

Odyssey Oracle

Contents

Odyssey students from the Class of 2009 created profiles of some of our remarkable Odyssey alumni. Thanks to Oroki Rice for helping Kegan Carter and Emily Auerbach with this Special Edition Oracle and helping to find a writing sample for each graduate. There are many other alumni we hope to feature at a later date. To read more about past participants, visit our Odyssey website at www.odyssey.wisc.edu and check out the link to "Meet Our Graduates."

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Special Edition: Alumni Profiles





**René Robinson ('08),
Singer and Striver
By Emily Robinson ('09)**



Born and raised on the south side of Chicago, Thelona René Robinson was number 11 of 14 children. René was brought up in church along with her other siblings.

Since a little girl, René has loved to sing, and right now she's currently in the choir at Mt. Zion Church. René has many skills, like bowling, reading,



and roller skating. She first learned about Odyssey from UMOJA Magazine.

René is a very intelligent, stubborn woman who sought to do things in her own way, which made her go through hard times. She now realizes that her past life is full of mistakes that people make every day of every hour, and she hopes to never go back to that life again.

René is about to turn 50 years old and has plans to return to school in the fall. She has six beautiful grandchildren including one who is deaf, which made her become pretty good in sign language. René works as a leasing agent at the Monticello Apartments. She also is embarking on a journey that she hopes will take her places she has never been.

My Journey By René Robinson

My journey started about eight months ago,
How I would fare, I really didn't know.
Reading, writing for sure there would be,
But from six to nine, that I couldn't see.
The professors were there for all to meet,
Outlining History, Humanities, and Philosophy.
I was scared but I didn't know why,
Maybe it was the thirty years that had quickly gone by.
Getting acclimated was a little rough at first,
But soon thereafter to read books I would thirst.

See, prior to Odyssey, I didn't read,
 All the info I got was from the TV.
 But things have changed
 Mainly the screen
 From the TV to the computer
 I'm now a Google Queen.
 My journey, my journey,
 Who would have thought
 Would be the beginning of me being taught,
 Being taught the importance of opening my mind,
 Instead of sitting around wasting my time.
 Thank you, Odyssey, for choosing me,
 I've found knowledge,
 My greatest discovery.

Juanita Wilson ('07), Lifelong Learner
By Dominique Christian ('09)



Growing up in Evanston, Illinois, Juanita Wilson encountered segregation. Poverty was the way of life and was no stranger to many Black families. During her seventh grade year, schools began to integrate.

Colored folks did not have a choice to stay in their current schools.

"I can remember a time when I did not have the proper school supplies; the teacher embarrassed me, then took me outside and scolded me," Juanita says. "The white children



did not talk to the children of color. I did not care if they did not want to be bothered with me; I did not want to be bothered with them." Time spent in school for colored folks was mostly play; very little book education was provided.

Her dream of being a lifelong learner came to a halt after she found out she was pregnant during her 12th grade year in high school. Gym class was very embarrassing for Juanita because they had to wear a gym suit. Due to her pregnancy, she was afraid that others were laughing and staring at her. Juanita left school with only months until graduation.

Juanita did not allow any hurdles to alter her dreams. In 1967 Juanita went back to school for her GED. After gaining her GED, she attempted to go to Northeastern College. "I could not do it because I was raising three children; actually, I was raising my family because I was married, too." Juanita Wilson had lots of work experience—in retail, government, and clerical jobs—, but nothing made her happy at this point.

In 2006 Juanita learned about the Odyssey Project. "I never thought I'd be in college. I thought I was too old. I was so happy when Chris (South Madison librarian) told me about Odyssey." Juanita has always wanted to help children who face similar hurdles and difficulties as she did. "It's a glorious feeling to learn," she says. Juanita has always wanted to tutor and teach children that what they have to say is important.

Once Juanita became comfortable with herself she learned that "it's all right to make a mistake." She adds, "I could say something and not worry about what someone else was saying. I could do anything I wanted to do."

A poor mother of three has grown into a lifelong learner. At age 73, Juanita is currently enrolled in MATC. Juanita does not have any major goals for finishing college. She loves to go to school, and she loves to learn. "If I never graduate, I don't care because I still enjoy learning." The advice that Juanita Wilson has for current and future Odyssey students is to "write down the things you read, have a study partner, and read aloud."

Song of Juanita By Juanita Wilson

First day of class—scared—
 I felt that I couldn't perform
 to the level of the class.
 I didn't know what to expect.
 We began to talk about ourselves.
 As the students started sharing--
 similar experiences,
 I began to relax.
 I learned that
 making mistakes was okay.
 I now feel confident
 and can perform.

Sandra Ramirez ('07), Proud Mestizo
By Lavern Brown ('09)



Sandra Ramirez was born in El Salvador, the smallest country in Central America. Sandra is Spanish and Latina, and she really likes her heritage. When she was a little girl she remembers growing up in war time, which she

would rather not talk about. Sandra also remembers growing up in the cattle lands and sugar cane fields. She said, "It felt like I was living in paradise."

Sandra says that she has been in uncomfortable situations because



of racial comments. Sometimes people think that Sandra doesn't speak any English because she is Latina. One time Sandra went into a clothing store where she was racially abused about her accent. Sandra became mad and asked the cashier, "How many languages do you know how to speak?" The cashier responded, "Only English." Sandra was very happy to tell the cashier that she knows how to speak three languages.

Sandra hates it when she has to fill out applications for jobs because they always ask her what race she is. Where she comes from they don't identify themselves as a certain race; they all identify themselves as "Mestizo," which means a mixture of Spanish and Native Pre-Columbian Indians.

Sandra would like everybody to know that the Odyssey program changed her life in many ways. For example, she knows more about artists such as Leonardo da Vinci and about Greek philosophers such as Plato and Socrates. She enjoyed it when her class discussed Philosophy with Ms. Feraca. Sandra says that she feels more confident and more knowledgeable in many ways she didn't before.

To My Abuelita By Sandra Ramirez

She did not go to school, but she graduated from the University of Life. She knows everything about life. Angelina Mejia was born in 1917 in a small town in El Salvador. Her green eyes, her bearing, and her skin color show the beauty of Spaniards and Indians mixed (Mestizo), and her spirit is something special in her.

At the age of 80, my grandma decided that she was going to go to school; it was time to learn how to write and read, because she did not want to put her thumbprint on papers anymore. She wanted to sign her name. One afternoon I was coming from my school, and she was going out, carrying a notebook and a pencil. I asked her, "Where are you going, grandma?" Her answer was, "I'm going to school. I want to learn how to read and write. And you don't look at me like that. I still can learn to read." And that was her first time, in 1998, at age 80, that she went to school. I used to help her with homework; we started with her ABCs. Two

years later she was reading the newspaper. Once while she was reading the news, she told me, "They should print the letters a little bigger."

Last November she turned 87. She doesn't read the newspaper anymore because she says her eyes hurt, and she misses reading the Bible, but she signs her name when she has to.

My grandma is a wise woman; she knows about philosophy, Martin Luther King, Shakespeare, and more. She always has advice for those who need it. Once my grandma told me, "You have to study. If you don't read, if you don't learn, you are going to be a slave. Education is the key to be free."

**Severn Anderson ('08),
Lifelong Warrior
By Rhonda Johnson ('09)**



Severn Anderson struggled with his Native American identity throughout his childhood. Born in Shiprock, New Mexico, of Navajo and Caucasian descent, he dealt with the shame of appearing Asian in a Native American

body. "I was quite embarrassed about my heritage," Sev says. "I grew up with my father in Wisconsin, while my mother lived in Colorado. As a child, I didn't know much about my mother. Everyone around me was white and



I was always mistaken for an Asian. I struggled internally because deep down, I wanted to look like them - White."

As he grew, Sev found it harder to accept himself while dealing with the prejudices of others. Initially, he thought wearing the right clothes and hanging with the right people would cause others to befriend him. He came to realize that his outward appearance would overshadow any attempt to fit in.

Although his internal struggle persisted through his teen years, he developed an interest in building houses with his dad. He enjoyed the intricate work of laying tile and interior design. Over time, he sharpened his skills in building and interior design.

He also found solace in attending Operation Fresh Start. This program was developed to address the issues of education, employment, crime prevention, affordable housing and leadership development. Their mission is to ensure that young people ages 16-24 work toward their GED or high school diploma, learn job skills, and serve their communities by building affordable housing.

Sev graduated in 1996 with a HSED from Operation Fresh Start. Despite this being a major accomplishment in his life, he still struggled with his self-identity. Due to his self hatred and the racism of those around them, Sev began getting into trouble. He found alcohol to be a comfort and medication to the wounds that always seemed to multiply inside.

He tried to attend college, but the alcohol seemed to override the need for education. His life began crashing into a sea filled with despair and a hatred for life.

Then in 2006, while visiting Centro Hispano, he found out about the Odyssey Project. After a visit to the South Madison Library and talking to Justin Wilson (Odyssey '08), a worker there, he turned in the application for the Odyssey Project. "I'm a bit of a procrastinator, so my application was late. I was a little nervous, but I wanted this chance. I needed this chance. Even though I didn't know what to expect, I knew my life had to change," he recalls.

After meeting with Professor Emily, he waited on one of the most anticipated calls in life. "When the phone rang and she told me I was accepted, as you know, it was the greatest feeling in the world. It was the best news, ever. I'll admit that I was a little nervous because I knew that I couldn't screw this up," he says.

Sev entered the Odyssey program in the fall of 2007. He says that being accepted into the program truly changed his life in many ways. First, he learned that it takes hard work and dedication to pursue your dreams. He admits that prior to Odyssey, he always wanted opportunities to fall in his lap. He has since transformed his thinking pattern. After studying in the classroom, he realizes that hard work is fulfilling although it can be painful. "I needed to stop procrastinating. The Odyssey Project gave me the push I needed," he admits.

