

ODYSSEY



ORACLE

ODYSSEY REFLECTIONS



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Emily Auerbach, Co- Director/Founder; Oracle Editor
Emily Azad, Program Manager; Classroom Photographer
Christina DeMars, Coordinator; Oracle Assistant
Beth Auerbach, Oracle Designer

emily.auerbach@wisc.edu
emily.azad@wisc.edu
christina.demars@wisc.edu

608-712-6321
608-590-5862
608-580-5948

MOMENTS OF COURAGE

courage: the ability to do something that frightens one; strength in the face of pain or grief; having the heart to face danger and hardship; from Latin cor "heart"



When my sister passed away in August of 2018, it was a very different type of experience. I never lost anyone close to me before. All types of thoughts were running through my head for a week straight. It was like I was numb to

the pain. I thought that I was living a dream when my cousin called and said my sister passed. I didn't believe her and was in disbelief for about a week or so.

When it became time to view her body, I had to gain courage to see her lying in a coffin without a heartbeat. I had to gain that courage and pass it on to my mother. She was also numb. My sister and I looked so much alike that it was hard for her to look in my eyes for months and years. I reminded her so much of my sister who no longer was here.



When it was time for the funeral, I was filled with all types of emotions. There were people that I hadn't seen in years walking up talking to me. To be honest, I don't know what they were even talking about. The words were going in one ear and out the other. As the service went on, my head was down, tears were running down my face, and my legs were shaking. I was really in disbelief. When it became my time to go up and read a letter that I wrote to my sister, I had to gain the courage to get up. After about two or three minutes, I began to speak.

As the years went on, I had to gain that courage back to get back to "Mia." I had to find the courage to be happy again, the courage to do what I have to do for my kids and my nephew too. **(Tameia Allen)**



"Anxiety disorders are characterized by excessive fear and worry and related behavioral disturbances. Symptoms are severe enough to result in significant stress or significant impairment in functioning."

According to the WHO (World Health Organization), as of 2019, 301 million people were living with some type of anxiety disorder.

Now if you've been to any Odyssey class, you've certainly seen me around. I'm the one in all black with my head down. But even more so, you've likely had a hard time actually being able to *hear* me.

I am a very mentally ill person. I have been living with a severe panic and anxiety disorder for most of my life. My very first panic attack occurred while playing solitaire on my bedroom floor (yes, with playing cards. Smart phones didn't exist quite yet) while watching the Disney channel. I was maybe 10 or 11 at the time trying to convince my mother that my heart had stopped working and that we needed to get to the hospital *right now*.

Silly, right?

But, of course, using her all-knowing-mom-healing magic, she gave me Dannon's fruit at the bottom peach yogurt and told me to watch Gilligan's Island



in the air-conditioned room by my dad while he slept. And somehow, my heart began to beat again, and all was beginning to be right in the world again. Despite the morbidity of this story, it is a funny story; please feel free to laugh.

After she died, I leveled up! Not only was my anxiety at "severe" status, but panic was added. I discovered that no, it's actually not normal to have close to a dozen panic attacks in a week. Severe clinical depression was also added to the list. How fun! And after years of intense bullying, family trauma and drama, I'm pretty sure varying levels of PTSD and maybe some neurodevelopmental disorders got added too. Who can really tell these days, unless you have the money to spend for a doctor to confirm it all for you? For now, your guess is as good as mine.

As a result of my anxiety disorder, I have crippling anthropophobia, a fear of people. Do you know what having self-worth feels like? I sure don't. I live in a world where everything I say and do is incorrect. I have burdened and inconvenienced everyone around me somehow, and I am a miserable failure in everything I do.

Sounds fun, right?

Logically speaking, I know all of this is just the result of my brain chemistry not being the most well-balanced. Unfortunately, that still puts me in the midst of more mental battles than I care to mention.

My courage is a struggle to obtain. I don't need more of an example; you can hear it in my voice, struggling to get the people in the back to hear my voice while I'm reading. Hiding my shaking, sweaty hands from my neighbors, I try my best to show that I'm okay. I am, really. I'm okay. My heart is exploding in my chest, there's a ringing in my ears, but rest assured that I am clinging to my courage to be present. I do try my best. "Hey, how's your week?" "Bye," "See you later." Unfortunately, 9 times out of 10, it falls on deaf ears. It's not anyone's fault. I know I come off as strong as a whisper half of the time. But I am proud of what I can manage to get out usually.

I want to speak up. I want to have idle chats with people. But something happens between my brain and vocal cords where a sudden disconnect happens and I can't get the words I want out so desperately. Do you know what it's like to have a lot to say, yet you can't speak a word of it? If I don't really volunteer to read my writings in class, it's usually because I'm too busy mentally cussing myself out for writing so damn much.

Mentally, I am fighting tooth and nail to get through the normal everyday things that so many people somehow manage to do with ease. Grocery shopping? Too overstimulating. Shopping alone without noise cancelling earbuds? I focus on everyone and everything far too easily, and it's likely to trigger an attack.

Clubbing? Ha! Now that's a funny thought. No, seriously, picture me in a club for a moment. Any type of social gathering, be it family or otherwise, my social battery only holds so much power, and just like home, I'm usually found in a corner or off to the side somewhere with my head down, trying to make myself as small and unnoticeable as possible.

But, I'll be damned if I stop trying my best. I came here with one thought in mind. I am a nothing and no one trying my best to be a something and a someone. That itself takes a lot of courage.

My courage comes in knowing that I barely made the cut for being in Odyssey this year, and I don't take that lightly. I muster up everything in the fiber of my being to make sure that I am here every week, homework in hand and everything.

Is it a struggle? Hell yes! Just ask Emily about my apology notes on my homework for her.

But I go to battle with my mental demons, and I do what I can. I may not win every battle, but I'm here. Quiet and scared as I am, I'm here. **(Kaitlin Birdsall)**



2019 was a very rough year for me. I lost things that I worked so hard to acquire, such as my apartment, car, and most of my material possessions as well, but what hurt me the most was losing my perfect criminal background that I took so much pride in for 28 years. It hurts to be accused of something you didn't do. I had to move back in with my mom and basically restart my life from scratch. Therefore, I had to search for a job, new apartment, and new means of transportation. I felt defeated, like my life was being drained down a toilet. In addition, I also now had to deal with legal matters to fix my criminal background. I was the most depressed of my life during this time.

It took me a while to stop feeling bad for myself and to find motivation to go out and take my life back. I'm pleased to say that as of today, I've completed the necessary tasks to clear my criminal background. Also, I have my own apartment, job, and car, and I'm proudly a part of the UW Odyssey Project.

I still have a long way to go before I'm where I want to be, but at least I'm walking the right path. This experience humbled me and made me look at life very differently. It also taught me that pain is temporary and that there's always going to be a tomorrow. **(Jonathan Booley)**





brought to my attention that two of my friends couldn't swim. I was eager to teach them how easy it could be. I showed by doing a couple of laps and gave them some beginner pointers. We practiced a bit until they were comfortable to try on their own. They both agreed they were ready.

The first out of the two tried it, doing everything I had taught her. She successfully made it to the other side. We cheered for her. Now it was the second girl's turn. She as well followed the pointer I gave her, then got halfway and suddenly stopped. Once she stopped, she started to panic and was flailing her arms. We all started to laugh, assuming she was joking.



That moment I held a mic. It had been weeks, days, hours, minutes of practicing, and my heart was still pumping and racing heavily. I could feel the sweat collecting in my palms. I stepped on stage. Crickets. There wasn't a sound

around me. "I'm Sarah B."

A room full of strangers was staring at me, waiting for me to speak the next line. A crowd of people did not know that I sometimes battle with social anxiety. But that night, none of my fears should have mattered. I was the one who signed up for the battle. I was there to take the stand, to stand in the gap for the ones who may have been like me.

That day I had courage. That moment in life, I stood. I used the power that I had within me. I shared my poems. I told my story. I shared many pieces of me. This experience has helped me be free. **(Sarah Branch)**



A moment where I showed courage was when I was 18 years old. Some friends and I were swimming at a community pool. I always had been a good swimmer because I loved the water.

