

The Backbone of My Family Tree

By Nkechi Johnson

If I were to speak about a phenomenal woman who is God-fearing, nurturing, and unselfish, I would be talking about my “Guardian Angel”: my grandmommie, Louise Dunlap, born in 1923.



“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Psalm 23) is what this God-fearing woman says to praise God for her blessings or trials. She goes to church every Sunday as long as she is able. If she is not babysitting on Wednesday nights, she will go to Bible study. When I was younger, my grandmother made sure I went to youth ministry, Bible study, and church every week because my mother wouldn’t make sure I went. She even made me wake my mother up when she just came in from partying all night. My mother would say she had a hangover, and my grandmother would get upset with my mom and curse her out. Suddenly Mom would get up and come to church with a hangover. My grandma believed in giving time to God, especially if you can go out to party and do devilish things. When my grandmother gets upset about someone not going to church, she will put her hand on her chin, shake her head in disappointment, and just look at you. When she does that, you better be far away from her because something may hit you upside your head!

The Bishops, Washingtons, and Braceys are just a few members of our family tree who know all too well about the loving and nurturing that Louise Dunlap dishes out to each and every family member that she knows. When she welcomes people from outside of our family into our family in a heavenly way, they see why we are so blessed. If you don’t have a place to live, clothes on your back, or food to eat, she will try her best to get it for you. If you are sick with no one to help you or take care of you, she will volunteer her time and care for you. My grandmother has had a part in a lot of children’s lives and helped raised them into the beautiful or handsome young adults they are today. Some of the ones she babysat or just gave love to will

come by and visit her. She will get up and cook as if she’s cooking for family reunions, graduations, and church events. When my grandmother caters, she cooks a variety of meats, side dishes, and desserts. For example, for family reunions there would be fried chicken so tender that when you bite into it, the meat falls off the bone with the juice dripping down your hands and chin. She makes baked and barbecue chicken, meatballs with gravy, spaghetti, baked macaroni and cheese, turnip and mustard greens, and cabbage. Umm, I’m hungry! Desserts included banana pudding, sweet potato pies, banana-nut pound cake, and peach and apple cobbler.

What can you say to a woman that is 88 years old, bull-headed, and stuck in her own ways that will care for others even when she is not doing well herself? She will give her last if you need it just to see a smile on your face. That’s what makes my grandmommie the happiest: when she has blessed someone else. For instance, a week before she left to go out of town to help out my uncle-in-law, she said it was a vacation. Yeah, right! If I know Louise Dunlap, she is cleaning and cooking. I wish there could be an award for unselfishness. Glennly Louise Dunlap would win for sure. She would not want to be called “Glenny” because she hates that name. I



will get cursed out and have something thrown at my head!

One day when I grow up, I hope to have some of the same qualities as my grandmommie does. She means so much to me. When I was a senior in school and pregnant, I tried everything not to go to school, but thank God she woke me up every day to go to school so I would graduate. I did, and that day made her the happiest ever. Because she had to quit school in the third grade herself, she believes in education for others. Who wouldn't want to have the qualities of a loving and beautiful woman who is God fearing, nurturing, and unselfish? I sure would! I dedicate this essay to my "Guardian Angel" here on earth: my grandmommie "Glenny" Louise Dunlap. Love ya!

Stretching the Limits: Mrs. Gwendolyn Anderson

By Phyllis Anderson

Although she is small framed and rather short, she is incredibly strong, extremely determined, and completely driven in most anything she sets her mind to obtain. She is totally committed and will not be deterred from her desired efforts to reach her goals. Gwendolyn Anderson is a woman who is always stretching the limits of her time and energy. She is devoted to the importance of education and willing to go the extra mile while stressing the great benefits of being educated.

Mrs. Gwen Anderson is a small yet feisty woman. At the ripe age of 70, she is still determined to pass along the importance of education to anyone willing to learn. She finally retired from her first and only job as a special education teacher at the Chicago Association for Retarded Citizens, a job she held for 30 years. During her tenure, her performance as a dedicated teacher led to her being voted best teacher well over 20 times, a title she deserved and was very proud to receive. These titles enhanced an even strong determination and caused her to become a driven machine pushing forward in an effort to educate.

Mrs. Anderson married at the tender age of

18 to a much older man. Her husband did not allow her to work or finish school. She started a family soon after her union, and 25 years into her marriage Gwen became a widow. Uneducated and unemployed, she was determined to get her GED. In 1974 she not only obtained her GED but also got her first job as a teacher. This job became the reason for her full devotion and determination to become educated and to educate.

Stretching the limits of her time and energy, she went full speed ahead after receiving her GED. Gwen became an unstoppable machine totally committed to obtaining her college degree from Chicago State University. She received an AAS degree with a specialty in Special Education. Gwen worked a full time job teaching mentally handicapped children, went home to raise five teenage girls and one hardheaded boy, and attended school in the evening. However great the challenge, she was always determined to prevail and always maintained a neat, orderly, and safe home for her children. Her children did not need to ask twice for help with homework assignments. They never missed a single meal and were always polite and respectful. Mrs. Anderson was so determined to obtain a higher education that she went on to receive her bachelor's degree from the University of Illinois. With great effort, as she was becoming ill, she continued her quest for her Master's Degree. She is constantly seeking to quench her insatiable



thirst for education.

Mrs. Gwendolyn Anderson is an incredibly strong, driven, and determined woman who understands the importance of education and the benefits one will gain during and after receiving such a valuable tool. She is willing to accept any and every opportunity given to teach those interested in moving forward with the goal of receiving an education. She exudes great passion when speaking of education or the mere thought of teaching. She is my mother, and she is my hero.

Mapping Success: The Mission of Diana Shinall

By Brandon McCarey

When surveying the plight of your own community, it's simple for many to detach and even ignore the ones caught in cycles of poverty and dysfunction. However, when Diana Shinall saw the problems plaguing her community, her initial thoughts were why and how she could help fix it. Her passion for community involvement and her selfless nature led her to found the Madison Apprenticeship Program (M.A.P.). This 12-week life skills course is designed to educate her students on fundamental life skills, pursuing higher education and vocational training and rehabilitation. So what motivates Diana Shinall to carry out this task? What past experiences in her life allow her to relate to struggling individuals? What does the future hold for the Madison Apprenticeship Program?

My connection with Ms. Shinall stems back to the summer of 2009, when I was selected to be a student for class #11. Caught in my



own personal obstacles, I was looking for anyone or anything to help lift me from my own personal adversity. Immediately, I could sense her dedication to her work and her compassion for those in need. By the second class session, she introduced us to her self-written and self-published book, *My Struggles, Your Struggles, They're All the Same*. She revealed many setbacks in her life, from having a son incarcerated to the passing away of an infant grandchild. Diana offers her students a glimpse into her own personal roadblocks and the wisdom she gained from such experiences. "Face obstacles with strength and courage and don't run from them," Ms. Shinall always illustrated to her classes. Born from her life struggles, M.A.P. was conceived and made available to those in need. Drawing off her own life experiences, she uses her wisdom to help guide people who are in her 12-week enrichment course.

Tapping into her community connections, she invites individuals and other organizations to help in the learning process. From tutors, public officials, volunteers, and college visits, she insures that her students have many resources readily available for personal advancement. Self-esteem building is a major focus of M.A.P. Diana's philosophy on success is that a positive self-image and the drive to succeed go hand in hand. Gearing her students to face everyday challenges, she fosters an environment that allows personal growth with positive affirmations or what she calls the "inner makeover."

The final weeks are highlighted with a trip to her home town of Gary, Indiana, with a shopping trip for new suits for the male students and dress



garments for the women students. The outer makeover complements the inner makeover. All comes full circle on graduation day. Her students go through their very own graduation ceremony. “Many of my students never had the opportunity to have an official graduation of any kind; this gives them a sense of accomplishment and self-worth and hopefully inspires them to press forward with their ambition to achieve high goals,” Diana explains.

Today M.A.P. has expanded into a new location along with a new addition: a dry cleaning service. The dry cleaners will serve not only as a functional business, but M.A.P. graduates will be employed, giving alumni a chance at gainful employment. Diana still continues to teach as head director of M.A.P. and continues to produce motivated and productive citizens. Those twelve weeks helped me to obtain my HSED and eventually attend college as a full-time student. I am eternally grateful for Diana’s wisdom and kindness and, above all, her willingness to help others while expecting little in return.

A True Woman of Courage Signifies Strength, Wisdom, and Fearlessness!

By Arnella Royal

Marge Yoakum demonstrates strength, wisdom, and fearlessness, as well as many, many more qualities. She is kind and a very hard worker, but most of all she is strength.

It was early 2008 when I first witnessed just how kind a person can truly be. I was pregnant with my last child, working at a grocery store, when I was approached by a married couple that I had waited on enough times to consider them as regulars. Marge came up to me with something in her hand that was wrapped and had a bow on it. I asked, “How are you?” and she said, “Fine,” and then proceeded to hand me the gift. “Why would you go to so much trouble for someone you hardly even know?” I asked. She said, “Because you are the sweetest cashier that has ever taken care of us in this store,

and we wanted to show our appreciation.” I opened the gift right on the spot, and do you know it was a newborn hat and sweater that she had hand-knitted? I was so grateful, so touched by her thoughtfulness. She actually took the time to do all of this for me; no one’s ever been this kind in my life.

