my vote didn't matter, what did they work so hard to keep me from it?" . . . They would tell you that you're doing exactly what they want you to do: absolutely nothing but sit among yourself and talk about how wrong they are while accepting what's handed down to you. . . . They would say to you, "You were born to speak. How can you not?"

Nicole Barnett
(Honorable Mention)

. . . Can you imagine not having the right to vote [as a minority] back in the mid 1900s? or can you imagine women not being able to vote [until 1920], which means a mother, a sister, a daughter, a niece, or grandmother had no right whatsoever to exercise a right that all human beings placed on this earth should have? Today in America the government doesn't give us much choice any more when it comes to major decisions, but we do have a decision and right to vote. . . .

Think of Thomas Jefferson when he wrote the Declaration of Independence. He stated that "governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." Jefferson conveyed the message that the governments and politicians only have power because the American people gave it to them through our collective consent.



. . . You want to be a part of [choosing] . . . the leader that has the integrity and decisiveness in peace or war. . . . We can make a difference in what's going on in the injustice system that we have today if we do take part in voting. . . .

**James Horton
(Honorable Mention)**

. . . People from all over the world defect, float, and hop their borders for freedom (civil or political liberty). No matter how broken we perceive our system, there is a solution: vote. One of the reasons we are in the predicament we've been in is because we don't vote; we are invisible, voiceless. . . . If a community is active and voting, a politician is more likely to be involved in pushing issues important to that community for fear of not being reelected. People who don't vote are worthless to the government.



Would a bank teller help you open an account if you left your money under a mattress or didn't have any money? Is there a blizzard with no snowflakes? Our voters are the oil in the cogs of Democracy's machine. It's why the country was formed for the people, by the people. . . .

The beauty in this abstract society is that theoretically the opinions of a prince and a pauper are valued equally, and diversity is the spice of life. So if you believe in change and you want to be heard and want a better life, vote. Vote every day to have a better tomorrow. . . .

A farmer is standing on the side of the road cussing the sky about how poor his harvest is. Year in and year out, he toils endlessly plowing and seeding, de-bugging and pruning his plot of land, yet every year the dirt is as barren as the sand of the Sahara. When asked why he doesn't just water his garden, he says, "Ain't that the rain's job?"

**Roberta James
(Honorable Mention)**

. . . If you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything. We as university students of the Odyssey program have an obligation to represent a certain level of perceptiveness. We are with all of our strength to set an example for those who might be following in our footsteps. What a simple example to set by implementing the importance of voting. . . .

We know that the legal age to vote is 18 years old. Right there your vote has at least separated man from boy or

woman from girl. I'm an Odyssey Project 2008-2009 student, and I don't know anything or jack about politics, but if I have no other reason for voting it is only to assume my position as a responsible grown woman, and for the ones who will be following in my footsteps as responsible grown women also.

Vote: because you're either part of the solution or you're part of the problem.

Vote: if you're not registered, get registered. Your vote could make all the difference in the world, as you are a responsible things.

Vote: separate the women from the girls and the men from the boys.

Vote: because adults do adult things. . . .

My name is Roberta A. James, I'm a responsible adult, and I approve this message!