While there hanging out at the pool, it was

At that moment, I remembered she couldn't swim, so why would she play like that? I looked around for help, but everybody was still laughing, so I jumped into action and swam to the middle to save her. In the midst of saving her, she was panicking, so she started to drown me. I had to think quickly on my feet. I used my advantage of already knowing how to swim, so the next time she pushed me under water, I just stayed under until I got her to the edge, then came up for air. **(Jekeiria Booker)**





Year 2020: The world was terrified by a pandemic, and I was no exception. At the time, we were all very afraid of being infected, all locked up, without going out into the streets, or enjoying nature.

People stored food, and we didn't know what was going to happen. That was just the beginning for me.

I had a phone call from work which told me it was no more because it had closed due to the pandemic. At that moment, I wondered what I am going to do if I am the support of my family.

I was home. Maybe the money saved would be enough to get us through the pandemic, I thought. But things were not going well; they were worse. So after a few months of being at home, I decided to look for a new job. Fortunately, I found it. It was something that I did not like, but I had to do it because my family needed me.

After living for months with the pandemic, I still wasn't used to this lifestyle. It was getting worse and worse, with many infected, some very seriously, and many deceased. That was all over the world. One day, I came back from work and was feeling really bad. I was infected, so there were very difficult days. I was worried about my family. After a few weeks I recovered and returned to work. Everyone in my family was fine, thank God. The pandemic continued to spread, and that's how it ended the whole year. Maybe the next year would be better. I thought.

January 2021, I picked up the phone and called my dad, like I usually did, and asked, "How are you?" "Fine," he told me with a tired voice. I talked very little and told him to go rest. A few minutes after, my sister called me to tell me that my father was not well. He was very sick; he had a positive COVID-19 test. Everything would be fine; that was our home.

The next day, my sister called me saying, "Fredy, my father couldn't take it anymore. His heart stopped beating. He passed away." It was something very terrible for me. In that moment, there was no way to be with the rest of my family since the distance was the impediment, but there was still more. My mother was infected, and her health was not very good. The doctor did not give me much hope for her life. Six days later, my sister called me and told me my mother is already with my father; my mom just passed away. Losing my parents at the same time was the hardest thing I've ever experienced in my life because after 20 years of not being with them, I still had the hope of giving them a hug. It wasn't like that anymore.

Time has passed. I had the courage and desire to get ahead; life has almost returned to normal after the pandemic. In my case, my life has changed a lot. Now I have another job that I like for the first time in a long time. I decided to go back to school, and I hope to finish some of my dreams.

(Fredy Carcano)





The day I moved to Madison, Wisconsin, I left my whole family behind. I moved here with two children and one on the way. I never knew my life would turn out to be what it is now. I didn't know where to go or where to start.

We were dropped off at the house of a relative who was kind enough to accept me and my children. She showed me the ropes on how to move around Madison, stating that Madison is a big circle. I couldn't get lost if I got back on the same bus because it would take me back to my location. It took me two weeks to learn Madison. After me learning how to move around without questions, I was fine.

Overall, I'm glad that I made the move. It was the best thing that could happen to me from leaving Chicago. Twenty years later, my children are grown now with high school diplomas, alive, doing well. I also received my high school diploma and am continuing my education towards a degree. I'm proud of myself and my little family tree that I've created as a single parent. **(Curtrice Foster)**



The most encouraging thing for me was making a lifestyle change. I had to make the choice of living on my own by making life changing decisions to better my life or live the life that I was living in Chicago. So, I decided to

make a move out of Chicago to Madison to better my life. I had to let my family know that I can make it on my own without their help.

I have been here in Madison for 24 years on my own doing what I need to do, bettering my life. It has been a journey for me, but I am doing what I need to do to survive in life. I have had my share of ups and downs, but I am still learning to be living on my own by making sure that I have the necessities that I need to survive like housing, food, and an income for the things I need to do.

(Tyrone Hudson)



The eyes of my baby gave me moments of courage. One of the difficult times I lived through was when my first baby was born. As an immigrant it was hard to recognize that I was alone in a place that was totally new for me. I felt more

fear when my son was born. I had a C-section, and my body was weak from the surgery and in pain. Also, besides a lack of sleep, my breast ducts were blocked with mastitis, which was giving me excruciating pain. Something was wrong in my life that was not normal, and it was causing me so much fear to continue.

The only support person I had at that time was my husband, who intensively helped me to go through this process of maternal recovery, but he had to go to work so he could bring some food home. I felt alone with all that pain and fear.

One day, I got inspired by the beautiful eyes of my baby, and I thought that I would like to give him the best of me. So, I had the courage to get up and look for help. I thought it is natural that we can ask for help when we are feeling vulnerable. I googled for spaces in Madison where new moms like me were gathering. This is how I arrived at Centro Hispano Madison. The space at Centro was very colorful, people spoke Spanish, and I met many other moms who maybe had similar fears and at the same time similar dreams. **(Aida Inuca)**





When I think of myself and a moment in my life when I was courageous, what sticks out the most in my memory is my first son, Rylan—his story of creation and his journey earthside. The story is so long I am going to do my best to

sum it up. I was told something was wrong at my 20-week checkup. My baby wasn't moving much, body parts weren't accounted for, and he was in a fixed position inside of my womb that made doctors unclear if he would be compatible with life. After things got worse, I was told I could die giving birth or even going on with my pregnancy. At 17 years young, I had to choose between my or my child's life.

I had a religious awakening. I nearly aborted my son, when I feel that God spoke to me and told me that that wasn't what I was supposed to do. A few months later, we made plans to have a scheduled C-section. There were many meetings with doctors, NICU tours, genetic tests, etc. One week before my C-section, I had a meeting where my son's NICU team of doctors prepared us for the worst and literally told us our son wasn't expected to live after removal.

They were so wrong. Rylan was both April 11th, 2014. He wasn't able to breathe on his own and was born with his intestines outside of his body, a condition called gastroschisis. He spent 39 days in the NICU and had three surgeries in that time



frame. He left the hospital on oxygen, a pulse ox, and a feeding tube. Later we were told he would never walk.

I am courageous because of him. He is the reason I push to be a better me every single day. **(Tierra Kimbrew)**



I was offered to be the MC at the Sustain Dane conference alongside my fellow associate Kai Airbender. The reason they chose me is because I am a Project Green Team (PGT) alumna 2014.

I was extremely excited for this opportunity, but I felt a sense of nervousness and fear considering I was stepping into a completely different environment.

The day finally came, and I remember waking up to smelling cinnamon from the apple pies my stepdad was making. I felt a cramp in my stomach and my knees buckled. Am I really about to do this today? I asked myself with complete uncertainty. That day required complete courage, confidence, strength, and bravery. **(Monél Long)**



Ufff! As soon as I read this assignment, I felt an emotion of being able to write. I have lived many moments as if I were climbing a mountain.

Well, my story of courage and bravery would be to live one day at a time, first with the dignity of being a woman and a human being, then I could think about my role as a wife, mother, and worker in the labor system, and now an Odyssey student. I can consider myself to be multitasking although it is not always a good idea to be.

I am a mother of four children: Israel, 14 years old; Eli, 13 years old; Fabian, 9 years old; and Luna, almost 2 years old. I notice that every time I walk with my children and my husband, people look at us more on the street.

I might think it's because they notice my dark circles or something like that, but no, although I don't see it sometimes, it's not because of me, it's because of them: my four little ones. I come from a family of five siblings and I am the youngest.

Many mothers have expressed their opinions to me. Some have been constructive, others not so much about their desire to have more children. They tell me sadly that their economic situation and lack of time do not allow it, and they are very right: having a family far away from your loved ones can be heartbreaking. Some must think that I live in abundance or something like that, but they are wrong, at least not in my case. Being a family with four children is a very personal choice. My challenge every day after a day of work is to get home with the desire to spend quality time with them, connect emotionally, read at least one page of some book, and listen to how their day of classes went. Many times our talks extend to being more emotionally internalized. . . .

Sometimes I find myself feeling discouraged, other times without so much energy, other days with the list of unfinished tasks, bills to pay, and countless things to do and finish, and I just want to go to sleep. I practice focusing my emotions and feelings, and I ask them to give me 10 minutes to recharge and be present with them. Each one is very different from the other, and each one has their own needs. The Major is a joker, nice, sweet, and obedient; The Medium is introverted, affectionate, obedient, and a very thoughtful observer; The Minor is playful, affectionate, and very empathetic; the Fourth is a smiling hottie who gives us more joy than we could expect.