Even at a very young age, Marge knew that she would be useful to helping others. She put herself through medical school and became a Registered Nurse. Throughout her life, there were a lot of rough spots that she had to endure. Not only was she going to college, but she was also a wife and mother of three! Her husband was unfaithful, but she didn’t let his infidelity keep her from being committed to him or the children. Marge continued to support him as a wife should. She knew that family was important as well as getting a solid education. So with hard work and perseverance, she accomplished what she sought to become. Having her in my life as a friend is just the half of it. I see her as an encouraging factor in my life to persevere through what I need to become in my own life’s goal. Staying on track is one way of perseverance, and keeping in mind the goals you set for yourself and for your children will have a marvelous outcome if you stick with it. Building solid relationships along the way helps you to count on the people you trust most and forgive those who have done you wrong in the past.

I spoke about strength in the beginning to



emphasize her physical capabilities. Marge is now a retired nurse. She cares for a young boy that is wheelchair bound due to a very serious illness, and on top of all that she had a husband battling two types of cancer. When she talks to me about what's new in her life or what's going on at work and at home, I take a step back and ask, "Are you doing okay? How are you managing all of this?" She just smiles and says, "I just do. I have to—they need me."

Marge's influence is one of courage that I too want to have as a human being. Going in with such a positive attitude and patience is always a good look! So here's to you, Miss Marge: I love you. Thanks for being a friend to me when no one else was.

Pa Yang Thao **By Linda Thao**

In Thailand and Laos, men can get away with almost anything; as for the women, they can't choose for themselves. Pa Yang Thao was one of the women who struggled living in Thailand, moving



to Laos, and then to the United States.

Pa was born in Thailand in 1963. She lived with her family in a small house made out of bamboo sticks and straws. She had three sisters and four brothers. As a daughter, her jobs were to cook breakfast, lunch, and dinner for the family. Their family was poor, so they had to cherish their meat. Most of the time everything was served with boiled vegetables called mustard greens, with rice and water. Serving meat was only for special occasions such as weddings or any type of party. Everyday Pa would have to go gardening; she would look for any weeds that needed to be pulled out, or any fruits or vegetables ready to be picked. Pa was to stay inside most of the time. If she had no more chores, she would sit in front of the door and sew. Pa loved sewing because it was a way of expressing herself and a way to relax. Pa also loved to learn, but women weren't allowed to go to school. Women were to stay put at home and do whatever they were told to do by their elders or their husbands.

In Thailand there are eighteen clans: Cha, Chang, Cheng, Chue, Fang, Hang, Her, Khang, Kong, Kue, Lee, Lor, Moua, Pha, Thao, Vang, Vue, Xiong, and Yang. Pa was a Yang; she received that upon birth, and all her siblings and she are members of the father's clan. A young man named

Long Thao was very attracted to Pa, but he came from a cruel and greedy family. Pa's parents forbade her to speak or see Long for her safety. However, Long kidnapped Pa once they were caught off guard: he dragged her by the arm to show his parents that he has brought a wife home. After the wedding, Pa Yang became a member of Long's family, but she still kept possession of her father's clan name; her full name is now Pa Yang Thao. During



Pa's pregnancy she was forced to cook, clean, go gardening, and do hard chores with no one's help. At times Pa would cry quietly to herself and her baby. She would rub her tummy and cry out, "Once you come out things will be hard, but we have to accept this fate no matter how bad it gets for us." Long would pay no attention to her, and his parents refused to let him help Pa in any way because it wasn't a man's job. He would go out to play soccer and to hunt with friends for birds, squirrels, fish, and porcupines, or anything that they were able to find and eat.

Around 1970, Laos began to fall apart because of the Vietnam War. Pa and the family swam across the Mekong River, fleeing into Laos for safety. Pa and the family including other Hmong families survived drowning in the river. They took a dangerous journey on foot once they reached land. During this time, Pa already had two boys and one girl. Pa would talk to them throughout the whole journey to keep their minds off anything bad. She would try to find fruits, such as bananas, and feed the kids instead of herself. When they reached the refugee camp, many families were divided to flee Laos or Thailand. Pa and her family—as well as her side of the family—decided to stick together and move to the United States. However, Long's side of the family refused to leave their country because of what they heard from families and friends about the difficulties of living in the United States; in addition, they knew learning how to speak English was hard.

When they finally reached the United States, Pa did not know she was pregnant with another baby. In 1989 she gave birth to a girl. They were able to stay with a relative in Bayview apartments. Having no money or a job, Pa and Long would search for worms at night in the middle of the rain and sell them for 99 cents each. Years later Pa and Long were able to find jobs, and the family grew with two daughters. Pa found an English tutor. Her speaking, reading, and writing skills began to improve. In 2000 Pa and Long were able to afford their first house for the family. Today, Pa Yang Thao still goes gardening and sews.

My relationship with my mom is so special that it is hard to describe what my mother and I have. Being raised by Pa Yang Thao, I felt like I was

living her life in Thailand. She taught me how to do chores when I was probably 10 years old so when I grew older I could take care of myself and know how to clean after myself. She forbade me to be close to any boys or men because she was afraid I might walk the same path she did. The one thing I know that my mom wants for me that she never had is to become successful, have a good education, and marry a man that has a loving family. I felt like I have failed, but at this moment I will change that feeling by being in the Odyssey Program. I will move forward to achieve my goal. One day when I walk up that stage on my graduation, I will see my mom's smile again.

Smiling through the Pain

By Lorraine Garrett

Afflicted, broken at times, she still stands strong as she is clothed with fearlessness and bravery. Her makeup sometimes changes when her afflictions arise, which causes her to be broken at times, yet she still stands strong in her faith and



trust in God. Jainyl Thompson is someone that I have had the pleasure of knowing for the last 33 years. She awakens in pain everyday, her eyes catching the morning sun that beams down on her as she wears a cooling vest to keep her from having an aspiration attack. Though stricken with multiple sclerosis, fibromyalgia, cancer of the jaw and glaucoma, she has found herself having to reach way down into the depths of her soul to find a smile of her own to display even when it's hard to find one on many days. She hangs her head with raindrop tears rolling down her face as she asks over and over again, why me?

As she fights to handle all this along with raising two beautiful little girls, she sometimes feels she is causing her children to suffer and make sacrifices that they never signed up for. I witness this woman's body go from a durable energized battery to weak unbalanced Jell-O stumbling over things as if she were drunk. I see she sustains the aches and pains that plague her weak body. Attacked by an aspiration of her MS, Jainyl has now discovered paralysis has consumed her right side of her body as if she had had a stroke, and pain beyond measure has accompanied her from the crown of her head to the soles of her feet from the fibromyalgia.

Through months of intense therapy and a determination to live, she pressed through all doubt and fears that challenged her until she was back up on her feet again, only to find yet another storm had been surfacing. Who would have thought that going to the dentist you would hear the word cancer? She did: cancer of the jaw, to be exact. Wow, I know just what you're thinking: how much more can this poor lady take? It was days before Christmas when the doctors found themselves cutting away at her jaw as though they were carving a turkey. They were able to get most of it but not all. Christmas is a time when you're supposed to enjoy your children's smiles of surprise as they open their gifts; a time of catching up, laughing with family and old friends.

Months have passed now and she gained her composure until she heard the word glaucoma, a disease that will in time cause blindness. I received a phone call telling me this was her diagnosis. At that time I remember telling her that God was setting her up for an awesome testimony, so that she could share with others how to make it through

a raging storm. She had to take pills to wake up in the morning, pills to give her strength to get out of bed each day, and pills to give her a temporary joy so that she wouldn't go crazy. Hebrews 11:1 says that faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. This is how she made it through when afflictions and brokenness would always seem to find her. Hope carried her as faith gave her insight on the many possibilities that lay before her. It also says in James 2:26 that faith without works is dead. Tell me, did you witness her faith? Did you see her strength?

Today I look at her and see that her strength has become her permanent wardrobe. Wow, what a sight to see! She wears it so beautifully. She is a woman that I truly admire not only for her will to live, but for her fight, faith, and trust in God. She lifts me up with her contagious smile that lets me know she's all right. To my beautiful daughter Jainyl, thank you, sweetie, for showing and teaching your mother what faith really is! I love you.

Hope amidst the Darkness

By Tatenda Bvindi

In the heart of a remote Zuze village in Rusape, Zimbabwe, whoever dreamt that Aunt Mona would manage to tackle all the challenges she was facing? It was like the story of Job: one tragedy after another, all seeming to happen in a short period of time.

The sickness and death of her husband left their family in despair. Her own health deteriorated, spreading unpleasant rumors in the village. With an uncertain future and five children looking at her as the breadwinner, she could only say, "The Lord of heaven will see me through the difficult times."

Aunt Mona had not realized that she had been married to an unfaithful husband. When Uncle Joe was diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, he did not disclose the outcome of the diagnosis. When he realized that he was carrying this killer disease, Uncle Joe lost hope and did not take his medication, which would have helped his deteriorating condition. As



a result, three months of his sickness were long enough to take his life. In his Zuze village, people believed that when a man gets sick the woman is to blame, and that if he dies, the wife has killed him. Aunt Mona refused to lose hope even when the whole clan was against her. She always prayed for them and asked God to clear their fogged minds so they could see reality. At the end of Joe's life, he confessed that he had been seeing other women. The confession was a great relief to Mona and a lesson to the community.

As kids, we cared less about what was happening in the village and tended to enjoy our own world. Maud, Mona's only daughter, was my age; we used to play games together, making their home my second playground. Their home was by the hillside with a natural, beautiful landscape. During summer time, it was a gorgeous place to take pictures if we had cameras to do so. On the east side of their house was a nice rocky slope where we used to slide till the sun hid its face from us when it was not our turn to take care of the animals or when done with our chores early.