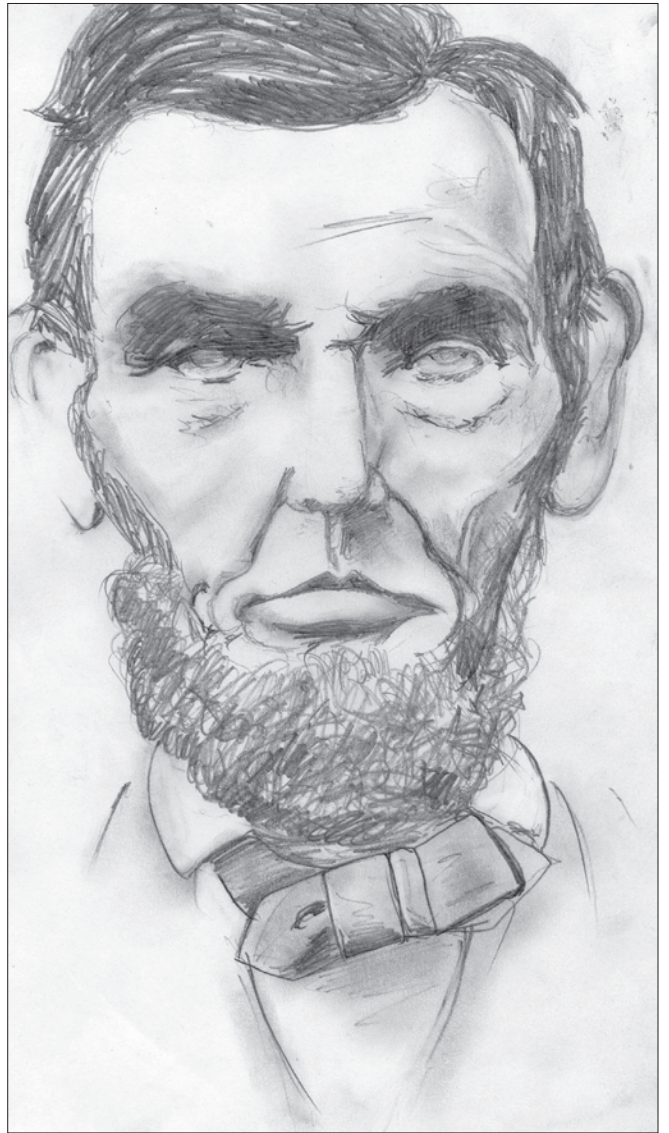


Art By Stanley Sallay

Congratulations to Stanley Sallay (class of 2007) on his upcoming February 2009 art exhibit at the Health Sciences Learning Center at UW-Madison!

Here are two of his sketches.

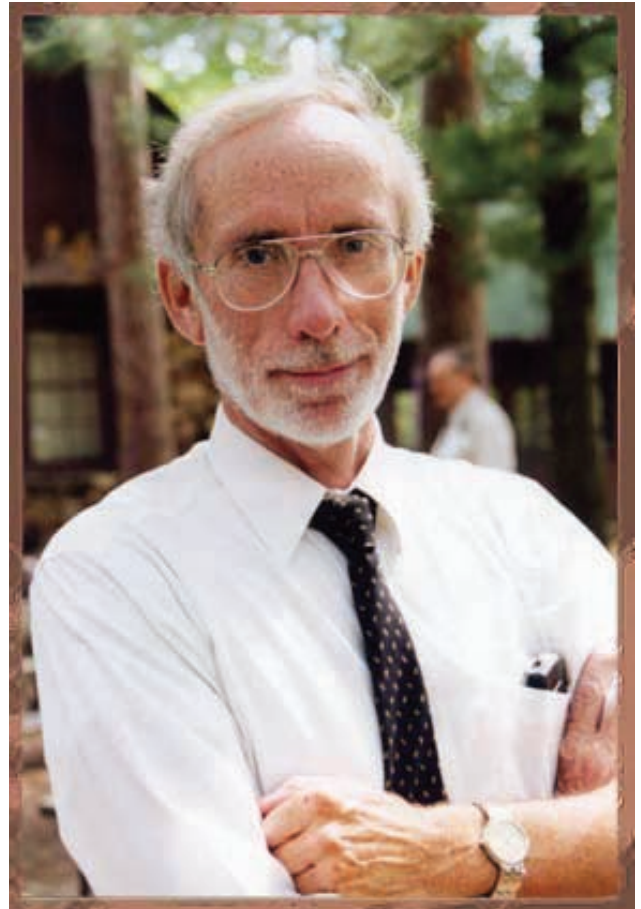
The ballot is stronger
than the bullet.
Abraham Lincoln



If American women
would increase their
voting turnout by ten
percent, I think we
would see an end to
all of the budget cuts
in programs benefiting
women and children.
Coretta Scott King

Meet the Donor: Richard Baker

For the past five years, Madison photographer Richard Baker has donated his time photographing Odyssey students and their families. He left a job in the corporate world to pursue twin loves--photography and sailing--and has been a wedding photographer for the past 15 years. "I took the path," he explains, "because I love photography and enjoy witnessing the sacred and happy moments in people's lives. In shooting, my goal is to capture the blissful and touching moments in people's lives."



Collage from Richard Baker's website