Since his graduation in May of 2008, Sev has enrolled in the Liberal Arts transfer program at MATC and has completed two courses in Information Technology. He hopes to transfer to UW Madison where he will study interior design in ecology. Ultimately, he would like to be an interior designer with an eco-friendly approach. He eventually wants to teach others to be eco-friendly as well. "We have to be mindful of recycling and protecting the earth. Being an eco-friendly citizen has become a passion of mine," he says.

He also has gained a greater appreciation and understanding of different backgrounds and ethnic groups since Odyssey. Delightfully so, he has also decided to accept the person that he is. He even promised me as we talked that he will research more about his tribe - the Navajos.

Sev shared with me one of his greatest and most crucial accomplishments since his graduation from the Odyssey Project - He has completely stopped drinking! Unfortunately, in 2001 the consequences of alcoholism hit close to home. His sister died as a result of alcoholism at the tender age of 30. He speaks openly about this tragedy: "I stopped drinking for many reasons. I wanted to focus on living and not dying. I experienced a loss, but I choose to live."

He has decided to utilize his life struggles along with his Native American background to educate others. His first student is me! Sev shared with me that Native Americans make up 1% of the nation's population, which is even less than the African American percentage. He told me that Native Americans are slowly being melted into other ethnic groups and over time will become obsolete.

In addition, his Navajo tribe doesn't have a casino and in more ways than one have been forgotten. He also crushes the idea that the process of education is so much easier for Native Americans in comparison to other ethnic groups. "The process of applying for college became so lengthy for me that I became depressed," he states sadly, yet he didn't allow this fact to deter him from continuing his education.

I asked Sev if he had any advice to give to me and my fellow brothers and sisters in the graduating class of 2009. He states with much conviction, "I was upset all of the time, mostly because of my past and the racism I incurred. My advice is stop allowing the negativity of the past to affect your life. Be optimistic and use your past experiences to shape your future."

I am proud of my brother, Sev. He chose life over death. He chose sobriety over alcoholism. He chose education over ignorance. He chose to embrace the person he was created to be.

Sev's road to change has not been easy; however, he says that he wouldn't alter his experiences because they have shaped him into the man he is today. He considers himself to be a life long warrior and philosopher in training and a proud Native American. I couldn't agree with him more.

Also an American By Severn Anderson

I grew up in my grandparents' home from 3 years old to 13. Before I begin I just want to say I love my grandmother more than anything. She is a devout Christian, was strict, and instilled morals early in my sister's and my heads. My grandmother was in her early sixties when she had to raise two of her formerly alcoholic son's children. After raising five of her own, she wasn't happy, I'm sure, but she

took on the responsibility.

I still remember my dad and grandmother arguing about it when we were 6 and 7. The rest of the family, my aunts and uncles, were jealous of my sister Kendra and me. They thought we were getting extra attention. Now I realize why we were never given Christmas gifts or had them as godparents. They resented us from day one, when it was my dad's choice to marry a native.

The mid seventies was still an awkward time for most to accept interracial marriage. My grandfather hated my sister and me. He would come home inebriated, stumbling and swearing, yelling, "Those damn Indians" outside our home. . .

Growing up native was and still is hard. My first kindergarten teacher wrote on a semester report card, "Don't know if he speaks English." I came home from a day of kindergarten with wads of spit covering my face from a boy a year older than me. I was called a chink, and kids constantly made their eyes Chinese. . . Fast forward to high school, where a girl asked my ethnic background. No problem, I thought. I told her, and then I asked her. She said, "I don't know—American." This bugged me for some time. But I realize she was just simple and, like most Caucasian Americans, didn't realize that someone of color that was born here in the U.S. is also an American as well. I felt ashamed to be a different color. I was definitely embarrassed a lot. I wished I was "normal looking" like all the other kids. I hated school, and everyday was worse than the day before. I closed up to everyone. When I was a kid, I didn't realize why half my family and the kids at school hated me, but when I was in high school I understood why.

Writing this rehash of my life is painful to me, but maybe this is a good way to get all these feelings out of the way for good.

Candy Gonzalez ('08), Survivor

By Samuel Bester ('09)

Candy Gonzalez graduated from the class of 2008, and this year her son, Stephen Taylor, is part of the 2009 class. Candy Gonzalez described herself in a poem she wrote for the Odyssey class: "I am woman, I am mother, I am student, I am co-worker,



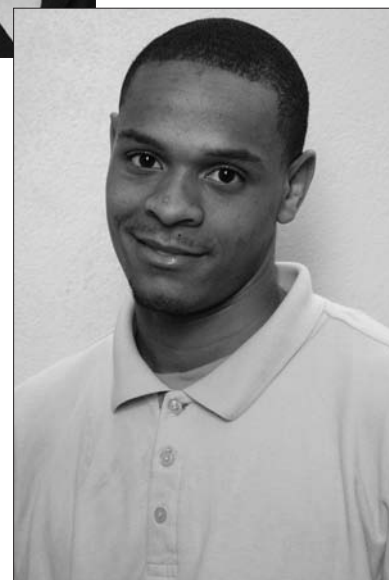
I am friend, I am me!"

My mom, Sherri Bester, was in the Odyssey class of 2008 with Candy. She describes her as "a beautiful, passionate, gentle, amazing girlfriend as sweet as the richest piece of

candy forever stuck in your teeth and permitted in your taste buds. After one bite of experiencing Candy's presence, you chew and smile!"

When I read Candy's yearbook self-description, it made me think twice about a lot of things in life. I really like the way she ended her writing with these words: "Survive: I am speaking and living proof that you can survive some very difficult things. Just stay positive." Candy said that the Odyssey class was a very positive experience for her. Odyssey helped her to open up and get over being so shy. Odyssey helped her dreams become reality and helped her get more education to open new doors for her. Today Candy is taking steps to go to MATC next year. She took the Compass test and is reading over the new information she was given about the culinary program at MATC.

Candy said that her favorite things about Odyssey are seeing everybody all together, working her mind, and being challenged by the professors. She sounded excited as she described



when she was called and told she was chosen to be a student of Odyssey. This represents Candy Gonzalez of the Odyssey class of 2008!

Candy Accepts Humanity By Candy Gonzalez

There are good and bad in all ethnic groups. We are human and therefore nothing is going to ever be perfect. . . .

I was orphaned as a child, grew up with no family, was a teenaged parent, had many struggles and no support system, grew up in a system where I was told when to eat and sleep, had to share rooms with complete strangers, and lived with many different types of families. On top of all that I never knew what nationality I was. I knew what nationality I appeared to be, but I never knew, due to the fact that I was abandoned at a very young age, adopted into another family where my name was changed, then sent back into the system.

Now I have many reasons to be bitter towards many people, including my own. But I said to myself, which has been very hard, "I can't go on in life blaming others due to what I've been through because if I do that then where will I end up, and—worse—what will my children grow up to be?" I continue to have many struggles and know that I have accomplished also. . . . I love coming to class. . . . I feel compassion and love.

Anne Meyer ('07), Butterfly By Jaunté Willis ('09)

Anne Meyer came into the Odyssey Project as a grown woman trying to break free of boundaries that she made for herself, determined not to live her life at a dead end. But what struggles does a woman have to go through to raise her confidence and get past her intimidation of life?

Anne was born in Minnesota, but raised in Madison, Wisconsin. Being biracial was one of the struggles Anne had to get through by herself. She was raised in a white household and didn't feel that anyone really acknowledged that she might have been having racial issues within herself.

On her first day in the Odyssey Program she was thinking we all may not look alike, but what do we have in common? She learned all people need to



get over looking at life superficially.

Class of 2007 was a great time for her, and the Odyssey Program changed Anne's life for the better. Anne is happy to have been given the opportunity to better her life because she longs

to have done something with the short time she has on this earth. Finding out at first she was on the waiting list, she was moved when she found out someone had left town and she was able to take their place. She said, "If I had not gone

to the Odyssey Program, I would still be thinking I wish, I wish, I wish, a phrase that is easily said."

Anne's biggest feeling about Odyssey is that it changed her way of thinking. Stating that the best moment in the Odyssey Program was graduation, she said this made her capable and gave her the confidence to know what she could do. The Odyssey Program made Anne want to go back to school to keep pushing and struggling to a complete and confident life. Her only regret is wishing she would have taken more part in class conversations.

Though working fulltime nights, she has the opportunity to take some classes at Edgewood College, like a video production class, while following through with her long term goal of



making a documentary on the Odyssey Program.

In conclusion I am much honored to have been able to write a profile on a woman much like myself. Just talking to Anne gave me more confidence to want to participate in class and to further my education. I do understand why Anne was picked for me, and I thank you, Anne, for the opportunity.

Free Flight By Anne Meyer

I am my cocoon, my cocoon is me.
 What was once my shelter has become my prison.
 Inside it is lonely and cold.
 I stay inside not because it is enjoyable, but
 Because it is familiar and safe,
 Safe from the cruel uncertainty of the outside
 world
 I struggle to release myself from this hardened
 shriveled skin.
 My struggle within my cocoon can not be avoided.
 I must struggle to overcome my fear
 Struggle to grow strong
 Struggle to release my beauty
 Struggle to believe in myself
 Struggle to be free
 I long to spread my wings;
 Long to fly carefree without fear or inhibition
 I want to fly high with those that have long taken
 flight
 And have embraced their beauty along the way
 Those beautiful creatures inspire and support me
 with their strength, wisdom, and encouragement.
 They tell me:
 I am strong
 I am capable
 I am beautiful
 I am ready to be free
 Free at last
 No looking back
 I spread my wings and take off in glorious flight

Marilyn Sims ('06), Gifted Woman

By Alice McDaniel ('09)

Marilyn Sims is a 50-year-old woman who is, in her own words, "a beautiful, full-figured black woman." She is the mother of three wonderful young ladies, ages 26, 28, and 30, and grandmother of two girls (Olivia, 8, and Alyiah, 6) and 4-year-



old identical twin grandsons (Isaiah and Isaac).