We don't do as many weekend trips to the movies or dinner, but when we do it once a month or quarter, we value it and enjoy it very much.

My house no longer looks pristine like it used to, and my metallic fridge is not bare and shiny. On the contrary, on the floor of our home you will always find a car, a stuffed animal, a rattle full of drool, a



piece of Lego that drives you crazy, or a stack of stickers. The fridge is full of drawings that remind me that my children know how to write and draw, the whole family, and it makes me feel proud of them.

Raising my four children is like climbing a mountain every day, where I am building character, discipline, love of life, autonomy, values, traditions, culture, and healthy habits. Many times, climbing this mountain I find rocky landscapes, with thorns and drops that make tears come out of my eyes; other days are wonderful, where I take pride in the achievements that are obtained by continuing to climb the mountain.

I hope and wish that my children see my example of continuing to study, of continuing to climb the ladder of education, and that no matter the difficulties of life and how difficult the path may be, they continue to climb, one day at a time.

I thank the Odyssey Project and all the people who get involved and accompany me on my way to continue climbing my mountain. For me, that is so valuable. **(Maricela Martinez)**



A courageous moment in my own life was when I decided to go back to school as a single parent. I went back to school at MATC and graduated in August 2020 and received my HSED. Having to

admit to my children that I did not have my high school diploma, I stressed to them how important that school was and that it is a very important task in life. Starting the fall of 2019, I forced myself to get up with my children, shower, and get dressed just like they would. I would put my bookbag on my shoulder, drop my kids off to school, take myself to MATC, breathe, breathe, and get to Truax to start my classes, praying that I would complete my GED/HSED.

I struggled to adjust because I had not been in school for years. Getting used to the reading, writing, and getting back in the hang of school itself everyday was a challenge, but with determination and perseverance I completed it within six months from the time I started. I was so determined and focused completely on my HSED I was able to graduate in August 2020. Getting my high school diploma was one of the most courageous things I had ever done in my life. It was self-determination and me knowing that my kids were watching me back then, waking up and getting ready with them every morning for six months, that gives me the strength and courage to continue and be a student in the Odyssey Project today. Currently, here I

am again doing the single parent thing and back in college – this time to succeed in the Odyssey Program, another encouraging moment in my life. I accept that I will always have multiple roles to play, and I must not give up. I must continue to be a role model for my children – this is what I call being a courageous woman. **(Lavinia Miller)**



My divorce was a moment in my life when I needed all my mental emotional qualities to overcome the pain and grief in this sad chapter of my life. . . . In numbers, it sadly looks like half of marriages will end in divorce. The reasons

these love stories have to end are unknown, but I do feel compassion for those who experience this painful and sad moment! In particular, my love story ended tragically. The faith, love, care, and respect faded, and pain took its place. Promises, dreams, and love at the beginning ended up turning into lies, dishonesty, and broken hearts. My marriage ended with broken promises and broken hearts. . . . First, I had nowhere to go, and I became homeless. Second, the trauma divorce created upon me was bigger than I thought. And third, I met the true source of happiness, and I overcame this terrible grief. My divorce hurt my mind so much, and it took lots of energy, love, and time to glue my life back together. And at the end, my divorce changed my heart and mind and made me who I am today and affected how I perceive life today. Life is beautiful!

First, I had nowhere to go, my heart was broken, and I was fearful of the new unknown. I became homeless and family-less. I was escorted out of my own house by two law enforcement officers. Lies, being a Latino male, and the lack of knowing my legal rights were all in my favor in a negative way. A restriction order was put on me, and I could not be in my own house until I proved my innocence. It was recommended to me to leave my own house for my own safety; then I was forced to leave my house with nothing other than the clothes I was wearing. I managed to take a small suitcase halfway full of clothes, my car, but no kids; this part shredded my heart to millions of pieces. Life did not look bright around this time. Moreover, the most painful part of all of this is that the day before, we celebrated

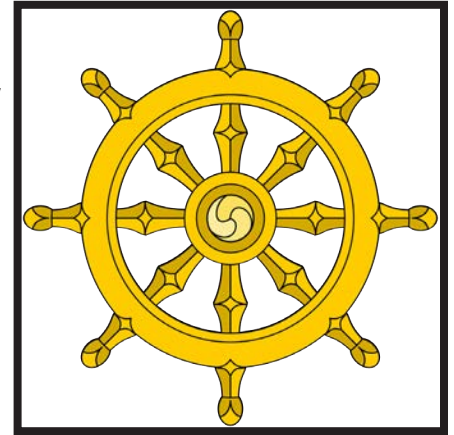


Christmas as a normal family does. Happiness and joy were celebrated the night before, not knowing what was going to happen the next morning. December the 26th of 2014 was the most shocking, frightening, and sad chapter of my life. It started by me being interrogated by two males dressed in blue. At the end of the interrogation, they informed me that I could not be in my house and that I had to leave until everything got sorted out and until I could prove my innocence. That morning, I felt forced to leave my house, my dog, and the most precious thing I have in my life, Akira and Aiko, not knowing if I was ever able to see them ever again. This day was absolutely so painful! I was numb, I was scared, I was broken, and tears would not stop falling for hours. I was dead inside, but I had to hold all my emotions inside of me, mostly for Akira and Aiko. My daughters' love was the only hope and the only strength I had in me to fight, and it was also the only light left. I wanted to fight my emotions to be reunited with the loves of my life, Akira and Aiko.

Next, triggers and traumas took place in my heart and mind. The divorce created a very painful life for me and the ones who had to see me after the separation. First, I became so fearful of anything that had to do with the police. To illustrate this, my hands got sweaty every time I saw a police officer in close contact or in the distance. My heart rate went up to the roof! My thoughts were clouded with negative self-criticism, and I felt like a criminal. Additionally, I felt like I was a bad father and a bad citizen, and I completely lost my self-confidence. Moreover, I felt guilty for the little I provided for my daughters; I felt like I was bad at parenting and that I was not good enough. Again, I became fearful of any confrontation or to speak my mind. I also picked up the bad habit of comparing myself to others. In all, the divorce caused me mentally hurtful traumas that followed me everywhere I went. This episode in my life made me cry until there were no more tears to drop. Then I cried every day for the next year at least. This experience made me question my existence, made me doubt myself, but this experience also made me look for inner peace in places I never thought would have been possible to find.

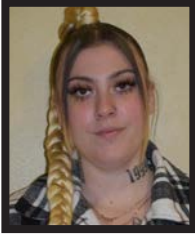
Learning about Dharma is what gave me the wisdom to find inner peace and compassion for myself and

others. I had to learn how to heal my soul, repair my broken heart, and lighten my mind. More importantly, learning Dharma gave me the strength to forgive my ex-wife. In addition,



in the blast of pain and hurt, I learned to use these situations as motivations to transform and purify my mind with the help of meditation and the wisdom of Dharma (the protection of the mind, Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings). I fully opened my heart and my mind to these new teachings with the intention to love and have compassion for Sarah (my ex-wife). Additionally, I put all my faith in Dharma to overcome adversity and anything negative in my life and move forward little by little until my mind got rid of all the anger and sadness from December the 26th of 2014.