For the three months that Uncle Joe had been

sick, he had not been working. This meant that there was no paycheck at the end of the month to supplement the family's financial needs. They had used the little money that they had saved to cover burial expenses, which left the family in a desperate financial situation. Now that all the responsibilities were left to her, she had to struggle to put food on the family table, find school fees, and clothe her five children. Her situation was quite depressing without any help. Because she was not employed, Aunt Mona had to look for a job before her children were forced to beg for food. Her determination to see her children lead a better future was for sure stronger than death. She easily found a job as a helper at a nearby clinic because she had worked in a hospital before. To ensure that her children had a variety of food to eat, she had a garden where she grew most of her vegetables. She gave each child a portion to work in the garden. They could sell some of the vegetables to help with books, pens and pencils. They were like bees making a honeycomb.

When Aunt Mona knew that she was HIV positive, instead of moaning herself to the grave, she took lessons on how to care for herself. Along with that, she took Prezista and other recommended medication to keep herself in better health. At some point when she overworked herself, her health began to deteriorate. Subsequently, she became prone to any kind of sickness. Some people in the village already had predicted when they would bury her. She did not let the gossip ruin her life. Instead, she was vitalized by the talk that had contaminated the village. Maybe because her own family, friends and community were afraid to catch her disease, they rejected her. Mona did not lose hope; she was determined to work and provide for her children.

The only words Aunt Mona can say now are, "The Lord of heaven has seen me through the difficult times." She has lived to see all her children grow and graduate from high school and college. She has been able to walk them down the aisle on their weddings, shouting glory to God who has sustained her. She has lived with this deadly disease for years because she had courage and hope even in the darkest pits she was in. Aunt Mona has become a role model to her own family and community, teaching those in similar circumstances how they can live with this dreadful disease even when it



feels like parched trees in the desert with no hope to bear fruit again.

Ms. Brown: A Soulful Woman of Style and Grace

By Hedi Rudd

Ms. Brown doesn't take any mess from anyone. She tells it like it is with love and affection, and she doesn't suffer fools. She can whup your behind, while loving you at the same time. She is my grandma by choice, hers and mine. My grandma welcomed us into her bosom as if she birthed us herself. She wasn't my dad's mother either; she was his aunt. My whole life I remember her being a constant. A homeowner, a hard worker, and a woman of style and grace, she became my role model.

My mom and dad met when I was nine months old. At that time, my mom's family was at odds with her for having me by a Mexican migrant worker. When my mom had my sister with my



dad, Lavelle Rudd, who was African American, they completely shut her out of the family. My mom had one more child who was also bi-racial, by another man. It was my grandma who stepped up and helped my mom raise my sisters and me after my parents separated. She opened her home to us several times when we were homeless or in dire straits. I remember my grandma being very protective of me. When I went to school, she would pick me up, and if anyone made comments to me she would chastise them. This happened frequently when I first went to the middle school in her neighborhood, as my school was exclusively African American and I was an easy target, being that I wasn't. My classmates soon figured out I was her granddaughter, and people left me alone and gave me respect. Eventually, I had fewer problems as people accepted me on the block, and they were as protective of me as my grandma. I learned that while her neighborhood appeared dangerous, there was a lot of love on that block. Once you were accepted, people would always have your back.

When my father's own mother abandoned him as a child and the welfare agency began looking for a family member to care for him, my grandma stepped in and took in her sister's son. She welcomed him into her home and raised him as her own. He frequently told me the story of her coming to pick him up from the bus station. She walked in wearing a beautiful red dress, embraced him, and took him home. As he grew older, he was rebellious and got into trouble, often going to jail for petty crimes. Rather than turn her back or send him away, she stood by his side until he got it out of his system. He would eventually turn to larger crimes and end up in prison. Again, she visited him and made sure that his children were cared for while he was incarcerated. She never judged him; she simply accepted him as he was and gave him the love he needed.

What I love most about my grandmother is that she never relies on others to support her and she is classy. I remember as a child that she worked at JC Penney and at a local tavern cooking catfish dinners and spaghetti. When she went to work, she took pride in her dress and the work she did, making sure she was on time and never taking a day off. At the tavern she was no nonsense; people



respected her and knew she was not the one to mess with. When she went to run errands or pay bills, she took us with her, not because she wanted to be bothered with us, but to show us how things got done. Everyone on the block calls her Ms. Brown and respects her as one of the few homeowners remaining since she moved there over 35 years ago. Grandma taught me how to be a lady, about personal hygiene and fashion, and most importantly how to mind my own business. To this day, I pride myself on my appearance, not out of vanity, but because I was taught that is how a lady conducts herself. It was the high standards that she instilled in me that helped me to see that in spite of my mom's family not wanting me, I was worthy.

When I think of a woman I admire, Ms. Climmie Brown's face always pops into my mind first. While my birth "grandmother" abandoned our family, my grandma never turned her back on us. When my father needed a mother, she didn't hesitate to go the distance as any mother would and put up with his rebellion. On her own, without fanfare, she taught a young woman how to be a lady. She showed that despite what others may think, it is possible to rise to your potential. I am fortunate to have had such a wise and loving woman in my life. Having her as my grandma is even better.

To Know Her Is to Love Her

By Marcia Brown

On September 4, 1920, Margaret Marilyn Miller graced this world with her presence. She was born in Helena, Arkansas, to Emanuel Fred and Nora Johnson Miller. Her parents were blessed to make the acquaintance of their first and only child. With the death of both her parents, Margaret was adopted at the age of 13 by her mother's sister, Fannie Johnson, and moved to Chicago, Illinois. She graduated from Du Sable High School in 1941. The caption under her yearbook picture read, "To know her is to love her." Margaret raised six children practically on her own and was an enthusiastic community activist



and strict disciplinarian. My mother was a loving, compassionate person and an awesome parent.

My mother, Margaret Miller, met my father, Lawrence Brown, in 1952, and they were married on April 25, 1953. My parents were blessed with six children: five daughters and one son. I am the second oldest child. When my father abandoned the family in the early seventies, my mother became a single parent. Oh, what a single parent she was! She was very strict. As children, we were not able to go outside to play until she came home from work. After we finished our homework, we would look out of our third floor apartment window, anxious to see her walking into the building, anticipating the sound of the key turning the lock to our front door. After she checked our homework for errors, if it was correct, we were allowed to go outside to play. When the street lights illuminated, that was our cue to start heading home. We weren't allowed to play with certain kids because of their behavior. My



mother enforced a 9 PM curfew weekdays and 11 PM curfew weekends when we were teenagers. We were required to attend Sunday school or morning church service on Sundays. My mother was a stickler on grammar. While listening to me inform her of a certain event that transpired during my day, she would correct my grammar in the middle of the story. On Sundays after dinner, my mother took me and my siblings on CTA buses and trains to different parts of Chicago. This gave me a sense of direction of how to get to different locations in the city and how to return home.

My mother loved working with children and in the community. She would go door to door collecting donations for "The March of Dimes." She was the first person in our apartment building to open a day care center. She started a cooking and sewing class that took place in the social room in our apartment building. My mother attended Wilson and Loop Junior Colleges in Chicago. With her background in Child and Elementary Education, she became a Teacher's Aide at Coleman and John M. Smyth Elementary Schools. My mother was a trailblazer for the fight against the act of bullying. If children were fighting on the school grounds, my mother would take it upon herself to break them up. She would get their names and report them to the principal of the school and sometimes to their parents.

My mother belonged to many professional, civic, and social organizations. She was the President of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) at Ludwig van Beethoven Elementary School where my siblings and I attended. She was a member of the Municipal Employees Society of Chicago; the Women's Auxiliary of the Foreign Wars (VFW); the Du Sable 41ers, and the Dorcas Art and Charity Club. She also sang in the True Light Baptist Church Choir.

I honor and respect my mother for the good moral qualities she instilled in me as a child. Had she not been a strict disciplinarian, I could have been a teenage mother. I get my strong, unwavering belief in God because I was raised in the church. I attribute my moral, ethical, and social qualities to my mother's ability to persevere from the obstacles in her life to raise six children on her own.

My mother died on February 26, 1989. Her death

affected her family, friends and the community. I was living in San Francisco when I got the sad news of her death. I cried and broke down when the plane approached Chicago. As soon as I saw the sparkling city lights, I thought, "This will be my first time in Chicago that I won't get to talk with my mama." There were not enough seats for people to sit down at her afternoon funeral service. People had to stand along the back wall and out the front door. My family and I were in awe of some of the people who came to help celebrate her life. Upon extending their condolences, many mourners expressed their love and appreciation for my mother. Reverend Winfield Phillips delivered her eulogy. He stated in his ending, "To have known her is to have loved her."

Grandmother of the Community

By Abraham Thomas

My grandmother, Annie May Hillman, was a fun-loving, interesting woman who had many talents, but there were three essential qualities that deeply secured my family's love and support for her. First of all, she was a great cook.

Every morning at breakfast, the long dining table was occupied with a family member or a neighbor. These times were very special because I would get to meet many people of the community and on many occasions find myself standing on her side being praised; yes, I was my granny's heart. It was at the breakfast table where I learned who a man named Mr. Hope was, and how much power and influence he had in the small rural community of Daleville, Alabama. My grandma took her duty preparing to cook very seriously, including making an early morning trip to the hen house to gather eggs for breakfast. Before we exited the back door of the house, like a clock Clyde the rooster would always put on a show. "Urc! Urc! Urc!" he would screech. At this time Granny would grab a pail filled with food scraps, stand on the porch, and yell, "Here, bitty bitty bitty!" Like magic, all the farm animals who had their liberty would rush toward the





door in a blitz to eat those food scraps. After getting fresh milk and gathering some figs, we headed back to the kitchen to prepare breakfast for family members and guests who would arrive like a Swiss watch. One day, curious as a small child would be, I asked my grandma why she cooked for all those people every day. In her loving way she sat with me on that long front porch and explained why Mr. Hope and all the other people visited our home all the time.