Serving the Lord faithfully in many ways, one of which is through a music ministry for which she is one of the lead singers. Songwriter, poet, and braid artist,

Marilyn is a very gifted woman. Her short and long term goals are to become a published author. Marilyn is searching for a publisher to have her first book in print. Releasing an inspirational music CD is also a goal. Higher education is still something she plans on obtaining in the future, with a major in Journalism.



When asked what questions she would ask President Obama if she could interview him, she said she would ask, "During your campaign, who was the person who came up with the idea to use the internet so effectively? When will the troops be returning home, and what strategies are you planning on using?"

Here is a poem Marilyn wrote:

"What Will Become of Me?"

I can hear the voices of many legends that have gone on

The most recent one of Nellie McKay

I believe it was in her heart,

And that she would say

"Focus on getting a college Education today."

*The legacy that my mother left
For me of love and the golden rule
I must use them as a tool.*

*I will continue to go to school
Yes, I'll find things hidden in books
Because I'm no fool.*

*My children and grandchildren
Will follow my lead
Therefore, I am obligated
To let them see
That I graduated
So that money will be ample
And they can follow my example*

*And when I leave this world
I won't die
I will simply multiply.*

Marilyn closes with words of wisdom to our class of 2009: "You have the best of the best of instructors. Do what they ask of you, and you won't go wrong."

Odyssey
Lyrics by Marilyn Sims, Music by Corey Saffold
(Odyssey Class of 2006)

Verse 1
One day I met up with Odyssey,
He said, "Come and go on this journey with me.
I'll introduce you to the Humanities,
This I can guarantee."

Chorus
Odyssey, Oh Odyssey, thanks for this
opportunity.
Odyssey, Oh Odyssey, thanks for showing me my
destiny.

Verse 2
After only a few months, I was mesmerized
Then I realized
I had been given instructions to succeed
Studying philosophy.

Chorus

Odyssey, Oh Odyssey, thanks for this
opportunity.
Odyssey, Oh Odyssey, thanks for showing me my
destiny.

Bridge
Odyssey, you have captivated my mind,
Every time I look, I'm reading a book,
I'm looking up words, those I never heard
I've been redeemed
I've been restored
I've been persuaded
Now I want more because knowledge is the key,
Knowledge is the key

(repeat entire bridge)

Vamp:
Knowledge is the key (repeat 5 times)

Mark Diman ('06), Welcoming Personality **By Roberta James ('09)**



When I walked
into the cafeteria
of the Memorial
Union on a cold
wintry Saturday
afternoon in
January, I expected
to be meeting a
professorial, tall,
dark, polished-

looking writer.
Instead I met with
a young, healthy,
casual, laid back-
looking guy with
a nice pair of
bifocals: Mark
Diman. I would
never have been



able to identify Mark as a newspaper columnist [for *The Street Pulse*] because of his casual personality. Mark welcomed me as I approached the table . . . and he was a perfect gentleman. Mark offered to buy me lunch . . . but once I met with his compassionate, welcoming personality, the only appetite I was interested in was learning about him and his views on the Odyssey Project.

Mark is an only child and grew up mostly by himself until his father remarried and he adopted some step-siblings. He's mostly been responsible for his own focus throughout his entire life. Odyssey taught Mark a lot of his experiences with people. Mark thought it was a good idea the way all the students gather together in one big room with the tables designed in a circle to bring everyone together with each other. I had to agree: I also like that part about our class structure.

. . . Odyssey 2006 had such a positive influence on Mark Diman's life that he now writes his own column for a local newspaper here in Madison. Mark is planning to continue his education in humanities and philosophy by studying these areas at MATC this summer 2009. Mark says the desire for knowledge and understanding is more important than a big job making a lot of money or a high-powered college degree, or gaining power and prestige for the world to see. What's really important is the love for living and learning, and learning to love and live.

I've learned a positive lesson from you, Mark Diman. Thank you for your down to earth philosophy on life and English literature. I only hope I can become the Odyssey success story that you turned out to be.

Stick Up for Odyssey by Mark Diman

I believe all of us in the Odyssey Project have been blessed. We have learned so much from our professors and from each other. We not only carry the knowledge we have been given, but it is our responsibility to apply it. We must make good decisions. We must use our education to help ourselves and our brothers and sisters. If you have the opportunity to make a pitch for Odyssey, take it! The gift of the Odyssey Project is something

that can never be taken away. Knowledge is power! Remember all those candidates who were not picked because we were chosen. I have held on to the Odyssey Project because it has been the most positive thing in my life right now. I hope you all realize how important you are to me. We have grown!

Josephine Lorya ('08), Immigrant By Sherice Lewis ('09)



Josephine Lorya has a very interesting background. She was born and raised in Sudan and Kenya, two countries in East Africa. When Josephine was younger she looked up to her parents and still

does. She wanted to become a lawyer or doctor when she grew up. Josephine speaks four languages: English, Kiswahili, Southern Sudanese Arabic, and her native language, Lotuko. She can understand a little

bit of French, too. She loves nature and sports, especially soccer. Her favorite hobby is writing poetry, and her favorite music is Congolese music. In addition, the term Congo can refer to rumba, rock-rumba and/or soukas.

Josephine Lorya came to the United States with



her family to further her education and escape the political issues affecting her country. Josephine is currently married and has a daughter named Zanadi, who is the love her of her life.

Josephine attended the Odyssey Project because it offered a brilliant program for students who want to continue with their education but have something that is holding them back. The Odyssey Project has been the best thing that has happened to her, and she is privileged to have been selected to participate in the program. Reading Shakespeare was a little more challenging than most of the other readings that she did in class, but she managed to get through it well with the help of the teachers. She also had a fun time memorizing her lines from Shakespeare, which she still remembers to this day. Josephine Lorya's favorite book was Langston Hughes' poetry collection.

The key advice Josephine would give to students in the Odyssey Project is this: "Everything that you are taught in the Odyssey Program will help you in your future studies. Make sure you do all of your homework and turn it in on time. Appreciate all your classmates and every moment you have in class together because once you graduate you will miss the family-like environment you shared in class. Have fun. . . . Just take it one day at a time and you'll be fine. Good luck with everything!"

Last fall Josephine made the dean's list at MATC, which is an honor and very exciting.

Josephine Lorya

I am the product of love,
I was raised around love,
And love is what I have become.
My name is Josephine,
I am a singing machine.
I am an exotic human being from Africa.
I am the original,
And I am on an Odyssey.
I am on an odyssey to earn a higher education.
During my Odyssey, I met wonderful people
From different backgrounds.
We all are a part of the recipe
To make the Odyssey Soup.
Our teachers stir us up daily

To stimulate our minds.
This journey is wonderful.
This journey is full of life,
Full of love,
Full of hope.

Derrick Washington ('07), Mentor By Ricky Barners ('09)



Derrick learned from the Odyssey Project how to speak in front of groups of people. He's also encouraged and motivated to go out and achieve his goals and dreams.

Derrick always had a passion

for reading, but growing up on the south side of Chicago, it was a struggle to stay focused on staying in school. Every day when he would walk out the door for school he had to face the violence and the drugs.



Derrick is now owner of a barbershop, and he's also involved in a mentoring program. He has a desire to help young kids stay on the straight and narrow, not making choices that they later will regret.

Derrick would like the Odyssey Class of 2009 to know that we are all one. We have our differences, but we all have something to offer each other. "I hope that you get out of the Odyssey

what I got out of it. Hang in there and stay on your journey.”

Silent Observer By Derrick Washington

Being silent, Being observant
Doesn't necessarily make me malevolent
Being silent while unwillingly processing
The woes of a whole community
You have one choice, one decision
Choose pain, or choose apathy
Listening to all and being heard by none
Feeling like a character of Ralph Ellison
But this is the profession that has chosen me
More than a certificate to cut hair
More like a degree in psychology
You see every part, every pain
Every palimpsest attempt at being new
You see every birthday every wedding
Every graduation day without a clue
But what I see truly
Is the magnificent beauty in humanity
another way of saying the same thing
But saying it differently
I still remember those classic words
“I dwell in possibility”
Wait, I hear Mahalia Jackson
Yes! I will tell them about the dream
About the technique I would use to patch the seam
But it won't be an original
Just a pentimento
Or a fresco
A skillful chiaroscuro

Molinda Henry ('07), Inspiration

By Lea White ('09)

“Were you sleeping?” were the first words of my 45-minute conversation with Ms. Molinda Henry. I sat in my room prepared to rattle off my questions and get all of my notes just right. This person whom I had not known personally before this immediately seemed like a friend.

Molinda was born in La Crosse and has lived in Madison most of her life. She has held jobs in medical administrative support and state revenue. She joined the military at 17 years old. After serving four years, she came out with a strong work ethic and could work anywhere. Despite her work ethic, she discovered she was a militant in a civilian



society. She's had her scrapes with discrimination, but to hear her speak of it, you cannot tell if it discouraged her. She quit her job and went back to school, which felt like “being on the flying trapeze without a

net.” It was a hard decision, but the rewards made up for it.

Molinda said, “Odyssey built virtues . . . from a room of people just like you, and it made us stronger and closer. It gave us a place for

recognition and comrades. It made me feel a part of a sorority and now I am alumni.” Though she says Odyssey was one of the toughest things she's done, it has made her make punctuality and attendance a priority in her daily duties. She remembers reading lines of Shakespeare. She remembers herself in a library full of overachievers. She has continued her education and is a student in African American Studies. She attends UW and MATC with a consortium agreement.