Today, I only have love and compassion for Sarah. I forgive her and I forgot everything that happened that morning in December. Moreover, Sarah and I are on good terms, we are a good team to parent together for the benefit of our daughters, we have good communications regarding my daughters' health as well, and we can be in the same places and have regular conversations. In the end, I took all my strength and courage to change my mind from negative to a positive, lovable, and compassionate mind not only for Sarah but for all living beings with no exceptions. I was able to overcome adversity thanks to Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings and my faith within me. My divorce was very painful and traumatic. However, I feel like this part of my life was necessary for me to experience the proof and the importance of my existence. This experience was not easy and took a vast amount of energy, perseverance, focus, faith, love and compassion for myself. More importantly, this experience took me to discover the real me. This experience also taught me what unconditional love can do for oneself and that I can unconditionally love even those who hurt me. Faith always lives in my heart and mind. I'm here and I will always love you, Akira and Aiko. **(Saul Naxi)**



Coming from a childhood of trauma, I felt vulnerable and alone after the most important figure in my life, whom I had always looked up to, abandoned me at only eleven years old. I matured

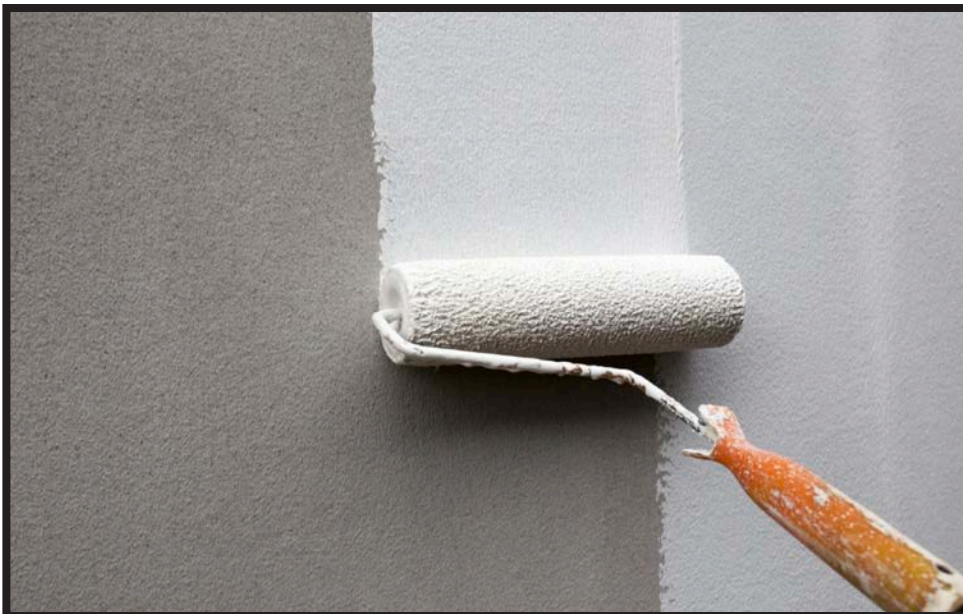
fast as I grew too soon to become that person for somebody else. As I grew a small tadpole to a baby with fingers and toes in my belly at only 17, I was scared. I wondered if I could be who my child needed me to be. As I continued to grow this child and it became closer to her arrival, I got more scared and more anxious. I forced my once young mind to face the fear of giving birth and raising a child when I was just a child myself. I hadn't even gotten the chance to attend senior prom or graduate with my classmates. The childhood I once hoped for was gone.

But the day came. I struggled through the pain of contractions and the aftermath of childbirth. As I looked at my beautiful baby girl, all of the questions and uncertainty I had went away. I gained the courage to do exactly what I needed to do: be that positive role model, give my child the love and nurturing I once lost. I finally found me in her love. I found the courage in her love. This is exactly where I needed to be.
(Keely Nelson-Grey)



When I first got out of school, I worked in the summer and while I was working, I realized how exhausting it was getting up and just working for someone else and only getting paid \$20 an hour. It's not that bad, but in 10 years I see

myself being my own boss. So, the big step I took was opening my own painting and drywall business. At first it wasn't that easy. I was using my own money, and I even got in debt buying signs, business cards, work t-shirts, work tools, etc. It used to be me by myself working, but now I've got four workers working with me. I have consistent work, and I'm not done. I plan on getting bigger in the future and finally paying off all my debts.
(Gael Rodriguez)





Courage is my own life. I feel like courage is standing up and fighting against other options, fighting to break generational curses. Courage is me.

I didn't choose the easy options even though many people told me to kill my children. Who else would fight for a piece of me? Who am I to take life away from my bloodline? Courage is when you keep fighting to end broken love or broken homes. Courage is when you are raising boys to men without any guidance. Courage is daring to be different. Courage is teaching my children it is possible to be positive leaders, not followers, standing up for what is right; courage is turning negatives into power.

Courage is moving to Madison so my kids can have more options, challenging the system of schools, daycares, and whatever needs to be done so my children will have the tools and support. Courage is becoming a better woman for my daughters to look up to. **(Kiana Sims)**



go through giving birth alone. Shortly after I gave birth, he was sentenced to five years in prison. Being a single mother has to be the hardest and most courageous thing I have ever done... well, am doing. In the beginning, I cried a lot and had no idea how to parent alone. I was going to work. I planned for a two-parent household and had to alter my whole life to adapt to being a single parent. I was stressed out, didn't eat much, and barely slept, but I got through it. Day by day, I learned that there is positivity in unforeseen circumstances.

Being a single parent has made me stronger, prouder, and more courageous to tackle tough situations on my own. I'm proud to be a single mom; I have a beautiful, smart daughter to show off because of it. **(Tiara Smith)**



A moment of courage in my life that I vividly remember is when my child's father went to jail a month before I was due to have my daughter. At that moment, I had realized that I would have to



On February 26th, 2018, I lost my first child due to premature birth. At 22 weeks, the middle of my second trimester, I began to experience excruciating pains in my lower stomach. At first I wrote it off as Braxton Hicks contractions, but



soon the pain became more consistent and relentless. Immediately I proceeded to the Emergency Room of the local designated hospital within my medical plan network. Upon my examination I was told that the baby's heart rate is fine and that I am not dilating and sent home within an hour of my examination. While home the pain continued and didn't let up. Rest was the only relief for me. Barely able to stand or walk upright because of the pressure, I proceeded to the restroom. There I found that the symptoms had worsened; there was blood. With panic and fear in my voice, I called out to my husband, "We need to

go to the hospital NOW!" He immediately leaped into action. For him this experience was new too, but we both knew this is not what's expected. Unable to move from the toilet, my body naturally begin preparing for labor and before I knew it, I had pushed my child out. Shocked, scared, but sure that time was of the essence, we called for Emergency technicians to begin the fight for survival for the life we created together.

Upon arrival back to the same hospital we had previously visited less than 24 hours earlier, we were told, "The chances are slim of a survival and you should prepare your goodbyes." Goodbye? We were just preparing our greetings, our goals for our little girl. I felt like a failure as a mother, person, and wife. I blamed myself for not being more knowledgeable. For weeks I couldn't look people in the eye and stayed in the house to avoid any questions about my pregnancy that was no more. Family and close friends tried to reassure me that this was no one's fault and shared with me their own experiences in reproduction. I began to feel better and finally started to grieve. It was in this moment that I had to find the courage to love myself again. I had to find the courage to accept that I would not get to experience all those memories I had planned for my child. I had to find the courage to console a grieving husband who had also lost his first child. I had to find the courage to live life again.

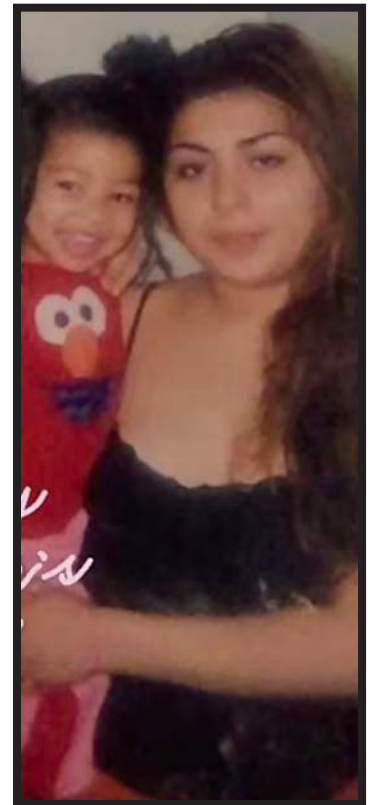
No sooner had I accepted God's will, my husband and I were blessed with a plus sign and once again were expecting a child. This time I knew to follow my instincts, remain knowledgeable, and advocate for myself and the health of my child. Today, I am the proud mother of two beautiful girls named Camilla and Keziah. I now face every day with the courage to be the best provider, nurturer, and supporter for them that I can be. **(Dominique Smith)**



The day I felt I had courage would have to be the day my first love was born. I had 36 hours of labor, my mother was nowhere around, and my child's father was panicking.