It was at this point I learned that the huge house with all the rooms and the land with pecan trees, corn, watermelon patches, and all the common farm animals, our warm friendly home, was sitting on the property of Mr. Hope. It was a plantation house, and my grandmother earned money cooking for many people at breakfast time. In some strange way, this made me feel proud of this adoring, likeable, and energetic woman. Now I understood. This hardworking woman was not just my grandmother but the grandmother to the entire community.

Second, my grandmother was a deeply spiritual woman. She could feel the wind blow in a certain way on a beautiful sunny day and mention a storm was near, and true to her word, that day it would rain. I remember one evening after dinner we all gathered in the living room. It was mom and my brothers, Ike and James, my uncles, aunts, my

cousin Trina, and Grandpa--14 members of the family in all. Grandma exited the kitchen by the back door and down the hall to her bedroom. When she returned, she was wearing her shawl over her shoulders and her slippers and a long house dress, and she sat down in her huge rocking chair. On the floor was a huge tin metal can that she would use for disposing of her chew. My Aunt Tootsie, her youngest daughter, was always the one to adjust Grandma's chair for comfort with a pillow behind Grandma's back. After several verbal exchanges between the family members, Granny slowly rocked and smiled at everyone. She seemed to be pleased with us all. After a short while, Grandma began speaking about our connection to each other and the bond that we all had with God. The Lord is our savior, and many in her day would not have survived the times without His spirit in them. Grandma would remind her children often to read her grandchildren the Lord's Prayer and the 23rd Psalm. In my view, she was a clear example of what womanhood is and should be: family.

Third, my grandma truly loved and adored me as her youngest grandchild. To have such a kind, sweet, fun-loving person in my life helped shape how I look at the world and people and their reason for being. To me, that's the best essential quality of all my grandmother's love.

My grandmother's love was the center of my family, and she loved us all with a purpose. She helped me understand what some attributes of a strong woman are. Today many of the strengths of womanhood have been replaced with personal goals which are essential to the happiness of many. But in my opinion the woman with the love for family first will always shape the present and inspire a healthy future in the community for us all.

My Strong Mother By Marilyn Johnson

My profile of a woman with courage would have to be of my mother: Lillie Mae Beatrice Monroe Johnson. She was a mother of 14 children. It took courage for her to have been married three times.





She pretty much raised her kids by herself until she married my dad. Four of my siblings died; there are seven daughters and three sons. I choose to profile my mother because raising ten children takes a lot of courage. Everyone in the neighborhood called my mother “mom.” Growing up, if the neighbors saw you in trouble they were allowed to whip you, and when your parents were told what you did wrong your parents whipped you too. That was then. Today, people will kill you for whipping their children. My mother was an excellent cook. When she cooked for us, she cooked like she was cooking for an army. She was a strong woman, wife, mother, and grandmother.

I remember one dish my mother cooked that we loved: it was a soup she would prepare. She would get out a big pot and put water in it with soup meat and crowder peas. She would let that cook for about an hour and a half. Then she would cut up some fresh okra, season it, and fry it. She would drain the grease off the okra and put it in the pot. Then she would slice some red tomatoes, season and fry them, drain them, and put them in the pot. Then she would let it cook until it made its own gravy. She

would call this dish a soup, maybe because of the Mississippian in her, but I call it gumbo. She would cook a pan of cornbread. For dessert she baked us an Upside down Seven Up cake. That was a family recipe, and she wouldn’t tell us or our neighbors the secret. It was gooooooood!

Even though there were ten of us, she kept us in line. When we were told to do something, she only told us once and we did it. You see, she’d have this look on her face that we knew we better make a move, and quick. There was no talking back either, not to her and also not to the neighbors. . . .

My mother was the only daughter in a family with nine brothers. As a grandmother she stood out. She did anything and everything for our children, spoiling them rotten. My mom worked at Hienz’s Hospital in Chicago for 17 years. She saved money so when her grandchildren needed anything all they had to do was go to her. My mother taught us a lot, particularly me. My mother was always giving: she would give you anything she had if you asked her for it. She was a kind-hearted person. What I most admire about my mother is that she made sure my four brothers could cook and clean a house as well as her daughters could. I truly appreciate my mother for bringing us up in church.

In conclusion, my mother had to be strong. She did what any mother would do to raise their children. I followed in her footsteps raising my children, and I got the same remarks from my children that I gave my mom. I know that she raised us the best she knew how, and I appreciate that. I told her I respect her. She did all any parent could do, which is their best. I love and miss my mother.

My Best Friend By Billie O. Kelsey

My best friend Katie means the world to me. We met when we were 18 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and bonded over music. I love the support we provide for each other and the instant rapport and empathy between us when life gets hard or when things are great. For instance, as we





matured as young adults we listened to each other while we worked through personal growth issues. Sometimes we provided advice, other times just a different perspective. As we grew into young adults we shared similar interests in our spiritual paths, and now as mature women who parent children, we support each other's growth and struggles from a common spiritual base. I advised her on getting her husband's support in weaning as well as how to think about her child in the process. She has listened and continues to listen to me and has helped me think about the various relationships I have been in. We have no agenda towards each other; we just want the other to be happy. Her love of the earth and the outdoors and her sense of play connect with mine and let me know we are one.

Katie was a musician and music lover when we met, and we bonded over our current interest in punk rock music. We would ride our bikes all over Milwaukee to go to male-dominated venues in rundown clubs or seemingly abandoned warehouses, jumping up and down and slam dancing to really loud music until 3 a.m. We also drank a fair amount of tequila and developed a taste for Antony and Cleopatra cigarillos.

As our lives expanded in various other directions, we shared our new interests with each other. She took drum lessons with the African dance troupe Kho~Thi and encouraged me to buy a drum and join too, which I did. I started learning yoga and encouraged her to do so as well, which she did.

We took Kung Fu classes together, and I attended a Tai Chi class with her where I met a very old Kai Chi and Kung Fu master who was an original student of the first Master of the Shaolin Temple. Master Yin was his name. We shared meditation books, new music, and new foods. Even though we didn't plan to, we both got pregnant when we were 30.

As a parent, she has been a positive role model for her children and others. Her love of music is

present in her parenting (she has a small recording studio and various instruments in the house), her volunteer work teaching music to incarcerated youth, her performances in her own band, and when she plays bass guitar in her son's fourth grade orchestra. Katie teaches her children the importance of environmental stewardship through various outdoor activities such as removing invasive species and maintaining a garden and prairie. She and her family exchange letters with as well as send money to young women in India so they may have an education.

I admire my best friend for who she is. I know how deeply she cares for those in her life. I am proud to be able to claim her as part of my chosen family.

An Impressive Woman **By Jesse Hamilton**

My grandmother is outgoing, family-oriented, and tough. My grandmother has lived through and been around more adversity than anyone I have ever known. She has seen the changes of times and personalities of the world through her own eyes. Not only is she my hope but a pillar of faith to the next generation





of my family. She has created and made a path to success like no one I know from the past or future.

My grandmother is outgoing because of what she does for her family. She sends a birthday card every year to every person living in my family, and she's never late. If you can remember ever single person's birthday and send them a card in the mail, that's definitely impressive and loving. I wish I could be as outgoing as my grandmother in every way in life because it is not easy at her age to still focus that hard on family. She has the heart of every family member and person she encounters day to day.

My grandmother is family-oriented in so many ways. She makes sure the family gets together for every holiday. She also holds the family gatherings at her house. She has her house open for any family member who needs a place to stay. If anything happens in your life where you need a boost, she's there. She is the definition of being family-oriented.

My grandmother is one of the toughest women you will ever meet due to her upbringing. She experienced periods of segregation, drugs, and gangs in the time she was growing up in Chicago. She had to protect her five-bedroom home with a

gun and the help of my grandfather before he passed away. My grandmother sometimes rides the bus or walks to her destination because she won't allow anyone to tell her she can't do it because of age or her body not being in good condition. Is this tough or what?

My feelings toward my grandmother are deeper than any ocean. My love for her runs endless. She is my guide and the light in my life. I hope and pray the world can be as loving, strong, and focused on life as my impressive grandmother. She has the key to every door that has closed in my life. She never gives up on anything because she has the gift of being around for many years, never stopping the cycle of success. She has my utmost respect as a person handling life's daily tests. She has passed every obstacle possible and still smiles with the joy of being around her family. That's all she needs in life: her family.

My Aunt Betty Burns By Michele Withers

"You don't mess with Betty Burns!" This was the slogan of a strong and courageous soul. This small town, big-hearted farm girl made many changes to nursing as we know it today and raised a family while at the same time strengthening a town and traveling the world over.



Taking care of people was tantamount to being alive for Betty Burns. Even at a young age, she dreamed of changes she would make in the world as a nurse. Betty would tell stories of how she bandaged up her dolls and took care of them. In her high school yearbook (Hilbert, Wisconsin, 1949), several of her classmates wished her luck in her nursing career. She was discouraged from going to nursing school. No one knows the real reason, but we might assume several: she was the baby of the family, the family had no money, and no one else had gone to college. Betty was determined to become a nurse! She continued to advocate for herself by graduating from high school and then from St. Agnes (now Marion University). Shortly



after being married, she and her husband settled in the small town of Mt. Horeb, Wisconsin. This made it possible for her to care for her sick mother and begin her family.