Molinda says that Odyssey has changed her forever. It's given her determination, confidence, tenacity, and the knowledge that “Anything I want to do, I can do it!” Odyssey motivated many of her classmates to further their education. She swears that Emily, Marshall, Craig, and the rest of



Odyssey faculty are truly angels (and I'm sure we all agree).

Molinda strives for more. This jazz musician plays keyboard and is a vocalist. She plans to go to Jamaica to teach and play music after she gets her degree. Why Jamaica? She visited Jamaica, and when it was time to go, she cried.

Molinda has a daughter who is a Brown University graduate that works for Microsoft and a FINE son (her words, not mine) who models. They are both in California. Though her children are her greatest accomplishments, her education is next in line. She doesn't claim to be the best student and says "there's an 'A' and a 'D' in graduate; all you have to do is pass."

So check out her music on MySpace or catch her at the Memorial Union to see what this 25-year musician has to offer. In one conversation, she motivated me, gave me hope and a new perspective on my own situation. Just talking to this magnificent person for 45 minutes will make me remember her for a lifetime. Hats off to you, Molinda Henry! You are an inspiration!

I Love Learning!! By Molinda Henry

I love learning. My mind is gathering information and soaking it up like a sponge. Sometimes there is so much new information in my head that my cup runs over, I cry tears, and I have to slow down my excitement. My heart beats hard and the words come so fast my mouth cannot keep up with my brain. I love learning. Now that I realize how empty I was, I know I will never be full. I will starve for knowledge always.

I love learning.

Lily Komino ('07), Honest Dreamer By Shanita Lawrence ('09)

Lily Komino came to the United States ten years ago from Africa. At that time she was only here to visit; she never could have imagined that when she stepped foot on U.S. soil that she would be staying, which was good for her and, more importantly, good for us.

Lily became sick and later ended up having a son, who is now nine years old and the center of her world. These two events were instrumental in



keeping Lily here in America, where she now is an employee at UMOJA, a local African American monthly journal, where her insight and knowledge are valuable.

When asked what inspired her to apply to the Odyssey Project, she is

quick to point out a current student (Rhonda Johnson) and her boss (Milele Chikasa Anana) as being the driving forces in her decision to check out and later apply to the program. She admits to being somewhat fearful and uncertain about applying. She was scared, had thought that maybe she was too old to go back to school, and didn't know anything about Odyssey. Even with all those thoughts and fears, she applied anyway, worked hard, pushed through, and today is a graduate of this Odyssey that we (Class of 2008-2009) have all come to depend on and that keeps us coming back.

One of Ms. Komino's greatest obstacles since graduating from the program has been going back to school, which is one thing that she craves the most. Wanting to go further, knowing that she can go further, she still faces this obstacle because she is not from this country; there are certain things she must do before she can accomplish her dreams. She is quick to tell me that this is not the end—not for her, and not for us. "Odyssey is just



the beginning for us all! Education is everything. Get it done as quickly as possible, reach for those dreams, and keep believing in yourself. See where it gets you!"

When I asked Lily what she would like people to know about her, she took her time. I could tell that she wanted to be on point and very clear. She said, "I want people to know that I think of others before I think of myself, that I am honest with myself first, which allows me to be honest with others. This year will be my year; I am going to be me!" These words hit home with me, hard. I too put others before myself. I too want to be me and not what others need or want me to be. I have learned a beautiful lesson from Lily: if you are not honest with yourself, there is no way you can be honest to others. May Lily Komino have everything her heart desires in 2009!

Covered in a Cocoon Shell By Lily Komino

Before a butterfly,
I was like a caterpillar
Covered in a cocoon shell
Battling to break free.
Once I had not known
Of life's possibilities
And the power of dreams.
So I still lay
In my comfort zone,
Hoping to break through
And spread my wings.
And here came my professors,
Emily, Coach, Gene, Jean, and Craig,
With a hammer of knowledge
From UW Odyssey
To break me out of my shell.
So I flew in wisdom,
Knowledge, enlightenment,
And courage to a better
Future with great expectation
For me and my son.
And so I thank my angels
Of inspiration and endurance.
You will always be
Part of my life.

Katy Farrens ('07), Hard Worker

By Betsy Pelto ('09)



Katy Farrens' life between kids, school, work, and family is much like the place she dreams of living one day: Los Angeles. She wakes up with a sunshiny attitude every morning despite her life that is much like rush

hour traffic in L.A. sometimes.

Katy is a college student and a 28-year-old single mother of two: Keishawn, nine years old, and Kazary, four years old. Before Odyssey, Katy felt like she was stuck in the middle of LA traffic in 105

degree weather with low fuel, no air conditioning, and windows that wouldn't come open. The temperature skyrocketed, she didn't know what to do, and before long, she'd run out of gas and air. She couldn't believe this was happening to her. When she opened the door she fell to the ground. Struggling to stand tall, Katy became weak and fell again, but this time when she stood up she sat back down and applied for the Odyssey Project.

Katy graduated from the Odyssey Project in May 2007. Since then, Katy hasn't run out of fuel or ambition. Her voice and words are full of hope. Her dreams are never ending. She realizes that in order to truly be happy you have to start with



yourself. She also feels passionate about helping others. Katy has come to the conclusion that she needs to help others in order to fulfill her own life. Working in a community center setting has proven this to her. This is why she has decided to become a social worker. She feels her heart wanting to reach out and help all who need it. However, life has taught Katy that she can't help everybody and herself at the same time. Continuing to maintain a balance between loved ones, school, work, and self has never been more rewarding to Katy. She said, "You can't be weak; you have to work hard."

Katy plans to stay in Madison, Wisconsin. Her goal is to finish school and become a part of a solution to help others and not just a temporary band-aid.

Can I Be Happy? By Katy Farrens

Let me tell you about a lady named Katy.
She felt like she needed a change.
So she thought long and hard about what would make her happy.
The first thought was, it would be nice to go back to school.
So then Emily and the Odyssey Project came along and gave her a chance to make the first change.
Now she knows what she wants to do, so she's staying in school.
When school is done, she will get a job she likes that makes her happy....

Mary Wells ('07), Warm Spirit By Wynetta Taylor ('09)

I am honored to do a profile on such a pleasant person as Mary Wells, Odyssey graduate of 2007. When reading her paper titled "Wells Family Pictures," I developed such a respect and appreciation for the love she has for her family. I felt I could relate to her in more ways than one. Mainly, I relate to the inspiration she gets from her sons and her love for creating.

When I spoke with Mary, I thought to myself that her voice is a perfect fit to her beautiful smile. She expressed her appreciation for Odyssey and says that she benefits from it even to this day. She spoke about how she always has an Odyssey



moment when she travels, and the excitement that brings.

Mary works full time and is currently in the IT program at MATC. She will be finished this year. I shared with her my desire to complete my education and the

different obstacles a woman in my position can meet in pursuit of that goal. Her words were encouraging and her warm spirit was genuine.

She asked me if I prayed and told me to "continue to do so and know that God already has everything worked out." The language she spoke was familiar and concrete. I'm glad I was given the chance to converse with Mary and wish her all the best in her future accomplishments. As she so eloquently put it, I will "Just keep going."



Mary's 2007 Odyssey

- O - Extra ORDINARY (The class went beyond what I envisioned)
- D - DRIVEN (I am driven like never before for education)
- Y - YEARN (I want to conquer my educational goals)
- S - SERIOUS (I am serious about education)
- S - SENSITIVE (I am sensitive to needs of others)
- E - ENTHUSIASTIC (I am eager to give back as I have been given to)
- Y - YOUTHFUL (I am young at heart)

Mandisa Hayes ('08), Striver
By Nicole Barnett ('09)



As she begins her day by pulling off the blankets from the warm bed that protects her at night from the cold bitter wind that tickles her window sill, she realizes she made it to another day. She awakens with such gratefulness

and thanksgiving upon hearing the angelic voices of her daughters, ages five, six, and eight. Her daughters make her feel gratitude in continuing her journey everyday.

Oh, but her name fits her well: Mandisa, meaning sweet, followed by Izegbe Hayes, which is long awaited birth. Mandisa has reached a new chapter in her life. At 31 years old, she is motivated now to return to school and further her education. Being a part of the Odyssey family has shown her not to give up in her odyssey. She says, "After Odyssey, don't just stop there because it's just the beginning. Don't give up—it's just the starting point, and there's so much you can do after Odyssey."

Mandisa feels her experience in Odyssey was a blessing and that it became somewhat of a support group for her. Many people have different struggles, different gifts, but all were striving



for the same thing: to grow. Mandisa gained the motivation to finish school after so many years. Now after finishing up an Accounting degree at MATC she still continues to strive. Mandisa can not and will not stop after her Associate's degree; she will continue her journey in pursuing a B.A. (Bachelor's).

Meanwhile Mandisa holds a full time job at the Department of Revenue, is a full time student (while on the Dean's list), and continues to be an overworked mom. Mandisa loves learning and loves math. Although the reading and writing assignments that were a part of the Odyssey curriculum were overwhelming at times, she still stuck through it. Never give up, she encourages others.

There have been many different obstacles that tried to block Mandisa, but she continues her journey to push forth. Even at work, she mentions how her employers look at her as if she's from another planet or have certain expectations for her because of her color, but she still continues to push through.

Mandisa continues to carry the Odyssey spirit with her. She mentions how every week was pleasant and different; the good thing was that no one ever quit. Even now she continues to get encouragement from former Odyssey peers because "we became a unity," she says.

I present to you 2008 Odyssey graduate Mandisa Hayes, a woman of excellence, determination, and motivation.

Mandisa Hayes

I'm sorting through My Life
 I am just beginning
 I have a long way to go
 I am just starting life
 Even though I am 31 years old.
 I'm moving on to a new phase in my life
 Trying to be the best me
 I'm leaving some things behind,
 But keeping lessons learned.
 I am unfinished.