I'm in pain, screaming, "press the button, I need more!" The nurse is saying, "Don't push, the doctor isn't here yet." My child's father is telling me to push! I see her head. The nurse is holding the head from coming out. The doctor is rushing straight to the gloves and catches Alejandra in her arms. She is 8 pounds, 4 ounces, my big baby. All the worries and the stress go out of my mind.

I found my courage on November 18th, 2004. I was scared for nine months, but the second I saw her face, my name had changed to Mom! **(Roxanna Sobrevilla)**

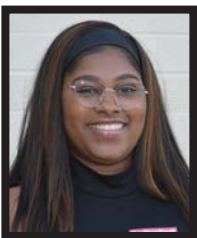




A moment of courage I had was when my parents got divorced. As an older sister, I had to show my sibling that I was strong, even though I wasn't. I think this experience made me stronger.

I was at a really dark place but I couldn't show any emotions, not because I didn't care but because I didn't want my brother or my mom to worry about me. Getting back up was hard, but the support of my loved ones really helped.

(Guadalupe Valerio)



A moment of courage for me would be me deciding to go back to school. I've had a couple attempts to go to college, but they were unsuccessful. My first attempt was right after high school. I had a newborn baby and

was still living at home with my parents. Although that may seem like the ideal situation for a teen mom trying to get her education, it wasn't. I still had to worry about working to help my parents pay bills, take care of my daughter, have reliable transportation, and have childcare for when I was at work and school. Realizing that having a child as young as I did was going to make life ten times harder was the most discouraging moment in my life. So, I dropped out of school and focused on just working and making money.

My second attempt at going to college was when I was 24 years old. I had worked long enough to have a reliable car for my daughter and me, an apartment with affordable rent, and money in my savings account. My stepdad had been helping with my bills at the time, so it made everything much easier for me. I enrolled in school and was doing well for the most part balancing everything. But my stepdad started getting really sick and was diagnosed with end stage renal disease. From there, my mom had to work two jobs, and I took over taking him to all of his appointments and taking care of him daily. I ended up quitting my job and dropping out of school. He passed away the following January. I knew that I still wanted to go back to school, so in 2018 I applied to the Odyssey Program and got accepted! But I had to be realistic: I was still trying to figure out a new apartment for my daughter and me, and I was still very depressed from my stepdad passing away. I called Emily and explained that I had to give my spot up because I would much rather my spot go to someone who was prepared to be an Odyssey student at the time.

I am now on my third attempt at college, and in my opinion, with all that I've been through, it takes a great amount of courage to still be considering college. I hope to continue school and get my degree in social work going forward. Hopefully the third time's the charm! **(Andrea White)**



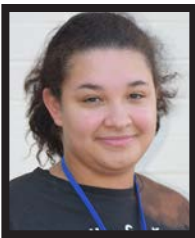


I've always thought that courage was the absence of fear. What I learned at the age of 32, while finding myself a widow with a seven-year-old child and homeless, is that courage is acting even when you are afraid

to move. Thanks to laws in Wisconsin, landlords can ask for income up to three times the rent amount from potential residents. As a now-single woman, I could afford my bills, but I didn't make almost \$4,000 a month, so I found myself and my child living with friends and family. For the first time in my life, I didn't have a home to call my own. For three months straight, I was denied apartments because of lack of income. I was told to call the YWCA for help. But shame and fear would not let me do this.

One day after picking my daughter from the summer program, I had to pull over and cry. I cried so hard I thought I would break my heart. Then I felt a tiny hand on my back and a tiny voice saying, "It'll be okay, Mommy." In that moment, I knew I would do whatever I had to do so that my daughter would never worry about where she would live or see me cry like this ever again! That day I went to the YWCA to get help. I was so afraid I wouldn't get help or that I would be judged that my whole body was shaking.

Ninety days later, through many more tears and hardships, I got an apartment, and my child has never worried about where she would live again. My courage in the face of my fear also led me to become a homeless services provider to help other people not have to go through what we went through alone. **(Mya Whitson)**



A time I felt courage was when I had my son. It wasn't just the pain of birth; it was knowing that someone was going to need me 100% forever. This past year, life has pushed me beyond, pushing me harder and harder. In March 2022, my son fell

off the couch when I wasn't home, I took him to the hospital later that night and found out he had two skull fractures and only one came from the fall.



Doctors and police officers looked at me like I was a monster, when in reality, I was just as scared and confused. CPS threatened to take him away.

I fought so hard and had to find someone to help watch him. I have to do visits, meetings, phone calls. Every day, I don't want to get up. Sometimes, I feel like just rolling over and dying. But then who would take care of my baby? I had to gain the courage to look these people in the eyes and tell them "NO! I didn't hurt my baby!" I found the courage to come into class and work every day trying to prove to CPS and social workers that I AM a good mom.

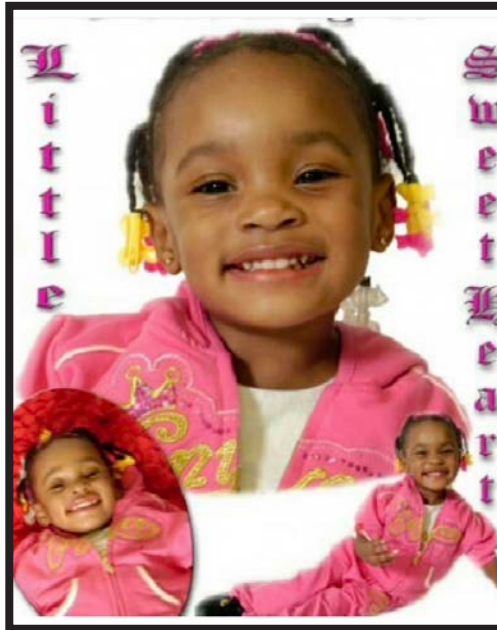
(Sinetra Wilson)





A time for me would be when I first found out I was pregnant. I was still

in high school. I was afraid and sad. I didn't know what to do, what to think, or how to feel. I was embarrassed because my friends weren't pregnant, just me. I went through my four years not giving up despite what anybody thought. I graduated and finished school and had my baby. I didn't give up because that was not an option. And now my baby is all grown up. **(Zykia Wilson)**



Last month, on October 9th, I relapsed after eight and a half years of sobriety. I did not go home for two days out of fear that I had lost my family.

Wrapped with guilt, I reached out to several people and was honest about what I had done. For weeks I walked around feeling like I let everyone down, and I didn't know how I would face everyone. I attended the Odyssey voting event at the Union and wore a mask because I was afraid that someone could tell that I had been using, and I felt guilty.

Part of me kept wanting to hide, and as anyone could imagine, I wanted to give up. For days, I sat and thought of everyone who had been in my corner and the thought of me disappointing them made me angry. I started to think of all the promises I made and something in me sparked. I made the conscious decision to start working harder on myself and loving myself with the kind of love that is real and important for me to make it to my goals.

No one other than one loved one knew I was using again, and it was crushing me that I was hurting the only person that showed me true love and loyalty during my hardest days. I decided that under no circumstance would I continue to hurt the ones I love, and I took the step and said something. I reached out for help, I refreshed my soul, and I got back on track fast.

I shared this about me because I know that if I didn't, I could never confront the feelings that come with the whole relapse process. I wasn't going to let a few moments of weakness determine the rest of my future. I want better for me, so whatever it takes I'm going to do it, even if it takes the courage of letting everyone know I messed up. **(Anonymous)**



FINDING PLATO'S CAVE TODAY

After reading Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" from The Republic, students found examples from their own life of times they have been trapped in caves that kept—or are still keeping—them from seeing the light or truth.

I was born in the Robert Taylor homes in Chicago. Mom had seven boys, one of them deceased. Gregory was killed by some guys coming out of a gangway. My brothers' names are Linzy, Otis, Antonio, Delmar, and Roman. We lived in a four-bedroom apartment. Every day was a struggle for us because mom was working and going to school. It would have been worse if it wasn't for our grandmother, who always lived in the other building from us. Sometimes she would cook dinner for us when my mom had to go to school. Where we lived was called "the hole" because they were the last three buildings on the State Street corridor. We had lived in all three buildings, 5322, 5323, and 5326. There was a lot of gang violence, killings, and people being beaten up. It was called the hole because there was one way in or out, until they were torn down. **(Tyrone Hudson)**

When I started high school, I was the perfect student, doing my homework, going to class on time, doing extra credit work. But then there was a cave of kids who skipped, had bad grades, in gangs saying they wanted to be "friends" with me. I said yes, and slowly I started creeping in the cave. When I noticed I was in the cave, I had abominable grades. My attendance was horrible. I was always late to class, but I knew this wasn't me.