While raising her family, Betty also took care of the whole town. The phone was always ringing with people calling to see if Aunt Betty could come check this or that if someone was sick or injured.



There were always accidents in front of the house, so she was always tending to people there. This was all before rescue services were in Mt. Horeb. At one point a boy got a very bad bee sting, and he was allergic. At that time it was only legal for doctors, not nurses or EMTs, to inject patients with anything. Betty risked her entire nursing career to give what was needed to save his life. She did this because she cared and knew he would not survive the ambulance ride to Madison without it. Near the end of her life, she would call the village officials to inform

them of the bad cracks in the sidewalks left behind when they built the roundabout by her house. She didn't want anybody to hurt themselves. The officials responded with, 'It's OK. If someone does hurt themselves, you'll be here to care for them.' Betty was put on this earth to care for her family and the whole town, and the whole town knew and appreciated it.

Betty was a voracious reader. Through reading she would travel the world. Books on cooking were a favorite of hers. Betty loved to cook and try recipes from all over the world. "Damn, I'm a good cook!" she would say at the end of a meal. She was known to remind family and friends, "If you feed people a lot of good food, they won't notice the dust." With having six children and many relatives always visiting the house, Betty always offered many savory meals. Throughout her life, she had always wanted to write a memoir. "I've got stuff to say," she used to say. We all believed her.

Betty fought cancer for many years. Unfortunately, her fight came to an end. Shortly after she passed away, the family received a letter from the mother of the boy with the bee sting. The mother sent a letter stating that she always considered Betty Burns her family's Guardian Angel because of what she did to save his life.

Mama Dear

By Yolanda Cunningham

My mother has always been my light in life since I entered the world. Her spirituality, dedication to motherhood, and love were above superior.

The first spiritual lesson she taught me was from St. John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever shall believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." My mother instilled the Bible in us and made its lessons the head of our household. She was a Sunday school teacher and missionary in the Church of God in Christ in Milwaukee. She led the singing with her favorite praise song, "What More Can He Do?" In our house we had prayer three times a day and church three times a week.

My mother was a very courageous and dedicated mother. Midway in my mother's marriage, problems began between my father and her. Separation took its course. There were seven children, and my mother was left alone to raise us in this world. She worked as a CNA at Milwaukee Children's Hospital to support us. We were poor but happy kids. Two brothers went off to Vietnam. She endured with patience waiting for their safe return home. Many, many times I heard her say, "I'm leaving!" yet she remained there for us. She gave directions in life to ensure peace for us all. She humbly trusted in the Lord to get us through. Because she never got an education herself, she instilled in me the values of speech and communication. "The dictionary is almost a Bible. You need to keep it in your backpack at all times," she told me. As a mother, she was a jewel in disguise. I didn't know the worth of what I had in my beautiful mother.

"Whatever you do, do it in love," my mother said. When there were arguments or problems, she would always say, "Wherever you go, always carry love. Let people always know you as love." I felt her love through her long hugs, her smile, and her eyes. Even a look from her eyes spoke into my spirit. Her arms were the only arms that gave me



security. Love is how I remember Mama Dear.

Although my mother has been gone for 21 years, her memories will always rest in my heart. I miss her so much. I carry her picture with me daily on the outside of my Odyssey binder. Her face keeps me motivated every time I want to quit. If I could obtain anything that my mother possessed, it would be her priceless wisdom. Because of all that she did for me in my life, I am a better person today. The things my mother didn't get a chance to do, such as becoming a youth minister, earning a college degree, and expressing love through poetry, I'll do them for her and for me.



Strong in Tough Times

By Kenya Moses

"Women have to be strong in tough times," are famous words of Miss Ruth Esther Martin, my great-grandmother. My great-grandmother is an awesome woman full of strength, might, and life. She is about 87 years old and still very healthy and active.

Ruth Ann raised a total of nine children by herself. Ruth Ann owned a farm at one point in time, and that's where she raised nine children, only one of whom belonged to her; the other eight kids were the children of my grandmother Bronzilla Moses. By the time Bronzilla Moses was 30 years old, she was dead, so my great-grandma had to raise all eight children plus her own. Bronzilla died from breast cancer; she had a lump in her breast and didn't tell her doctor until it was too late. Ruth Ann took all the children into her home. Going from raising one child to nine was a big change, so big of a change that it changed my great-grandma into an alcoholic/abuser. My great-grandma would beat the children for just about anything. All the children were afraid to open up and talk to her. On one occasion, my great-grandma hit my mom in the



head with an iron. My then-17-year-old mom had come along with a baby.

Ruth Ann was sorry but her anger seemed to overpower her; she continued to drink but not to the point of being unable to cook a meal. Ruth Ann was an excellent cook when she wasn't angry. Ruth Ann would show the children how to cook, sew, and make homemade medicine. Eventually she got her drinking under control and managed to raise all nine of her grandchildren. My great-grandma is a brave woman because I remember when I visited her as a young child she bought my mom groceries and gave excellent advice. She wasn't the best grandma but she did what she had to do! In the end she was a better great-grandmother! Ruth Ann had the courage to get clean and try again. She is still alive. Little Miss Spitfire, Ruth Ann Esther Martin, is my great-grandmother.

Out of the Cave

By Samantha East

This profile is about one of the former Odyssey classmates, Edwina Robinson. She is my mother-in-law, and her story is about addiction. Odyssey helped her self-esteem, and it changed her way of thinking.



I believe there is a God because no man has been able to change her. She has been clean for almost three years, and she keeps herself busy. She is a mother and grandmother. She chairs meetings, sponsors others, and does service work with people with the same addiction.

She enrolled in the Odyssey program for 2010-2011. I watched her study and write papers. Many times she would say she was too old, not good enough with her education to keep up with her class. Emily, Jean, and Coach helped her to stay in school. She found out she liked Socrates and could compare the Allegory of the Cave to her life. I watched her grow from that.

She does not believe anymore that she is too old and unteachable. Her belief is that she can do anything if she tries. Being in Odyssey, she learned to respect other ideas, people, and cultures. She





takes these lessons that she has learned and passes them on to her grandchildren and community.

Her conclusion to all this is, “Your past is your past, and it doesn’t dictate your future; you do.” She takes the teachings of Socrates and applies them to her life. “Don’t believe everything you hear,” she says. “You have to get up and out of the cave and find the truths for yourself.”

A Courageous Woman **By Beatriz Mairena-Kellman**

My mother raised nine children of her own and also one stepson and one grandchild. She had to be strong, courageous, and independent. She had to work very, very hard. She also had to manage the budget. These are some examples of my mother’s strength, courage, and independence.

She had to go to the hospital by herself to deliver some of her babies while my father was away working. My father was a fisherman and came home every three or four weeks. When he worked out of town in

Chincha, Peru, it took him several days to come home. When it was time for my mother to deliver her babies, she told me that there was some rice, beans, bread, and chicken soup with vegetables, enough for almost three days for feeding my younger brothers and sisters. She also asked me to send them to school while she was in the hospital. I felt sad when she left for the hospital and was so happy when she got back.

My mother worked very, very hard. I think most women cannot imagine what my mom had to do. She washed a lot of clothes by hand. She had to carry water in pots from six blocks away to our house. She used to finish washing clothes after dark. We were little kids. We couldn’t help her because we would have to cross a main avenue to carry the water to our home. My mother cooked three times every day. It was always food fresh from the market. My mother washed a lot of dishes and also bathed us. She got us ready to go to school. Some of us went to school in the morning, other siblings in the afternoon. She made all the arrangements for us. She participated in some projects in our schools and talked with our teachers about our progress. As a child I wished I could spend more time with my mother playing, walking, reading, laughing, and hugging more often.

My mother had to manage the budget of the family. The money came from my father’s and later my older brother’s wages. She was very wise in spending the money. She planned very inexpensive but nutritious food. She bought inexpensive clothes



for us. Despite her efforts, she was always short. When my older brother Jorge was a 14-year-old student, he worked delivering newspapers before he went to school in the morning. He spent part of that income to help my mother during hard times.

I consider my mother to be a courageous, strong, and independent woman. She worked very hard to raise her children, a stepson, and a grandchild. My mother is a good model for all of us. She taught good values and love. She maintained a united family. I learned from my mother how important it is for a mother to be there for her children. Thank you, Mom. I love you very much!

Who Inspires Me?

By Shaquida Johnson

The woman who inspires me the most to write freely on in this paper is amazing, kind-hearted, and strong because she has gone through the struggle of being homeless. She used to stay in a two-bedroom apartment with five other family members who used drugs and didn't have jobs; people were running in and out. She went from home to home paying people money to rent for space that was not worth it, yet she still was able to hold a job down. Before giving birth to her son, she was told that there was a 90% chance that he wasn't going to live due to being premature and having a disease called CMV. She was given a C-section and the baby was hospitalized for a month and a half while needing intensive support.

I really take my hat off because I know a lot of young mothers who give birth without planning on taking care of their child but just to receive a government check. She is a young mother who has been there since the day her son arrived, from getting up in the wee hours, taking him to the first day of daycare, or being there three years later filled with joy to see what the next 20 years will bring. She is also furthering her education by taking a double major in college and working on her Associate's degree. She seeks help out any time of the day and night. She goes to work at 7 AM till 10 AM, then heads to her second job from 2 PM till

6 PM, then off to her third shift from 10 PM till 2 AM.

It puts a smile on my face to find someone as kind-hearted as she is. Instead of directing a friend to the shelter, she welcomes them into her home. I know a lot of people who pass by homeless people who are holding signs saying "Feed the Poor. Will Work for Free." Others keep rolling by, but not her.