Sonia Spencer ('07), Determined Student
By Felicia Anderson ('09)



Sonia Spencer is an Odyssey alumna who came from Angola, Africa. She is employed at Anchor Bank and has been there for three and a half years. Because of the Odyssey class, Sonia has lots of knowledge about Art, English,

Writing, and History. The Odyssey Project has made her more aware of her surroundings and gave her more tools to use to continue her education.

Sonia plans to graduate from college with her Bachelor's degree in teaching. She would like everyone to know she's very determined, reliable, and successful.



The Odyssey Journey By Sonia Spencer

It's not Friday, Saturday, or Sunday,
 It's Wednesday,
 not hump day,
 Odyssey Day,
 that I'm giddy about.
 Like a child on Christmas day
 I feel the same about Odyssey day
 "Is it here yet?
 Is it here yet?"
 I don't feel pity for those
 who don't know my odyssey.

They don't know where I've gone
 what I've done
 what I'm doing and
 where I'm going.
 I'm taking that journey—
 The Odyssey Journey.

Angela McAlister ('07),
By Felicia Jones ('09)



As I was reading archived articles of the Odyssey Oracle, then interviewing Angela, all I could think of was a Maya Angelou poem called "Still I Rise."

Angela's journey began

when she was told by an Odyssey graduate [Char Braxton '06] about amazing attributes of the program. Angela applied, and her extended journey truly began when she was accepted. One of Angela's most memorable moments of being in Odyssey was when the class went to get their UW identification cards. She states that she felt great to be recognized as a UW student.

Angela is a vivacious, vibrant 55-year-old mother of three adult children, grandmother of three beautiful grandsons, and eldest of 10 siblings. When Angela started the Odyssey



program, she was the Program Assistant for the Wisconsin Association on Alcohol and other Drug Abuse (WAAODA). Angela is currently the program's director. Angela has a dream of returning to school to earn a degree in Clinical Psychology.

Angela would like for all of us future graduates of this 2008-2009 Odyssey class to know that she is still growing and still learning every day. She also wants us to know what a blessing and precious gift it is to be a student here. Angela said we should appreciate this opportunity to further our education. Angela happily states how much she loves Emily, Coach, Craig, Jean, and "everyone that's involved in this wonderful program."

I Am Three People By Angela McAlister

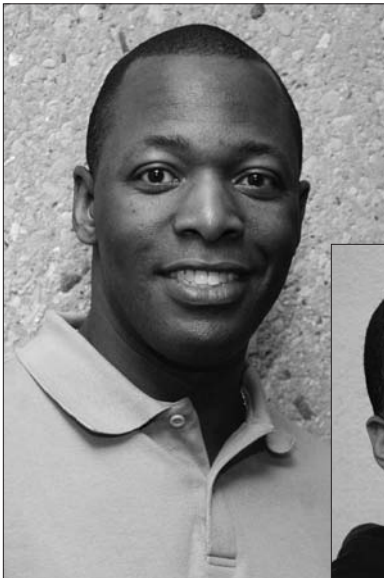
I am who the world wants to see.

I am who I want the world to see.

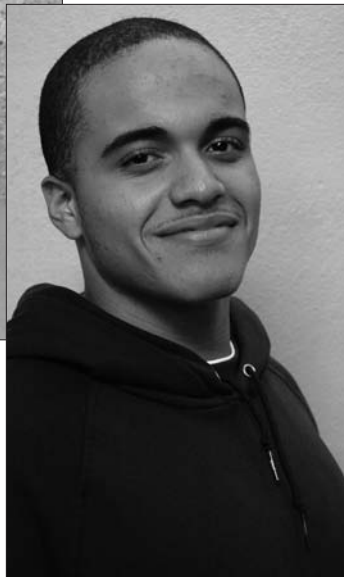
I am who no one sees when I am alone.

John Shields ('08), Good Man

By Stephen Taylor ('09)



John is a very strong willed person with a great work ethic. John is 43 years of age and has two boys, ages



18 and 17. He works full time and goes to MATC classes in the evenings. . . .

Mr. Shields is very smart, intelligent, and wise. He speaks so articulately that you'd swear he was a UW grad. He's organized, ambitious, hungry to succeed, open minded, optimistic, and humble.

John made me feel lazy. He does more than I do yet doesn't complain about it. John works and goes to school. He's always busy.

When John graduated from Odyssey he felt like it was the beginning. He said, "Odyssey gave me hope and it nurtured me. . . . Odyssey prepared me for further education." These are very wise words and very true.

John is always willing to help out, too. John's goal is to be in counseling, and I feel that's great. John is a caring, funny, heartfelt person who is doing a lot for himself. Meet John Shields, a good man who is also an Odyssey alumnus.

I AM JOHN By John Shields

What's in a name?

I am John,

Not Saint John,

Not a god,

Just a man.

I am a product

Of my environment,

Nurtured at birth,

Molded into

The man before you.

A man on a quest,

In search of myself.

Not knowing what lies ahead,

Yet never wavering in faith

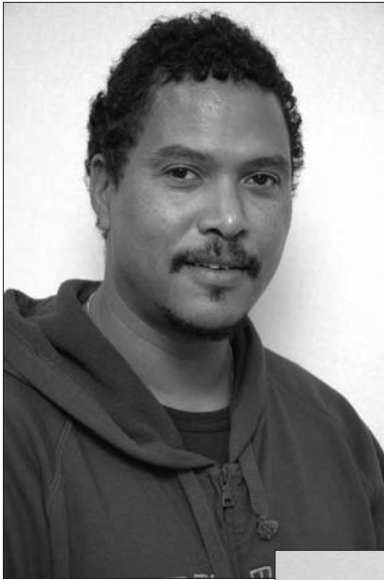
I move forward unafraid.

Brian Benford ('07), One Rich in Life

Experience

By Otis Harris ('09)

A low-income single father of four, person of color, community servant, activist, and lover are terms Mr. Brian Benford uses when defining himself. Born and raised in the late 1950s to early 60s, Mr. Benford found several things to cause him to believe there's no use in living, wanting to learn, or wanting to better himself or his family. Experiencing "bouts with racism and its insidious impact," he at times felt hope would never exist in his lifetime. Brian Benford was raised a fighter, being an "Afro-native American with a strong indoctrination to civil rights . . . and a vocal critic to injustice." He gained strength from others and



even inner strength to be a champion of civil rights for people who could not fight for themselves.

“Odyssey has been one of the most profound experiences of my rich life,” Brian says. Though Brian stated he

is “low income,” experiences have made him rich. He says, “I will reflect back on the gifts of this world and know that I have not only climbed out of the cave but had the opportunity to climb the highest mountains, as I see the world differently due to education and opportunities like Odyssey.” Many times it’s the simple things and opportunities that don’t cost a dime that make your life rich: a smile of a child, a visit from an old friend, a surprise party, a hug that tells you someone loves you, a reassuring pat on the back, a chance to learn. Odyssey gives hope to fulfill dreams. “Think of the first time you learned something and it touched you deeply,” Brian says. When touched deeply, he gets “tingly deep to the core sensations.” Now that’s deep!

Brian is a full-time student, part-time youth specialist, and community activist. Brian worked for the City of Madison Common Council as alderperson of the 12th district and has worked in countless community based organizations. He’d



like to run for a state office sometime soon. He wants to teach and maybe get his MMSW in Social Work for counseling. Brian wants to learn Spanish and play the blues on the acoustic guitar, and he wants to grow old holding hands with the one he loves.

Brian also wants Odyssey students to know that “we all have come together to improve our lives, our families, and our communities . . . and our all taking this journey with the common goal of life long learning and sharing.” He tells Odyssey students, “Never give up and never quit—not until all who want it can have the wonderful gift that we have of knowledge and an opportunity to share and learn on this Odyssey with beautiful, gifted people.”

The Life of Brian By Brian Benford

I’m a sensual thinker.

In my dreams I taste, smell, and feel.

Blinded only when I’m awake.

Tenderly I held my babies between jobs, meetings,
and relationships.

For my children, I cooked tried and true ancestral
foods. Stirring in extra love as I nourished our
bodies and soul.

At times the electric was lost to pay the rent. Used
it as a teachable moment on how the ‘old timer’
lived.

Gave my blood to pay for food.

Pushing shame and guilt aside with artificial pride,
as I try to justify that my plasma gave life to
others.

In the face of poverty, I bowed and embraced a
lifestyle of simplicity and grace. I introduced my
children to him with hopes that they would never
be friends.

Education has brought me out of the cave,
enriching life as I race to the grave.

I read about realities unknown, new ways of
thinking were shown.

In my dreams I’ve tasted pain, smelled fear, and felt
the light.

Now I’m awakened, I can see, and the future looks
bright.

I’m a sensual thinker.

**Oroki Rice ('07),
Strong and Independent Woman
By Edwin Shumpert ('09)**



From the very beginning it was a pleasure meeting and getting to know Ms. Oroki Rice. Our meeting and greeting was very comfortable from the start: we both had similar geographic backgrounds, as we are both from

Chicago and can relate to about the same time frame.

Culturally Oroki and I were able to recall people and places we both knew. "Small world," we often said.

Oroki, like myself, came to Madison for a change and to somewhat overcome a fast-paced lifestyle with ups and downs, finding ourselves self-medicating and experimenting with drugs.

Talking and learning from Oroki, I found out she came to Madison in 2005 through an invitation from her sister. Her sister has been here 15 years and is a Nursing graduate of UW Madison.

Oroki has established herself well in the Madison community, has had her own business selling clothing and offering schooling. She also shared with me that unfortunately she had to do some prison time but has been blessed after coming out by staying focused on changing her old ways of



thinking and turning her life around for the better. Oh, how I can relate to that as well.