A new semester started. I told myself, I'm going to change. I left the cave, started going back to my old schedule, and stopped hanging out with the wrong people. And I was finally free! Everything was back to normal. Those "friends" still sent me messages, but I ignored them all the time. Ever since then, I warn people about the cave, and it's better to stay away from it. **(Gael Rodriguez)**



Yes, I have been in a "cave," dealing with depression. I lost my only sister due to a car accident in 2018. Dealing with the pain, I found myself depressed, where I only wanted to drink and sleep. I felt like drinking helped because it took my mind off reality. I was able to go to sleep and think that it was a dream, but automatically I would wake up to reality.

I also found myself in a "cave" dealing with battles that life threw at me. Being a single parent dealing with the everyday mom role has happy moments. But there are moments where I feel alone, moments where I want to reach out to my mom and get advice but can't. Sometimes I'm in a "cave" filled with depression, lack of nutrients, happy, and sad.

(Tameia Allen)

My weight used to get the best of me. I was ashamed in high school because all my friends were smaller. I had let my weight control my life, and that was not me. My goal was to get slimmer this year so I would not feel like I'm trapped in this body. I have been working on it, and it's been working. Now I love the way I look.
(Zykia Wilson)

I think my weight struggle is a cave for me. Growing up, people always made fun of my weight, but those who loved and adored me told me nothing was wrong. These people are the ones whose opinion mattered the most. Instead of being honest, they shielded me from the truth and the reality of my troubles.

If the ones who were showing me love would have showed me reality, I feel like I would never have gotten to the point of depression. If I would have been aware sooner than later, life could have gone differently for me.
(Tiara Smith)

Growing up with a single mother was not the best, but she found a way for me to get taken care of. At the age of five months, I lived with an elderly cousin and her husband. She is my third cousin, which in my opinion is no relationship, not even family at this point. My mother came to see me on major holidays. I even got to leave during spring breaks and summer breaks.

Yes, in reality, my parent wasn't the greatest, but I've seen a lot in my 43 years of life. I've seen drug addicts and dealers to the point where me as a young child at the age of 11 knew the process of mixing these chemicals up on the streets. I've also witnessed domestic abuse in my life. I've seen my mother get beaten with a 2x4 by her beloved husband, to the point where she got married with two black eyes. Where is the love there?

Living in poverty, I saw that whites didn't allow our young men to walk through their neighborhood; they would get called n***, get jumped on, or shot



at. My lack of education came when you didn't feel safe going to school. Don't judge because, no matter, I love my mother. And the life obstacles I've seen and gone through, I try not to let my children go through. But if it weren't for my mother's mistakes, I wouldn't know half the things I know now.
(Curtrice Foster)

I was a troubled teen growing up. I was very smart and had the ability to get good grades, but instead I made the choice not to. I started doing a lot of bad things, getting myself in a lot of trouble. I ended up in group homes and JRC a lot. This all occurred because I was trying to fit in with who everybody felt like was the cool crowd.

I knew I was doing wrong but continued to dig myself in a deeper hole just trying to prove a point. I knew how to get out of the situation I was in, but because of how deeply I was already in the tough situations I was in, I chose to give up instead. It caused me to go into a deep depression to the point they had even sent me off to a mental institution. It took for me to be cut off from family and regular life for it to finally click to me that it was time to make a change. That was my cave, and I will never go back to that place in my life again.
(Antoneah Armour)

I'll admit, this is one of the hardest assignments I've come across so far. I think it shines too bright of a light behind the marionettes casting shadows that frighten me. Do I know what they are entirely? No. Do I even know why they scare me? Nope. Not at all. I just know that I'm too scared to take a proper look most of the time, much like the people who refuse to break through their chains to look behind them.

Unfortunately, that's what anxiety does to you. It seemingly taints and infects illogical thoughts into a perfectly logical mind. Everyone seems to equate depression with sadness, and to a certain extent, sure. But really, it just leaves you feeling wholly empty. "Why bother" becomes a phrase that falls too readily past your lips when you're in the midst of yet another mental storm.

For now, let's call the shadows my anxiety. The chains that keep me shackled, depression. I could go on about the encouraging phrases I've heard in my life: "without suffering, there can be no compassion," "Storms make trees take deeper roots," etc. However, one phrase will always stay with me.

"You're only given one little spark of madness—you mustn't lose it." —Robin Williams.



You have to be a very unique and beautiful type of mad in order to finally break free of the shackles that have bound you into place for so long. Although there is something to being in the darkness of a cave for so long, it makes you appreciate the light so much more. Muted and saturated worlds become blindingly brilliant and vibrant. Sounds of laughter, touch, affection, and everything in between suddenly comfort the part of your soul that you didn't realize needed to be nurtured.

Plato has wisdom towards the end: "They must be made to ascend again..." I see two points he was possibly making. One—humility. Two—hunger. One, to never forget where you started and having the recognition that others may only be just taking their first steps toward ascension. Realize that you may not know of the shadows that still haunt them. Two—never stop ascending. Have the gnawing hunger to continue moving forward, to know more, understand more. One could argue that there are actually dozens of caves to climb through in life (if I was clever there would be a spelunking joke here somewhere). **(Kaitlin Birdsall)**

I'm currently in a cave that I'm slowly coming out of. These past couple years have been very difficult for me. I lost my oldest brother in December 2017 and my youngest sibling (brother) in June 2020. My family hasn't been the same since.

Shortly after my brother Clinton passed away in 2020 is when anxiety and depression took a drastic toll on my life. I didn't care about anything for that matter. I started to miss work. My self-esteem was terrible. I had the mindset of just giving up. I didn't care or love myself for a very long time. I'm starting to love myself more every day now.

It took so many losses for people to give up and turn their back to me, for me to understand a better tomorrow, a better life starts with me. It was my negative thought process, holding onto past guilt and hurt that kept me chained. I'm starting to be more grateful for where I'm currently at in my life. It's the process and growth that I'm thankful for. **(Gabrielle Brown)**

I've been in a cave multiple times in my life. I believe that we must go through this phase in life in order to grow an open mind. My cave was being born into poverty. My mother raised me and my other four siblings in a Section 8 household. She did not work; she did a lot of schooling. We weren't able to do fun things like go to the movies or go out to get ice cream. She always told us that Santa and the Easter Bunny were real. She had often gone to pantries and gone through programs in order to get our gifts and food.

The age of 16 is when I found out my mom had an addiction to drugs. It broke my heart to pieces. All I could think about was, "Is the love of all five of your kids strong enough to help you fight this battle?" "Do you love us enough to put the drugs down?" My cave turned into reality when my mom started to put us (her five children) last when it came to her needs. I found an escape through fighting a battle against my mother to help her save her last-born daughter from the system of adoption.