I keep bringing up the age factor because it's unbelievable a woman so young who has gone through so much is as capable and determined as she is to succeed in life. She is so determined to have the best for her son and herself and to be able to have a better future. She has set goals, has reached them, and is still reaching for the stars; there are no limits with her. It is outstanding that she is keeping her son involved in the action of learning. She wants to have him grow up in the world without having him use the black card as an excuse but to use it instead as a determination to want to do better. "Incredible" is the word that spills



out because she is working on getting to a place in her life where she has that nice three-bedroom house or condo that is nicely furnished, a picket fence, her own backyard, and just a place in life where she is living comfortably. I guess she knows what is on the other side: success.

I write about this independent, incredible, go-getter woman, ME! There is no limit to what I can do, where I'm going, and what I have already been through. I am a fighter.

Evangelist Ollie Brown Donals, "Mama Bear"

By Juba Moten

Evangelist Ollie Brown Donald: who is she? She is a dearly loved church official who began her relationship with God in 1971 as a member of the church. That status changed quickly as she soared into the ministry exercising strong faith and good works, later becoming an active student of theology. Ollie, at the early adult age of 18, began her journey in life as a mother to her firstborn son, the eldest of six children who all view her as Mama Bear.

Born June 26, 1943, in Chicago, Illinois, Ollie Brown grew up among five siblings with Grand Mama Bear, whom we called "Nana." Nana was forced to raise Ollie and her siblings



singlehandedly. They struggled financially but were a very close-knit family. Despite their poverty, they were rich in love, and because of this they had it all: peace, joy, and happiness more often than not. Ollie went on to

do everything in her power to instill the value of love in her own children. She knew that without love, we, her loving cubs, were bound to fall apart. Whenever we argued, disagreed, or even fought one another, Mama Bear would discipline us by having us give the other a hug and kiss and say "I love you" to each other. She also would include the reading of Love Scriptures from the Bible.

Mama Bear's technique in planting the gracious seed of love in each of her cubs was unique because she combined a mixture of her own upbringing, teachings of love from Nana, and the things she began to learn from the church. It is here that Mama Bear would become a choir member, giving vocal glory to God. She received her minister's license in the mid-1970s, around the same time that she founded a Christian-based boys club for teenagers bearing the church's name: "New Jerusalem Temple Boys Club." This is a club that men in their fifties talk about today with rave reviews. She supported the congregation of the church with her spirit-filled sermons and filled the elementary kids' hearts with joy through sweet Sunday school teachings. Whenever the church faced any financial crisis, she didn't hesitate to contribute. Mama Bear was obedient to her heavenly father in all ways.

Though Mama Bear was often busy with church affairs, she minded her own territory, never harming anyone. Her desire was to teach her cubs wisdom, knowledge, and understanding for better guidance to assist us in navigating successfully through life, using the Scriptures as a solid foundation and then by way of action. For example, she has never shown us anything but positivity through reading and prayer.

Recently Mama Bear, the head of early Saturday morning prayer service for six years, brought more lives to Christ praying for and healing the sick. She also is presently in hot pursuit of an Associate's Degree in Theology. We are all proud of our Mama Bear and will remember one of her grandest teachings: "There's always somebody worse off than you, so always be grateful." Oh, how we love Mama Bear!



Woman of God By Eugene Smalls

The thing I love about my wife the most is the God on the inside of her. She reminds me of the great women of the Bible such as Phebe.

My wife, Beth, is always looking for ways to help someone who is struggling or suffering. She is always at church seeking whom she can help out, whether it's someone who needs a ride to and from church or someone in the hospital who needs to hear a word of encouragement or have



someone simply sit down and hold their hand or read the Bible to them.

There was once a sister at the church who had heart surgery. Beth would take time out of her already busy day to make a full-course meal and take it to this sister. She would have fellowship with her before she had to head off to work. I think that type of self-sacrificing attitude is amazing. My wife has a physically demanding job working at the Walgreen's Distribution Center.

Here's what Apostle Paul said in Romans 16:1-2 about Phoebe: "I commend unto you Phebe, our sister, which is a servant of the Church. That ye receive her in the Lord as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you; for she hath been a succourer (helper) of many and of myself also."

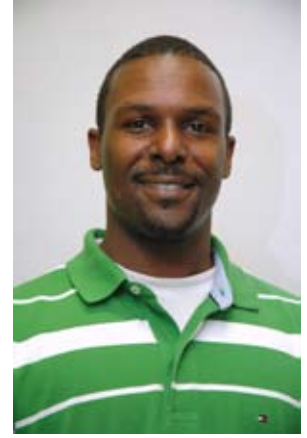
A Special Woman of Courage By Terry Hart

Whenever I think about courage, I think of my mother. My mother is one of the most loving, caring, and understanding women I've ever come to know.

My mother's name is Regina Hart. She was born and raised in Middletown, Ohio. . . . Ever since I can remember, my mother has tried her very best to raise my brothers, sister, and me to be the very best we can be in life. She also wanted us to be very honest and humble. It was essential to her to keep us involved with other kids and other activities. Also she made it a norm for all of us to have self-esteem. But mainly she would tell us to believe in ourselves and our abilities. It was important to her for us to dream. Daily she would ask us our goals and also what we wanted to be in life. It was hard for us not to have goals. Regina Hart was and always will be a special woman in my life. My mom gave us the tangible and intangible things one needs to succeed in life. . . .

My mother made it a personal goal to give us all the tools we would need to succeed in life. When it came to personal sacrifice, she displayed it with grace. She loved playing kickball, baseball, basketball, and any other activity with us. While we were having fun, she was providing us with tips on how to be great. All of my friends growing up loved my mother. Everyone would always ask to stay the night and also just to come over and play. My mom would gladly say yes. I would like to express the fond love of acting my mom had. When she was a young girl, her parents encouraged her to try out in plays at school and church. My mom used this as motivation to let us know never to be shy and mostly be yourself. It wasn't easy growing up in the 80s with four kids, on assistance, and trapped in the projects. However, she made us always laugh and mostly feel loved. I think personally that she felt that she owed us in life for her to be at her best every day.

I remember her Sunday meals after we got out of church. She loved to decorate and make the house





look so festive. Once we arrived home from church, she would warm up all of the food she prepared the night before. First, she would set the table and then lay out all of the food. My sister was her first assistant. My mom would bake a ham; then she would make potato salad with sliced boiled eggs on top. The macaroni was baked with three different cheeses. The green beans had bacon bits, and the corn bread was so soft it would melt in your mouth. When everything was ready, we would sit down and say a warm prayer before we ate.

My mother was never afraid to discipline us anywhere. She would say she's teaching us a lesson. Many times she would spank us, but mostly it was a verbal lashing she would give us. It was crucial for her to display instant discipline. She also made it a point that we store this event for future reference. Being a coach was a motto of hers. She wanted total control of us and she had it. As long as I can remember, my mother preached education. We would work on multiplication and reading and writing. Her little pop quizzes were usually worth 25 cents. I remember her asking us questions on the way to school. All of our spelling was taught in rhythm.

My mother loves us all and tells us daily. I've never really taken anything she's said to me for

granted. But at times, if I would have used her method, I would have succeeded. Now I find myself many years later referring back to my childhood. My mother has been so helpful to me all of my life. When I told her I was in the University of Wisconsin Odyssey Project, tears and a big smile followed. We hugged and again she told me she was very proud of me. She also told me to be yourself, and that's a great young man. Be great, be special, and apply yourself. She told me to consume myself with my schoolwork and never give up. I told my mother how much I loved her and appreciated her. We hugged and then I kissed her on her cheek. Before I left her home, I told her she's always motivated, and I get my courage from her!

My Hardworking Mother **By Donta Starr**

My hardworking mother spread every drop of her love with no time for herself to spare, and still she gave her all every chance she had. She was also a strong-spirited woman always keeping her spirits up along with her kids and family members. Plus my mother was a great cook: she could get down in the kitchen and make some good, good food. She was also a real big sports fan who liked all sports plus could play them herself. She would get up early, tired from yesterday's hard work, barking orders, handing out clothes with lunches, always saying, "See you later" instead of "Good bye," knowing most of us wouldn't see her until she got off from her 9-12 hour shift. Every day she was chasing kids, meeting



with parents, even sometimes taking on odd jobs in between all of this like cooking for people's birthdays, washing and doing their hair, and also washing clothes of her kids or friends of the family. She was always hard at work.

She was the mother of eight children and loved them dearly, me being the youngest. I can remember moving to Madison, Wisconsin, around 1989. We lived in the Salvation Army. It was like a family shelter for single mothers, but she made the best of it. Sometimes when I was hungry and crying, she would tell me it's okay and fix us some grilled cheese sandwiches on a clothes iron so we could eat. Sometimes she didn't eat until the next day to make sure we got enough.

Sometime after the Salvation Army is when she started working at the center now called the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County. She worked hard and made an okay living but was still poor. She would sometimes bring kids from her job home to eat with us if she knew they had it hard at home. She even moved one of my friends and my sister's friend in with us until their parents got off drugs. There were ten kids now, and she was still giving her all every day. So what I'm saying is that you single mothers should keep your heads up and stay strong because there's hard work ahead. Support each other like a steel rod planted into the soil because giving up is not an option. Your love is needed, so keep loving—like Loretta M. Walker—with all your heart to raise the best man or woman you can.