My own life has been a roller coaster ride, so Oroki's story was very inspiring to me.

Oroki had endless stories to tell, and we could probably have shared enough together to write a book. A most beautiful, strong, and determined woman, Oroki still has desires to travel more and perhaps relocate.

Oroki, it was my pleasure to meet you. I wish all the best blessings to you and to all strong and independent women and single mothers of the world.

Dreams By E. Oroki Rice

When I was a little girl I dreamed of being a ballerina. But that was in the 1950's. As far as I knew, colored girls could not be real ballerinas. Oh, my cousin Val took ballet lessons, but I'd never seen grown-up colored ballerina. So I decided I would never be a ballerina. I would never be an astronaut. I would never be a Mickey Mouse Musketeer.

But I read books. I read more books, and more books, and more books. I pretended I was those little white girls in those books I read. I was exposed to the worlds they traveled. It wasn't that I wanted to be white. I just wanted the privileges that those cute, smart, brave girls I read about had.

Today I am not afraid to dream. In fact, you'd better not tell me what can't do. If I want to create a one-woman production called Inappropriate Laughter, I'll do it. I'll dream of having my own talk show, kinda like Oprah. Maybe Oprah will be a guest on my show. If I want to write wonderful stories I'll do it. I'll dream of others benefiting from my dreams. I'll get my finances in order and have an abundance of wealth to donate to good causes like the Odyssey Project. I'll buy a big house with a big porch. I'll sit on that porch, chill out in the evenings, dreaming under the pitch black sky as it bursts with wild stars. I'll dream. I'll dream. I'll dream.

Corey Saffold ('06), Stereotype Breaker
By Shannon Lawrence ('09)



Corey Saffold is a 29-year-old husband and proud father. He was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, as was most his family. He values his family, a healthy relationship with God, and music.

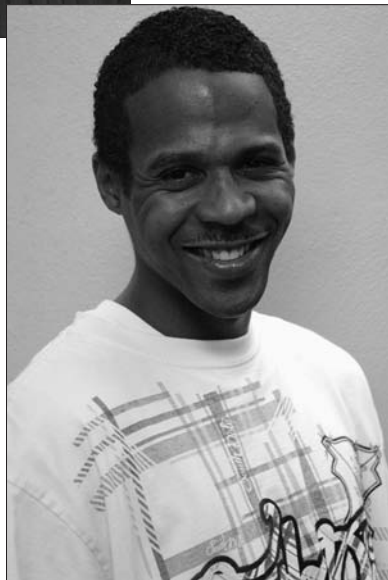
Corey feels

that society doesn't expect us as fathers to be there with our families. I understand where he is coming from. Corey's wife is his backbone, keeping him focused and on the right path. He also uses the word

of God and the teaching of the Bible to keep the faith. For his art project, he used a picture of a dove to represent the time he felt the Holy Spirit, which must have been a great experience.

His passion is music. He enjoys watching his kids dance and sing around the house. To hear and see that fills up his heart with extraordinary feelings no one can explain. And it's feelings like that that keep us striving forward to be the best we can be.

Corey has determination to break the stereotypes that people like to put on us. Every one has obstacles that pop up on us, and Corey



is no different. I can hear his cries, his praise, his screams, and his songs.

We all come to a point in life where we question who we are, who are the people around us, what's the meaning of life. Corey has found that and has already set sail on his journey, that Odyssey journey! He was also touched by how much the Odyssey Project has changed so many people's lives in the program and in the community. That's why he wants to give back to the community. He also wants to attend a four-year university and become self-employed by starting his own production company. I wish him all the best. We always have to keep those BIG DREAMS alive!

Who Said Justice Was Blind? By Corey Saffold
 (Published in the Wisconsin State Journal)

The belief that everyone is treated equally and fair in the criminal justice system is misguided. It's astounding that we as a society deny the truth when the facts are staring us in the face. Even Frederick Douglass once said, "Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob, and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe."

Unfortunately, the criminal justice system is by far one of the most corrupt forms of government in our country. Everything from prison scandals to racial profiling proves this to be true. Justice is not blind as symbols of Lady Justice would suggest. She hands out verdicts of guilty to the poor while receiving bribes to free the rich. She disproportionately locks up blacks while simply giving white criminals a slap on the wrist.

How do you explain the fact that Wisconsin is ranked dead last in graduating black men from high school and ranked number one in locking them up? Can you see the connection? Our country spends so much of its time, money, and resources on figuring out ways to contain and lock up people of color instead of investing in the families and homes they come from.

Look at the so-called war on drugs. According to the Department of Health and Human Services,

whites are 76% of current users, while blacks are 13.5% and Latino/as are 9.2% of current users. Both Latinos and blacks make up less than 23% of all drug users, but over the past several years they have come to represent 90% of all persons sent to jail or prison for drug possession charges.

The question I ask myself is, why does Lady Justice have on that meaningless blindfold when she can clearly see race?

**Angelica “Angel” Rowin-Fox (’04),
LPN and Future RN
By Charles Sallay (’09)**



Charles: So tell me a little about yourself.

Angelica: Let me see. I’m 24 years old and am currently engaged—on New Year’s Day—to my man of 6 years. Thank God! I have two beautiful girls:

Shauna, 7 years old, and my little baby, Avianna, 5 months.

Charles: Where were you born and raised?

Angelica: I was born in Milwaukee and raised here in Madison. . . . I was around five years old when we moved here because we lived pretty much in the “hood” and my mom was a single parent trying to work and go to school at the same



time. Well, the bottom line was that I got stabbed in the eye by this little boy, so my Mom was like, “OK, that’s enough of this . . . we need to go,” so here we are.

Charles: What do you do for a living, Angel?

Angelica: I’m an LPN. I’ve been a nurse now for one year. . . . I work at Oak Park Place, which is a nursing home. Downstairs we have a rehabilitation area for people who come in from injuries, like hip fractures, breaks, falls. . . . I’m currently going to school to become an RN, and I’ve just got one more year to go on that, hopefully. . . .

Charles: You were in the very first Odyssey class, 03-04, correct?

Angelica: Correct. . . . I was graduating from this alternative learning program, and at the graduation they had the pamphlets there. I felt it was a great opportunity. I filled out the application because at that time I really didn’t know what I wanted to do. So it was just like getting my feet wet as far as colleges study goes.

Charles: What were some of the things you liked about Odyssey at that time?

Angelica: I liked that it had a lot of different ethnic groups present. I liked the fact that there was an array of different instructors because each one had his or her own teaching style. I definitely liked the fact that they fed us dinner (little chuckle). And I just appreciated the fact that they introduced me to some things that I probably would’ve never been introduced to otherwise, like Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, Socrates, and Plato, or even some of the more notable black writers in our past like W.E.B. DuBois and Langston Hughes, to name a couple. I would’ve never read any of them on my own, nor would I have ever gone to the museum. . .

Charles: How are you doing health-wise?

Angelica: Well, I'm feeling pretty healthy. I just started back dabbling into smoking cigarettes, so that's not good.

Charles: Oh yea, you've got to stop that again, Angel. I tell anyone, anywhere, at any time just "Don't Smoke." It has absolutely no redeeming value. It doesn't even give you a vitamin. All it does is take away from you . . . money, time, health, even your life, and the lives around you.

Angelica: Yeah, I know. . . .

Charles: If you could add anything to your self-representation collage that you did for Odyssey, what would you add?

Angelica: I would add my baby. I would add my fiancé, and I would definitely add in my nursing pin.

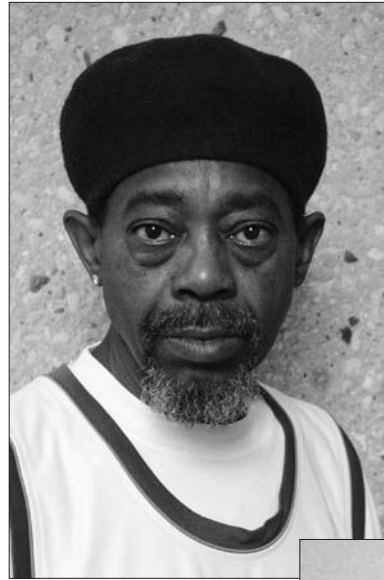
Angelica Rowin-Fox

Life isn't easy, but I'm making it, a young mother striving to make it in a money-hungry world, I am Angelica Marie Rowin - fox, mother, daughter, student, caregiver and friend to many. What a journey, so many lessons taught and so many to be learned. I know that life I only what you make it; it's what you have earned. I know that I will do my best to stay on my feet and forget about stress. I will accomplish my goals, my future. It's all in my hands. A strong black woman, I stand. I do believe, therefore, I shall achieve all of my goals, a story to be told of a successful young woman who did it on her own.

Maurice "Rockameem" Bell ('08), Big Self By Cameron Travis ('09)

"Um, OK, I'm on my way." This was my reply after calling Mr. Maurice "Rockameem" Bell on January 5, 2009. I did not expect him to invite me to his home without even knowing me. As I drove along the Beltline, westbound, I thought about the 12 questions I had for him in my attaché case. . . .

As I rang the bell, I could see the clothed figure color coordinated from head to toe in blue. I knew that this was Rockameem. I don't know how; I



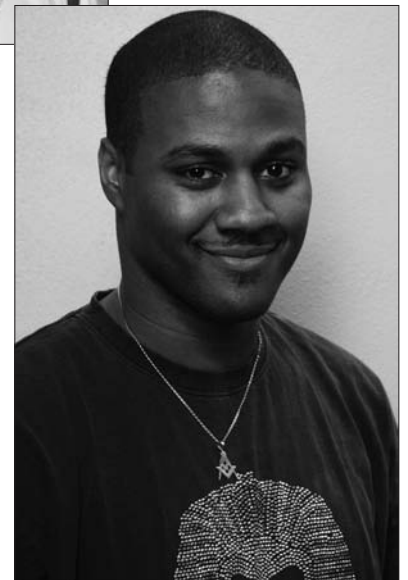
just knew. I was still amazed at the fact that I would be invited into one's home without his seeing or meeting me before, and then lo and behold, Rockameem asked me to take off my shoes and gave me a pair of his own sport sandals

to wear. "Make yourself at home" should have been coined at this moment, for none other in my life describes it better.