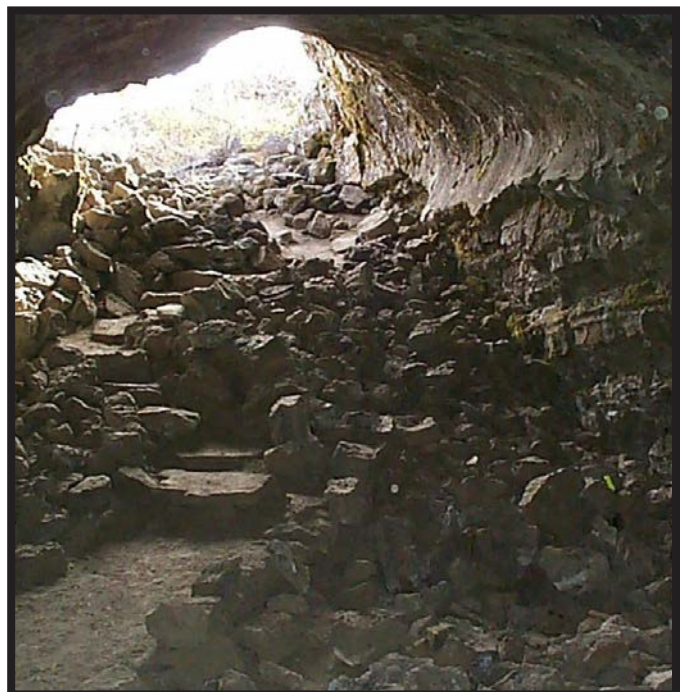
While fighting for her safety against our mother, I ended up back in a cave, a different one this time. At the age 19, still fighting for my family, I was found to be in an abusive relationship with the man I thought was my lifetime partner. I was afraid, shocked, and alone. No, my mother couldn't help me; she couldn't even help herself. I was all alone, with no one but my little sister, the one who's looked up to me ever since I began fighting for her. As time flies, I begin to find my way out of this dark punishing hole I put myself in. Two years later, I find myself bearing a child, all while being stalked, kidnapped, raped, and beaten by my miserable ex. In the midst of all of the horrifying events, I still couldn't find my mom in the right mindset, as I'm still grasping for the legal rights over my little sister.

With that being said, caves come and go; the lessons learned last a lifetime. I will always put my family first; they deserve to be free minded and free willed. I refuse to let them be in a cave for over a decade of their lives. It's unimaginable. It's unfair. Everyone thinks and sees differently. **(Geresa Homesly)**

An example of a cave for me is when I'm upset, I'll just go in my room and imagine I'm somewhere else happy. I'll stay in there for hours and not come out. I'll ignore all my responsibilities as a mom and student and just sit there. In society, the government presents the world in a different way than what it actually is. The price of everything is rising, and no one can pay for anything. Low income is either still way too much or you make too much but not enough for market rate, leaving people struggling and homeless. **(Sinetra Wilson)**

As a whole, I believe we the people of America are living in a cave. We continue to fight the same fight. For many years, America has been trying to create equal opportunities. For years, we have been trying to end homelessness and poverty. For years, we've been trying to break cycles. For years, we've been trying to make America great. For years, people are without their basic needs. For years, children and families have been dying from hunger.

For years, America and Americans act as if we don't have the answers to end at all. For years... People are still needing what they've always needed. We act as if we don't have the answers, but many stories and surveys have been completed. **(Sarah Branch)**



I think I have been in a cave. When my parents got divorced, I felt trapped in my own world. I stopped caring about school, and my daily activities didn't seem fun anymore. It was really hard seeing my two favorite people separate. It was better that way because there had been too many arguments. It was not the same as it was. I got out of the cave, and I found the light. **(Lupita Valerio)**

I have been in a cave of my adolescence for a very long time, since about age eleven, actually. When my mom started her journey of drug addiction, it changed my whole life. My mom was all I ever knew, the only person I loved with everything in me as a child. My father wasn't really around, so when I "lost" the mother I knew to drugs, it changed my life and me forever. She was the one always around to make me feel safe. Then all of a sudden, she wasn't. I know what you might be thinking—no, she is not dead (thank God). What I mean is she was no longer the mom I once knew. She was out running the streets high, leaving me with family members to take over her responsibilities. I felt lost, I felt alone, I felt like she didn't care or love me anymore. I began to become rebellious, engaging in drinking, smoking weed, tobacco, among other things. I stopped caring about my future and education.

At 14, I finally had to get a job. My grandparents weren't rich, but they did their best to make sure I had a roof over my head and food in my mouth, so I had to make sure I could provide everything else I needed or wanted on my own. I'd go weeks, months without hearing or seeing my mother. I lived in fear for her every day.

At age 17, I got pregnant with my first daughter. That changed my life forever, but that's where real bills came and real responsibilities. I now had another person to take care of aside from myself. I did it and

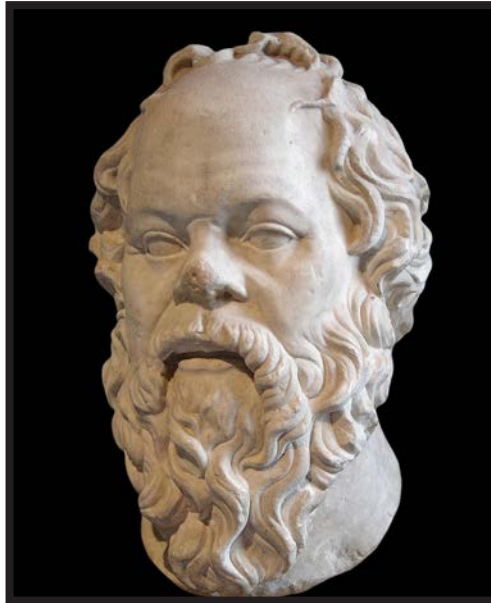
I've been doing it ever since. I knew I'd never want to make her feel how I felt; I knew I needed to change. I am so happy I did not fall into that cave of adolescence, but the one I had to provide, protect, and teach. Two years went by, and I had another child, which pushed me harder. I worked, I grocery shopped, I cleaned, and every day I was still a mom—maybe not the perfect one, but a trying one! As I stated before, my grandparents were not rich, my parents were not rich, so neither was I. Everything I've accomplished, everything I own is mine, which is something I never expected I could do. The moral of the story is that I became in a cave of my adolescence by always having to simply survive.

My whole young "adulthood" I never got the chance to find myself or find a hobby even. I never got the chance to really be a kid. My life circumstances led me down the wrong path. I never attended a school dance, not even prom, also leading me to the point I am at now, a working mom struggling with bills, no real idea on my life interests to lead me on the road to a career, just trying to map out the future day by day, step by step, and sleepless night by sleepless night. I have been reaching many goals lately, so I hope soon I will be out of this cave. **(Keely Nelson-Gray)**



Growing up, I always knew my family and I lived in mostly African American environments. I also knew that we didn't have as many clothes/shoes, and my ma oftentimes sent me and my brothers to centers to eat dinner.

As I grew older, I learned the names of the assistance programs we were enrolled in. A few of them are called Section 8, K12, Secret Santa, and many more I could name.



Today, I am 26 years young, and my immediate family is still utilizing these resources. These programs come with restrictions such as no man on the lease, no felons, income restrictions, and yearly updates, none exclusive to house checks. I see my mother, my cousins, my aunts willingly struggle and live below the means to keep receiving assistance. Now that I am more knowledgeable, I realize that they live in Socrates' cave; they've made comfort there. **(Monèl Long)**

Traumatic experiences in my life led me to feel trapped inside an unwanted cave. Imagine living in a constant mind set of fear of failure, feeling disappointed, and continuously hearing the little voice that tells you 'You are not smart enough.' Living with these dark parts in my mind has not been easy, and consequently I felt like life purposely threw these obstacles only to me. Living in extreme poverty as a young boy, for example, has made me believe that I do not deserve a good life. Or I feel stupid because I cannot pursue my dreams due to my lack of education. And, entering illegally into the United States of America has made me feel fearful and not free. Having these shadows in my mind constantly affected the way I think and express myself, and they prevented me from feeling complete and happy.

Starting with poverty, this experience has left me traits of negative ways of thinking. One of the effects poverty has had on me is living in a constant

fear and stress of never having enough money. I also have the feeling of anxiety because I feel like I cannot spare or spend money on myself. For example, I did not like to spend money on myself, such as buying nice clothes, because I felt the urge to save it for my family in Mexico and think about how they could use this money in a better way. Another example of this stress is that I did not take good care of my health because I felt like I was spending money on unnecessary things for me, and consequently I had a tooth ache for several months

that ended up in losing two teeth. Moreover, experiencing extreme poverty made me believe that I do not deserve a good and healthy life. For example, it was hard for me to schedule doctor appointments, and I just had to bear the pain, so I did not have to spend money for medication or the clinic fees. Another example is when I had a hernia since I was a little boy and as a young adult, I never took care of it with the fear in mind of the bills I was going to end up paying and keeping in mind that this money was for my family here in the USA and in Mexico. Having lived through poverty forced me to face some obstacles that prevented my mind from enjoying my life without stressing about money, feeling sad, or the urge to endure the pain and keep working without a time off.