My mom would write poems to keep her spirits up and watch funny things on TV or talk about the good old days when she was a little girl and their house got blown away in a tornado and they all survived. It would make her smile. Then she would tell us how they would pick pecans and play in the grass with handmade Barbies and mud pies. She also kept my spirits up. I would have a bad day at school, and my mother would ask me what's wrong. I would tell her that I hate school and that I can hardly read, but she would tell me everybody's not the same and you're different for a reason. If you practice it will pay off. Then she would read me a poem that helped me deal with my problem and made me feel better about myself, like one that tells you that everybody grows differently, mind, body,



and soul, so baby ya'll be okay. Pick your head up and keep it moving. One day my mother's friend came over with a busted ugly caramel cake for her son coming home from the Army. She was crying tears that seemed like they would never stop. My mother showed her how to cook a caramel cake. She was still crying and losing her breath. My mom asked her, "Why are you still crying?" She told my mother it was because she's happy. Then they started singing an old song repeating "because I'm happy." When my mom's friend left our house, she was happy because a friend had raised her spirit. It showed that if you were down and my mother was around, she would give her best try to raise your spirit.

My mother was also a great cook. She would make the greatest caramel cake. It was mouth-watering sweet but not so sweet that you wouldn't want more. The cake had a pretty, glowing caramel glaze that made you want a nice piece all to yourself. She showed me how to make the caramel. It's a secret, just like her sweet potatoes cut like sliced potatoes and sweet like candy when you smelled them you wanted the lid to stay off, but she would tell you if you asked, "They have to cook that way so just wait." Most of my mother's food was made from scratch, like her biscuits and

her flapjacks. We would eat flapjacks with brown beans, pork 'n beans, and lima beans. The flapjacks were tasty, and we used them to soak up the juice from the beans. I loved my mother's food. I really disliked when I had to cook for myself or other people's food because she had me hooked on home cooking like a kid in a candy store.

My mom loved to play sports like basketball and baseball. She would also watch football, and her team was the Packers. My mom showed me how to play basketball. She had the sweetest jump shot. It would pop the net most of the time; it would touch nothing but net without touching the rim. She would tell me to follow through and flick my wrist when shooting the basketball. After I learned how to shoot, she would block my shot because I knew how to dribble. She would tell me to create my shot off the dribble. I would do the Tim Hardaway crossover between the legs; she would just watch me play. People would ask me, "Who showed you how to play ball?" and I would smile and say, "My mom." They would say, "I don't know a woman that good. I think you're lying," and I would look at them and smile. She loved watching the Packers and big rival games like Florida vs. Florida State. She would be screaming at the TV like she was on the sidelines, telling the quarterback what to do and screaming, "Why did he do that?" It was pure excitement when sports hit the TV screen. After all of the football game watching, playing with friends and family, and cooking good, tasty meals and making friends and family happy for the moment, she was back to work: my hardworking mother.

Paola's Courage as a Teen

By Elvira Rodriguez

Paola was born in Mexico in 1989. Her parents left her behind with her grandmom when she was only three years old. Paola was a sweet little pie. She did not have parents with her for five years, and she did not know the meaning of "abuse" before eight.

Paola was the most beautiful little girl. Her



brothers and sisters, who watched her up to age eight, were children, too, but they had so much love for each other. They spent five years alone. One day her mom called and said, "I am ready to bring my children to be with their mom." Paola and her brother were really happy, but grandmom was sad. Paola could not believe that grandmom was sad because she always thought she did not love her or her brother. She felt really sad about this emotion, but she wanted to see her parents. It was all she could think about day and night. She pictured playing with them and more. She just wanted to see how they looked and feel the emotion of being with her parents like other kids she had seen.

One day mom called grandmom. Finally they were going to be with their mom and dad. When they went to the place, mom and dad were not together. Instead, they were also living with someone else. It was sad, but they got over it and used to it. After six years, everything appeared to be going well, and Paola was in her first year of high school. Her oldest sister received a phone call from the principal and could not believe what she just heard. Paola was being abused by her stepdad since she was ten. But the most horrible thing was not that but unfortunately that mom believed her husband. Paola was kicked out of her house. She called her dad, but he also did not care. The only one who cared was her oldest sister. She helped her, and mom stopped talking to her too. Her oldest sister did not care and did anything she could to



protect her and other kids today and always.

Paola had only one purpose in life since she was three years old: to see her parents again. After five years without them, she wanted to know them physically and emotionally. She wanted to receive her parents' love. Instead, she received cruelty and abuse from both parents. But now she is a mom. Her husband and mother-in law love her a lot. She has forgiven her mom but will never forget what she was put through.

Finding Beauty in

Everyone

By Katie Pruitt

My friend and co-worker Carol is the most amazing woman I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. She overcame sexual abuse as a child, has held many professions despite economic hold backs, and has an open-minded acceptance of all people because of her religious views and experiences. She has lived a colorful life and has much to share.

When she was about four years old, Carol's maternal grandfather began sexually abusing her, and the abuse continued until he died when she was seven years old. Carol felt guilty about the happiness she experienced when he passed away and wondered what was wrong with her that she was happy while everyone else had been sad. He had been abusing other members of the family, but nobody talked about it. The denial of the situation continued until Carol's own daughter was about four years old. Carol became severely depressed for some time, and it took great strength just to get out of bed and return to everyday life. At that time she was in her 30s, married, and had two children who needed her, so she was forced to function. She didn't fully forgive her grandfather, however, until years later when she came into her true spirituality. She then realized that what had happened to her did not define who she was as a person; it was simply something that had happened to her.

Growing up with ten siblings and a mother who

did not work outside the home, Carol experienced first-hand what extreme poverty was like. At one point, her family was evicted from their home, given a three-day notice to vacate. Having gone through that herself, she didn't want her own children to have to, but she also wanted to stay home to raise them instead of supplementing her husband's income with outside work. She used her ambition, ingenuity, and entrepreneurial sense to do just that. She taught herself skills such as beadwork and playing the guitar and piano to gain income. Her beadwork led to designing a belt for Land's End and teaching an art class. Her musical skills led to her being hired to perform at weddings and other events. Often she would simply see someone with a need and find a way to fill it, at times even bartering with neighbors and friends. Employing these tactics, she was able to earn an income while raising her children at home.

Carol was raised as a Catholic and attended private Catholic school all the way through most of high school until her family was evicted from their home and forced to move to another side of town. At that point, Carol began to attend a co-ed public school and realized she didn't wish to live her life the way Catholicism preached. She remained somewhat religious and continued to attend church services of different denominations. She even worked at a Lutheran summer camp that



her children attended, but she was not spiritually awakened until just a few years ago when she was introduced to the Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF). She describes the experience as “turning around towards the light” that had been shining at her back. Through the SRF and teachings of Paramahansa Yogananda, Carol has been able to teach herself to see the beauty in everyone and everything around her and finally forgive her grandfather for what he did to her. She admits that she doesn’t have all the answers but is willing to listen, learn, and share what she has learned. She knows every single person has potential, and that is the reason why she treats everyone equally well.

The things Carol went through as a child taught me that what you experience growing up doesn’t indicate where you are going to end up. The things she accomplished professionally taught me that you don’t have to follow a straight, predictable path to achieve what you want. Her spiritual outlook on life and humankind has taught me about how I choose to live my life. I’ve learned, through her, that there are a lot of opportunities for happiness and enjoyment if you approach things open-mindedly and are willing to learn and adjust your mindset.

Inspirational Woman By Run Barlow

Honest, intelligent, compassionate, strict, confident, overachieving, loving, devoted, motivated, driven: These are a few words I would use to describe my mother. People who know my mother may have different words to describe her. Some would use very beautiful words filled with kindness, words so sweet that they blossom in the sunlight and leave a sweet-scented aroma. There are also people who would use nasty, ugly words; it would bring shame to even repeat them. Most of my mother’s critics are too cowardly to speak, so they hide behind their silence. Some are bold, squeaking their opinions like rodents. Collectively all the opinions would make a pretty good picture of my mother, like a Picasso painting: Some say it’s beautiful, some hate it, and the rest



just don’t understand it all. Three of the best words I can use to describe my mother would be that she is a learner, a teacher, and a disciplinarian.

As a young married couple raising five children, my parents contemplated heading back to the life they knew in Chicago, IL. As hard as things were in Madison, Shavay knew how hard life for a family that moves around often or lived in cities infested with drugs, gangs, and poverty could be. That was not the life Shavay Barlow wanted for her family. Shortly after her decision to stay, Habitat for Humanity took notice of Shavay’s commitment to her work, family, and marriage and offered to build a house for her and her family. During this process Shavay learned many skills in plumbing, carpentry, woodworking, painting, electrical skills, and many more. Shavay continued to flourish among her co-workers and managers at work, and she received many promotions. She even took management-training courses and eventually became a manager herself. After working for eight years, Shavay decided to go back to school to further her education. With her previous management skills, she found a new job as manager and personal banker at a bank where she has been 11 years and counting.

When her younger sibling came to her depleted with life experience, Shavay showed her sister a new way of living. Her sister was leaving Missouri and desperate for a new start, with a basic high school education and very familiar with seeing street violence, drug abusers, and street crime. Shavay invited her sister up to Madison. Shavay showed her younger sister money management, smart investments, and the power of a higher education. Her sister was able to buy her own fix-it



up house and is now a well-respected accountant for a national corporation. With the skills she acquired from building her own home, Shavay taught her younger sister how to take a small ugly dungeon and make a castle fit for a queen.

Growing up, Shavay was a non-believer in the theory of time out. She was more of the hands-on type. . . . In the public eye this method can be frowned upon. When in public, if our behavior was not up to par my mother made us touch our toes, back bent and knees straight. If we were in the grocery store, we walked the aisle touching our toes. We would touch our toes or deal with the consequences out of the public embrace. This was almost as embarrassing as it was back straining. Some people might say this was cruel and unusual punishment, but my siblings and I never mistook the message afterwards.