I originally had 12 questions to ask Rockameem, but because of our almost instant connection, our energies (mental and stellar), our conversation traveled to many lands we have in common; some of these can not be visited by man on foot in his physical form. We are both Ex-Marines, extremely knowledgeable of the Tarot and its connection to the Bible, the Tetragrammaton, the Hebrew name of God written in specific letters, and even the hermetic quaternary, which relates to the elements of life and its hidden secrets.

During the course of this "preliminary" meeting, my car was running outside the entire time because if I turned it off it wouldn't start up again. By this time, 45 minutes passed by so quickly. I told Rockameem that I needed to go but promised to return, enthusiastic to talk more. When he replied, "You are welcome at any time," I felt just that.

Maurice Bell was given the name Rockameem



from his native home, Chicago. He was part of a group that didn't really have a name, but the main objective was to connect and share knowledge and information with others. Rockameem was sent out by the elder of the group to gather new information on mysticism, even forms of what most would consider "voodoo" or "black magic," from elders from different locations within Chicago. At this time Maurice did not have a Hebrew name; however, members of this group were allowed to pick their own name. He chose "Jarabic," which means executioner, but this did not go over well with the elders of the fast forming, up and coming organization. In fact, the elders responded, "You cannot have that name. C'mon now, can't you be nice just a lil' bit? Can you ever be nice?"

It was obvious that Maurice held much undirected energy, so he was appointed to be the manager of a lounge and health food restaurant called Transition East on 87th and Stony Island Avenue on Chicago's south side. (Incidentally, I was raised in this area; in fact, on my left and right shoulders I have "100% Chicago" and "West 87th St. South side" tattooed.) Transition East was geared towards African Americans that studied and practiced the "knowledge of Self" and acknowledged that they were the "True Children of Israel." Maurice was given the name "Rah'ckmin Bin Shin El 'Him" but changed the name (in English) to "Rockameem" for the sake of "people murdering the name," even mistaking the pronunciation and saying "Roachman." . . .

Rockameem and his wife Afi moved to Madison 22 years ago because at the time the situation wasn't too good for the couple. . . . The spiritually connected couple's energy could be felt even as Afi passed us while we conversed. . . .

When I first received the packet for my interviewee, I was drawn in by this statement: "I will create Civil Disobedience as much as I can." These are a few of the words and quotes that Rockameem lives by. This brings me to the Latin phrase that has become my personal motto: *Flectere Si Nequeo Superos Archeronta Movebo*, If I cannot move Heaven, I will raise Hell.

I believe that Maurice Bell would give you

the shirt off his own back to keep you warm if you were in need. His "I don't let you do me" perspective in interacting with people comes from dealing with the different prejudices in America.

Maurice "Rockameem" Bell may come off to a stranger as an arrogant, self-serving, self-centered, stuck-in-his-ways, biased, addled aged man speaking of himself in third person. During our conversations I felt this way more than once. Because of some of Rockameem's remarks, I built an immediate wall of resistance. This was knocked down just as fast once I listened more deeply to the words and looked into the heart of this man. . . . I realized that I could not conduct a successful interview with Rockameem with my "regular" life eyes. Life is an illusion. Dreams are reality. The "dream" eyes are used to create, to invent, to manifest the spirit . . . to talk to God. These are the eyes you need to travel in speech with Rockameem and people who possess deep thought, allegoric actions, and astral intellect.

Rockameem's travels at one time took him to Jamaica. One of the elder, wiser natives told him, "Mass murder your little self and big up your big self." Your "little self" is the "devil" in you, the side that addresses all of the insignificant things and causes more problems for yourself and those around you. "Big up" your big self is bringing out the "God" in you, which brings about immediate change. Now I understand why some of the Rastafarians that I knew from my childhood neighborhood would say repeatedly in a strong voice, "Big up—Big up, big up!"

This was an amazing experience for me—a connection with a familiar spirit but a 25 year difference. The gap has been bridged. . . .

Maurice Bell a.k.a. Rockameem

Well, like Darkwing Duck, it's time to get dangerous! I feel like I wrote the periodic table of the elements. This education that I've received is praiseworthy, more than gold, better than being a fat rat in a cheese factory. I'm somebody—leave my cave behind.

I've been able to seek, to discover general truths about human social behavior, to consider different standpoints of morals and ethics.

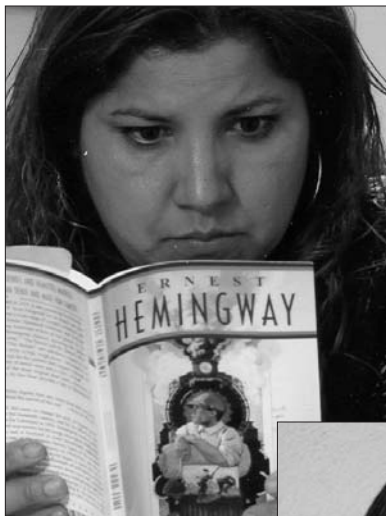
What's the payment? My amazement. To go from essentially superficial relationships to having significant relationships brings into play a new set of social codes of behavior for me!

Behold—what manner of love is this? It has been an Odyssey, and I'm sure I was a project. Thank you all so much.

Now, what shall I be? Dangerous! I will create civil disobedience as much as I can, do something with the writing, art history, American history, literature, philosophy, humanities, and African-American philosophy, and graduate from the UW Odyssey Project, receiving six credits in English and American literature.

Wow—that's a lot! To whom much is given, much is expected. I'll do well.

Teresa Tellez-Giron ('04), Iron Woman
By Erika Rosales Serate ('09)



Teresa was born in Mexico City. When she entered the University of Mexico to study International Studies, she was already speaking three languages,

Spanish, Portuguese, and French, but they asked her to learn English as a requirement, so she won a scholarship to come to the United States and study English.

After a few years she met her husband, got married, and



decided to stay in the USA. She gave birth to two beautiful girls, but later she got divorced and began a new life as a single mom.

Teresa is a bilingual and bicultural social services specialist for the Dane County Department of Human Services. One of her important jobs is dedicated to investigating cases of child abuse, monitoring home visits, and providing information to the Latino families involved in these cases. She is also an advocate of the Latino community, and she helps to develop programs against racism for the YMCA.

Teresa is really involved and active in the community. The first Tuesday of each month from 10-11 on AM 1480, she has a radio show with the aim of providing education to the Latino community about domestic abuse, child abuse, etc.

In 2004 Teresa became a student of the Odyssey Project. She feels that this program has changed her life by helping her to raise her own self esteem, as well as giving her satisfaction for her own achievements.

The Odyssey moment that she always carries with her is not just the education she received by the time of graduation but also to have met her classmates and felt their support as they shared their deepest feelings and problems. During her life, Teresa has had crises and family problems that have interrupted her dreams, but with the support of her family and her daughters who are her inspiration and the most important part of her life, Teresa hopes one day to reach her dream to get her education as a social worker.

I just need to add something: Teresa, you are . . . an "iron woman."

About Odyssey By Teresa Tellez-Giron

If I had not been in the Odyssey Project, I would not be as successful as I am. I wouldn't have started a radio program. When I graduated from the Odyssey Project, my daughters said they were very proud of me and that I was an example to them... Because English is my second language, it is very hard for me to do the readings but I love the challenge. I have become more confident ... and I am a better mother. Gracias to everyone who helped me in this program.

A black and white close-up portrait of actor Chiwetel Ejiofor. He is smiling broadly, showing his teeth. He has short, dark hair and a light beard. He is wearing a dark, collared shirt. The background is dark and out of focus.

A black and white portrait of a woman with short hair, wearing glasses and a floral patterned top. She is smiling and looking slightly to the right. The background is a plain, light color.

His favorite moment in class happened when Emily had a panel of admission counselors from

You can't deny the beat
The language of the world keeps you tappin' your
feet.
From Chicago, Mexico, South Carolina, LA, and all

the way back to St. Louis,
You can feel the spirit.

My voice, my songs, my music, will never be just
mine
Because I've learned, heard, and seen for myself
That all I am is because of those who made music
before me.
Listen to the song of Frederick Douglass, Walt
Whitman,
Langston Hughes,
Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Tupac, N.W.A,
Nas, Ben Carson,
Michael Eric Dyson, Kwane Kilpartick, Warrick
Dunn, Emily Auerbach,
Mel Gibson, Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth,
Madam C.J Walker.
Can you hear that sweet, sorrowful, happy, sad,
inspiring, liberating literate, compassionate, angry
song?

Keep singing y'all, keep singing y'all
I love the music, I need the music,
I am the music!

Kevin Schoen ('08), Creative Carpenter
By Mary Lucille Moore ('09)



Kevin Schoen is a 51 year old, self employed carpenter. He was born number 11 of 11 children. His family lived in Spring Grove, Illinois during his youth. He moved to Madison, Wisconsin at age 18. Afterwards he found a job working for a company called

Fastenall.

His parents wanted him to start college right away but he never did until he attended Odyssey. When I asked him how he thought his life would

have turned out if he'd attended college earlier he said he doesn't think that he would have appreciated the opportunity at *that* time. Struggling hard for his family later gave him the mindset to eventually appreciate the chance to finally start college through the Odyssey Project.