I would definitely say my mother is a complex woman with many skills. She quickly assesses every situation and person and forms her own opinion on them. It is best to start on the right foot because going on her naughty list may mean you never get a chance to get off it. You may form your opinion about her, but good or bad, frankly it doesn't matter. She lives in her own world. You just absorb what you can and don't overstay your welcome. Follow this model and, like Socrates, my mother will force you to think, enlighten you in every way imaginable, and challenge you for the better. Make the wrong mistake and, like Medusa, my mother can give you one look that can turn you into stone. In summary, Shavay Barlow is a proud mother, wife, and philosopher.

Annamarie Lynn Griseta **By Bradley Barner**

The woman I chose to profile is a close friend of mine. There are three characteristics that stand out to me about her: her independence, how caring she is, and her humor.

Independence means not controlled by or dependent on others.

She is independent because she has a great job

working at Central Wisconsin Center as a resident care technician or CNA. She takes care of people who can't take care of themselves because they are in wheelchairs and can't see, hear, or even walk. Another reason why I say she is independent is because she lives out on her own and purchases anything she

needs. She never asks anyone for help; others are always coming to her. She pays for her own car and all the bills that come with being an adult.

This woman always thinks of others before she thinks of herself. An example would be when she goes shopping and picks out gifts for her family or friends. I never see her buy anything for herself. You know when someone really cares is when they call or text you every day to make sure you are doing okay. They are there for you when a family member passes away or when you are going through a hard time. These are ways I see how caring she is. I know I can count on her!

She may not be all that funny, but when you're down she lifts you back up just by her smile. One day when I was feeling stressed out, she came over and took me out shopping. At the end of that day, all my problems went away because she was there and made me laugh. She would make up jokes that only she and I would get. She is the craziest person I know, and she lights up a room with just her smile.

In conclusion, this woman is independent, caring, and humorous. Once you have met this wonderful woman, you will just melt because of her smile, her laugh, her everything. She is such a great person, and I am so happy she is a part of my life. I wouldn't know what to do without her.



Flower Child: Sweet and Kind

By Keith Johnson

I would like to introduce you to one of the kindest people I've ever met: "Sister Chloe." She has amazing musical talents on the guitar or djembe drum, and when she graces us with her soft voice, she brightens a room like the morning sunshine peering through the kitchen window. She has endured and overcome abuse and hardship in her childhood home in Indiana, only to become a kind-hearted and compassionate person who helped me get through a harrowing and frightening event during my time of travels across the continental U.S. I met this dreadlocked, free-spirited, and perpetually joyful woman while living in Boulder, Colorado, just prior to the beginning of my first Grateful Dead summer tour in 1994. I was blessed to reunite with her later that year at Buena Vista Park, San Francisco, California, on a hot summer's day.

"Sister Chloe" is as sweet and kind as pure, natural raw honey straight from the hive, propolis and all. Every morning she would prepare fresh fruit, granola, and soy milk for those of us she considered "family." I remember often hiking



with her in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. She was very energetic and loved nature, so we shared some peaceful times together looking at the splendor of the mountains and creeks. She would sit and listen to you intently when you had a problem or need, especially if you were trying to hide it from those around you. It was as if she could "feel" that something was not right with a friend and immediately would come to their assistance to help them to some sort of solution, resolution, or acceptance. I recall a time when she had a limited amount of money for herself until we were at the next concert venue; nevertheless, she willingly gave all that she had in order for another friend of ours to get home to her family for the holidays; the friend had not seen her family in three years. Kindness abounds in her.

"Sister Chloe" had to endure sexual abuse and harassment while growing up as a teenager in her childhood home after her parents divorced and her mother remarried. Her strength of character and deep resolve enabled her to stand up and change her situation and ultimately her life. One morning when she had had enough of her stepfather's advances (which were not believed by her mother), she simply packed a bag and left. I commend her for writing her mother a letter explaining her feelings and plans so that her mother would not think she had been abducted. She knew that she needed and wanted more in her life than remaining in that situation would ever bring her. "I deserved better," she once told me when discussing the differences in how we lived as children and grew up. On her way away from her mother's house, she stopped inside of a record store, where Fate had her meet a few people on their way to California to follow the Grateful Dead, one of her favorite bands. She said, "I'm in," and away she went, with no cares, worries, or hassles. She was just gone.

Sometime after we had already known one another for a while, a moment of thoughtless carelessness befell me. My "friends" left to go to the next concert venue near Eugene, Oregon, and I lost all of my clothes, camping and survival gear, money, and phone numbers of friends to help in a tight jam. I felt abandoned and hurt. Sister Chloe saw me as she was on her way to the airport after we checked out of our current hotel rooms; my



face told the tale. She immediately knew what was happening, as she had already known about the “kids” preparing to leave for Eugene. Guess what? She sold her plane ticket to another guy and stayed with me until we could get transportation and I was steady on my own feet. We had a blast. We had “fat pockets” one day, and the next we were eating cheese and crackers, riding on a Greyhound bus across the country.

If you ever have the opportunity to meet an extraordinary individual, take heed and cherish the experience. I have been blessed in this regard and am glad I endured the hardships, like losing my hard-pack, to help me realize just how awesome that can truly be. Unfortunately, over the years I have lost track of her. I know that she will succeed in all that she puts her energy into, as that is her nature. “Sister Chloe” is my friend. I miss her dearly and pray that all of her choices and paths in life have been wise, beneficial, productive, and filled with joy. Thank you, Chloe.

Jaded but Courageous:

Grandma Frances

By Yetta Harris

Frances Powel Mock, my grandmother, was a completely loving, slightly jaded, regal, complicated, and courageous woman. Grandma Frances, as I affectionately called her, held our family together, with every family member lovingly focused on her as matriarch, healer, peacemaker, and hope maker. She is so painfully missed by each one of her family members that sometimes I think just seeing family makes it almost unbearable for some members of my family. They think more of her loss than of her life.

Grandma Fran had a saying: “Life’s a bitch and then you die.” Yes, she was jaded! She lost her biological mother at a very young age and would never discuss how, nor would any of us dare ask. In fact, most of us didn’t find out that our great-grandma that we were raised with was in fact her stepmom. She married at 18, lost an infant daughter to SIDS, and then was left with four children and

no money to feed them after her husband left her. Grandma went to college and succeeded in becoming a nurse. Before she finished college, she met a man and had a child with him. This man was incredibly abusive. Her last beating had her hospitalized for some time. When she left the hospital, she stayed with my mom, sister, and me for a while until she was better. The man stalked and harassed my grandmother for years, but she never returned to him.

Grandma Frances was stunningly beautiful. I remember her being flirted with, but Grandma was having none of that. When I would say, “Grandma, that man is flirting with you,” she’d shrug and say, “So? I’m done with that.” It turned out she was: she never dated again. Her life was only about family. We were her heart and soul.

Grandma Frances was diagnosed with terminal cancer ten years ago and given two weeks to live. In fact, when they did exploratory surgery, they did not understand how she could still be alive and not in more pain. One time when I was in the hospital with her, she pulled out the tubes that were inside of her to help drain an incision. They were a bear to get in, and Grandma hated that. I said, “Grandma, they are going to have to replace the tubes,” and she said, “So?” “But Grandma, you hate that.” “And?”



In short, that is what Grandma's life was about and her lesson to us. Life doesn't always go as you expect, but when you hit the bumps in the road, you get up and do something about it.

A Caring and Determined Friend

By Tai'Kiah Phillips

Entering high school can be a very difficult transition for most students, especially for those with no support system. Luckily for me, that was not the case. Don't get me wrong, I had difficult challenges in high school, but there was one major person there for me that kept me strong throughout everything: Alyssa Nicole Neblett. Alyssa, my best friend, was and is one of the most caring, intelligent, determined women I know.

Alyssa is a very outspoken person, but only because she cares. She doesn't like to sugarcoat anything, but not because she doesn't care. In fact, it's the complete opposite. There is always



at least one person I can count on to tell me when I'm wrong or when I'm slacking. She also lets me know when she's concerned. When my grades were slipping, she offered to tutor me. When I had guy problems, she was always there to comfort me and make sure everything was okay. Because of this, her opinion means more to me than anyone knows.

My best friend has always been a smart, intelligent young woman. Because of her excellent grades in her freshman year of high school, she was accepted into the PEOPLE Program. Most people join the program in the 6th grade. She was also in advanced math and English classes. When most freshmen began in algebra, she was already in geometry. During her junior and senior years, she added advanced placement English to her transcript. She and another student won the African American History Bowl Challenge against other Madison schools and headed to Florida for nationals. She continued to keep up her academic success throughout college and is now a senior at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is a finance major and is sure to do great things after college.

During high school, there were many things Alyssa and I said we would do in college that she has already accomplished. She said she was going to make more lifetime friends and she did. She said she was going to keep up her grades and she did. She has completed almost every goal she set for college at the end of high school.

During her freshman year at UW-Madison, Alyssa had her mind set on joining a particular sorority. She kept up her grades, was involved on campus, and did everything she needed to do in order to join. She was determined to be a part of this sorority. She did all those things, and by Spring 2010, she was a member of Delta Sigma Theta Incorporated. Her determination had finally paid off.

Alyssa has become my best friend by simply being who she is: a very caring, intelligent, and determined person. I am so grateful to have someone like her in my life, and I know that we will continue to have the long-lasting, healthy friendship we've always had. I love my best friend, and no one in the world could ever change what she means to me.