"I was really surprised about how involved they (the staff) were in what they were doing. I was really nervous and didn't know anybody and they made me feel very comfortable. It was the first time that I had ever been the minority. Everyone else's skin was browner than mine."

"When I started to see the creative sides of my classmates and myself as well, I was very impressed. Before it was easy not to see my own goodness, but Odyssey helped me to see my fellow classmates as the creative individuals that we all were."

*When I see myself in others
I can accept myself in me.
The magic is not in what I saw
But in how I choose to see.*

"Odyssey endorses and supports this basic concept. The Odyssey Project helped me to step up to the plate and be who *I* really am."

The Introduction By Kevin Schoen

I hid under the stairs
That led up to the light.
That which revealed me
Is that which I'd fight.

Then an old-soul from Odyssey,
Held out her hand.
She said that if she could,
She knows I can.

So I took her hand,
With the smile of a liar.
Feigning a laugh,
I took one step higher.

So, that's how an onion
Gets peeled, as you know:
One layer at a time
Till there's no place to go.

Out in the open
For all to see.
But what's most important is
I'm getting to know Me.

Sherri Bester ('08), Prayer Warrior

By Mary Lucille Moore ('09)



Sherri Bester was born July 5, 1962 in Greenville, Mississippi. Because of challenges during her mother's pregnancy and being born the day after the Fourth of July, she was nicknamed "Firecracker."

Her family life included her parents,

grandmother, and two other sisters. Her mom suffered a miscarriage and a baby boy died at birth.

After her parent's divorce when she was in the second grade, Sherri's family moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It was then that Sherri stopped communicating because her grandmother wasn't around anymore; she missed her terribly. As a child Sherri was excessively quiet, kind, and loving. She was very accommodating to whomever she could help and support, but rarely ever spoke out loud. She suffered countless incidences of prejudice and abuse.

In school she enjoyed gymnastics, the pom-pom squad, art, drama, dancing, singing, and poetry. Mathematics was also a favorite for hers along with attending church.

Later her family moved to Madison where she was accepted into a program called SOP (Summer Opportunity Program) right after her graduation from Marshall High School. Sherri moved into the Lake Shore dorms and began basic learning classes to help prepare her for what she should expect as a

college student.

When asked how she finally heard about the Odyssey Project she answered, "Three people told me about it: Chris Wagner (the librarian, South Branch), Fabu Briscoe (her children's godmother and Madison's poet laureate), and Denise Maddox (fellow church member and Odyssey graduate)."

On her first day of class she says that that she was so excited and didn't really know what to expect, but it felt like she was dry land and Odyssey flowed through her heart, mind, body, soul, and spirit, like an ocean, and took her on a journey of learning.

Sherri says, "I kept hold of that positive feeling and carried it with me, so when challenges come, I reflect back to that positivity; I feel that very first day of class to pull me through."

Her favorite Odyssey moment happened when she was able to give back something to express her love and gratitude by performing a dance to a song by Celine Dion called *Because You Loved Me*.

"When I can overflow freely in the arts it stirs up love inside of me and makes me feel free!"

The one word that comes to mind when she thinks of her journey in the Odyssey Project is *Wisdom*. "It didn't only teach me about experiences of education and learning, it took me to a much richer and deeper place in my *Wisdom*. *Wisdom* is the cherry on top of the Odyssey journey of life."

Sherri is the mother of a current Odyssey student, Samuel L. Bester, who is nineteen years old. She has five other children, Emanuel (24), James (17), Christopher (15), Mariama (14), and Keziah (11). She is happily married to James Bester, her husband of twenty years. Sherri is a UW-Madison student, a community service provider, a member of Fountain of Life Church, a member of The Living Water Praise Dancers, a childcare provider for the current Odyssey Project class, a prayer warrior, an awesome creation of God, and a true friend.

Sherri encourages anyone who is applying for the Odyssey Project to *run fast, freely, and fiercely into the fire of your dreams!*

My name is Sherri Genell Bester

I escaped and now live outside a burst bubble of boldness in brilliant belief that I am UNCONQUERABLE!!! Odyssey helped me break out of a clear, glass, transparent though invisible bubble of torment shielding me once from the beauty, wonder, and power of educational freedom.

I am a blessed, loved, grateful wife of one wise, sexy, hard working, faithful husband and mother of six beautiful, creative, healthy, gifted children.

I am a Christian, a prayer warrior, a Bible searcher, a crybaby, a dreamer, a homemaker, an artist, a dancer, a singer, an actor, a poet, a sewer, a cook, a creator, a teacher, a learner, a builder, a family person, a community person, a nation person, a fighter, a friend, and a LOVER.

I am a peacemaker who believes only LOVE is what is worth fighting for.

I LOVE TO DANCE BAREFOOT AND FREELY BEFORE THE GLORY OF THE LORD.

Last but not least I am a grateful UW-Madison Odyssey student and Community Leadership major.

Yasmin Horton ('07), Living Testimony
By Mary Lucille Moore ('09)



Yasmin Horton is a 52 year old single woman who is not only an Odyssey Project alumnus (2007); she's also the mother of a current Odyssey student, James Horton.

Yasmin looks at her Odyssey experience as a springboard that inspired her to pursue higher

learning.

In her former life Yasmin was a crack addict who was born in Chicago. She lived on 45th Street

and Wabash. She was born #7 of 9 children and raised in a single parent home by her mother, who raised her son James as well.

Her life goal is to address women who are similar in character and experience to herself. She wants to be a living testimony to the people who are inspired by her story, especially women.

Yasmin aspires to be a drug counselor and already has her Substance Abuse Counselor in Training (SACIT) license through the Department of Regulations and Licenceses.

Yasmin shares that she immediately felt the loving, generous spirits of the Odyssey Project staff and classmates. When her brother got sick and then passed away, her classmates were very supportive and were there for her in her time of need.

Yasmin says that Emily Auerbach and her staff go above and beyond the call of duty for her students and staff. "Odyssey reaches out and extends much further than the 8 month course we take. Emily and her staff still do so many wonderful things for me, even to this day."

Her testimony still to this day inspires so many, but she feels that God gets the glory whenever she shares her life story and experiences with others. In closing, Yasmin credits her relationship with God for all her achievements and feels that *with* God *all* things are possible.

I Know I Can By Yasmin Horton

Before I came to Odyssey
 I did not know my destiny
 But now I know what's best for me
 My mind is free and I can see
 The path that's opened up to me
 And I can now indubitably
 Be the best that I can be.

Sherreallyum Allen ('05), Woman with Energy
By Mary Moore ('09)

Sherreallyum Allen is an extremely hard working, energetic mother of four beautiful children, ages fourteen to five years of age. Ms. Allen moved to Madison, Wisconsin from Chicago, Illinois and was told about the Odyssey Project by her best friend, Kegan Carter, who



graduated from the program in its first year. She had nearly perfect attendance (only missing one class due to a car accident) but shares that staying in the program and finishing was the “good choice” she made.

Sherreallyum was accepted in the program the first time she applied,

followed by her mother the following year. She feels that she is a better writer and speaker because of the foundation attending the class gave her, even though she sometimes still needs help with grammar. The class really helped her to express parts of her that she was unable to express before. Her favorite reference to this fact is saying that “it (Odyssey) helped me to step out of my safety zone.”

As a result of all her new growth she majors in nursing, which is perfect for her because she loves to help other people. She appreciates the emotional and mental support she received from staff members and is one of the few students (former or current) who said they really loved the homework assignments.

There are lots of memories about classroom experiences but the one that was most profound was when Baron Kelly came to speak. She also cites the way Emily (Program Director) was able to remember the names of the entire class the first night.

When asked if she ever thought she could start up a program of her own, Sherreallyum’s answer was, “Of course, yes!” It would be a low budget idea offering information on good nutrition and eating habits, with a catchy name like “Sugar Free but Still Sweet.” It looks as if Sherreallyum Allen wants to help change things for others for the better, just like the Odyssey Project did for her.

The Gift By Sherreallyum Allen

One fall day I woke to a surprise
A little boy staring with innocent eyes
I looked and I wondered How could this be?
Why was this little boy entrusted to me?

Naïve and filled with dreams
but when I woke that morning
I really wanted to scream
I was filled with doubt but ready to face the world
To tell the truth I really wanted a girl

I said to myself wake up, you see,
because this little boy was entrusted to me
When I looked in his face he was beautiful and fine
Then I thought to myself that he was all mine

Just in a flash, there were a bunch of white coats
They looked at me and said
“Miss, just give up hope.”
With fright on my face I asked, “What’s wrong?”
They said, “Miss, we don’t know, please go home.”

“Go home!” I say
“This must be a joke
aren’t you a doctor?
Didn’t you take an oath?”

He looked at me and smiled.
“You’re young and naïve.
You still have time to fulfill you dreams.
Just leave him here and no one will know
Turn around and walk out there’s the door!”

Now I was mad
Insulted, you see,
Because this little boy was entrusted to me
I may have been young but no dummy by far
Because I picked up my son
And headed straight for the car.

I went from doctor to doctor all around town
They would look at me and say
With that sarcastic frown

"Miss, give up hope
He's not going to do much
Not walk, not talk, nor see, nor hear
He won't even be able to feed himself lunch, my dear

People do it everyday it's not that hard
It's a locked facility but they don't have any guards
See look! Children playing in the yard."

Enraged by now I turned and walked away
Because they won't get my son Oh no! Not today
More determined than ever to prove them all wrong
I awoke every day just to teach him songs

People would look at me and stare
How dare she bring him out to play
He looks funny
You should take him away!

I would shout it from the rooftops every time
Isn't he beautiful?
Yes! He is mine.

With my family's support we made it a long way
I took him outside everyday to play
Many people would be ashamed
But Oh! No not me!
Because this little boy is a gift from God
Entrusted directly to me.