In addition, lack of education made me feel stupid because I did not go to high school here in the USA and did not have a diploma that says I'm educated. These experiences made me feel sorry for myself. Furthermore, having this feeling of lack of education present in my mind at all times made me doubt myself, and made me lose my confidence about learning or expanding my horizons. For example, when I'm in class I feel like I'm the only one who is not doing well in completing assignments or the only one who is not understanding the lessons. Even though I know it is not true, I'm still fighting this little voice that tells me I'm not smart enough to be attending here. Also, lack of education makes me feel lost and

frustrated when I have to deal with things out of my comfort zone, such as paperwork or planning ahead for my daughter's education. An example is the frustration I encounter when I have to file paperwork for my daughters' education. I do not feel good not knowing how to fill forms, and I feel defeated because I'm not educated to know what to do with the forms I'm filling out. Another example is when I have to navigate the internet looking for information needed or when I want to plan a trip with my kids, and I end up giving up. Again, I am left feeling defeated and wishing I have had the experience to learn a bit more about how to navigate the internet or learn how to reach out for help. In all, not being able to enjoy a nice trip with my daughters or not being able to help my daughters with their education left me feeling defeated and feeling like a victim from the lack of education I have.

Lastly, the thoughts and feelings I had for not feeling welcomed and wanted from being an illegal immigrant consequently made me feel like an intruder and not free to enjoy a quality of life. Feeling the guilt for doing something wrong, like illegally entering the USA, brought me countless painful moments, and I still have some remaining

effects on me today. For example, when I first moved to Madison, I never wanted to get an ID because I felt guilty using the services knowing that I'm here illegally. I did not get an ID a few years after being here, and thereby I felt like I did not exist here. Moreover, I never felt brave enough to speak up because I feared getting in trouble and being deported to Mexico. For example, when I worked at a hotel as a cook, one of my coworkers called me Wet Back and it hurt me deeply. Being insulted was not the worst; the feeling of not being able to speak up and report to a manager was the worst feeling. I felt like I could do nothing for fear of getting fired, so I stayed quiet and never reported. Furthermore, I never asked for help to better my living conditions, knowing I was undocumented here in the USA. To illustrate this, one time I complained to my landlord about the disgusting carpet in the apartment I was living in. The landlord simply said that if I ever complained again, he was going to call "La Migra" (The Border Patrol). I felt as if I was just someone who is used to benefit the Americans' life and that I was worthless. Again, experiencing these acts of racism made me feel unwanted, and I felt like I could not ever speak up because of the fear of being kicked out of here. These experiences have had a tremendous effect in my life and created trauma deep inside of me. I'm working so hard to overcome this mind set.



In conclusion, having to go through extreme poverty, feeling stupid because of my lack of education, and feeling fearful because I entered illegally into the United States have had many consequences in my life. Living in fear and doubt and feeling lost were due to the experiences I lived, and consequently I was trapped in this cave for a long while. It is not an easy habit to break free from because till today I'm still struggling with some of these bad habits to think about myself. But I'm also working very hard every day at all times to heal my heart and soul to break free from these shadows and live happily here. **(Saul Naxi Perez)**



understanding of the Bible or what it spoke to me.

I was comfortable with my routine of going to Church on Sunday mornings (religiously), paying my tithes and offerings, praying at the altar, and singing hymn songs for Praise and worship with the rest of the congregation. This is what a righteous one should do, right? This is what my pastor is preaching to me, so I must be doing all the things God asks of me. Why wasn't I progressing or elevating as a person, why was I feeling alone in times of sorrow, and why was there so much judgment and gossip among the congregation? These were

At some point I think I found myself in a cave, the cave of religion and not a relationship with God, where I only imitated what I saw without the conviction of wanting to do it because I liked it. It was rather to live in appearance, but there were the opportunities to turn my head to look at the sunbeam of knowledge. The chains that had tied me fell away. Suddenly the people around me thought that I was a helpless dreamer; "too foolish," they called me because I am somewhat rebellious by raising my voice about something that I don't see as fair. I relearned new ways of living that are fine for me and that for others are synonymous with rarity.

In my work as a doula and CHW Community Health Worker in my Latino community, I can see that there are many caves that oppress my community, but I also believe that part of that is that we occupy them until we break out of conformity in order to see the light of day, sun. We need to realize that the light of the fire [in the cave] is not everything. I think it is a complex topic.

(Maricela Martinez Munguia)

In my experience I was once trapped in a cave of the Church house. I was a prisoner of religious beliefs displayed to me through the words of a minister preaching to me the "Gospel" that he commanded I follow. His words were my truth, and I basked in that knowledge shared with me. Not once did I question or attempt to seek my own

questions I begin to ask myself as I begin seeing the glimmer of light coming from the opening of the cave I was mentally trapped in. I started going less and less to the church house to congregate. I started to read the bible, a few chapters per day, until I had completely read it from the book of Genesis to the book of Revelation.

At times the information I was ingesting was painful to accept because it was so much easier to conform back to the ways of indulging in sin and then simply asking for forgiveness from God than to maintain a lifestyle of following the commandments of God. These commandments exceeded well over the popular 10 commandments associated with Moses. Although those 10 are essential commandments, there were commandments regarding dietary consumption and commandments regarding clothing and attire. These were things never addressed in sermons preached to me. It took me to seek my own understanding.

Although I am still a firm believer of God, I now have my own knowledge and understanding of what is expected of me to lead a righteous lifestyle and walk in my truth as a believer of God. No one can recite verses from the Bible to me without me understanding the context from which it derived. In no way am I perfect, but walking in my truth has opened up my confidence to seek knowledge to be the best person I was meant to be.

(Dominique Smith)

For me, today social media is a cave. When I was younger, some mornings I would get up and scroll through Instagram for hours, wishing I had the lifestyle of some of these rich people. I would actually save money for expensive things I couldn't afford and simply just didn't need. I didn't realize until after I bought these things that it didn't upgrade my life in any way. In fact, it put me in more debt and made my life worse.

(Jonathan Booe)

Growing up in the 1980s as a young lady, I experienced my family and even family friends who sold drugs for money to help take care of their families. From the time I could remember, selling drugs was something that was offered to me as a young girl. I'd seen it was quick money to be made. I was told that's all that African Americans could do because it was hard to get a job in the world.

After being offered to do it, sell drugs, I just couldn't. Besides the money, I'd seen how much pain—physical, emotional pain—it brought the user and their family. I just couldn't bear that feeling. At fifteen years old, I was talking with a family friend, and she advised me to not listen to what was told to me, that it benefits to have a job; that was my beginning to exploring how to get my first job. I studied how to get a job. I went to trainings on how to fill out applications and what to expect in an interview. I asked questions. I actually took a class in school to prepare me for work to become a working young lady. Then I told myself to go further, so I did, and to this day I work, and there's not a time I even thought about selling drugs.

Getting up every day to work feels great! Not having to worry about putting pain in another's heart or damaging their family or looking over your shoulder about what you are doing feels great! A working woman, I have so many more benefits in this work. **(Lavinia Miller)**



I see there was an allegory of the cave in the life of my family. This happened in the past century, in the generation of my grandmother who passed away a couple of years ago. She had nine kids. She lived in a rural community with no basic services at all. There were no schools, medical centers, or roads to access the community by car. There was strong racism against the indigenous going on in the nation of Ecuador. My grandmother lived in the time where white-latifundium still tortured indigenous people. My family was told that indigenous people don't have any right to live and should be exterminated. So they were killed as if they were beings with no souls.

In the middle of extreme racism against indigenous people, my grandmother somehow managed to send her kids to elementary school, which was located in the city, two hours away from the community by foot. She said that she knew that education was the doorway to freedom. She said, "You learn how to write and read, so you can defend yourself from the oppressor." So she sent her children to school to learn how to write and how to read.

I see this example as an allegory of the cave because my grandmother was the first woman (first family) in the community that bet on education as the way to fight off racism. **(Aida Inuca)**

For a very big portion of my life, I was in a cave. My mother had a ninth grade education, and my older siblings had a similar educational background. My father had gotten a college education but wasn't around for my childhood to teach me the importance of education. I was in a cave because I was ignorant to the fact that education is so important. When I was a child, my mom worked two, sometimes three jobs to pay the bills, and when it came to keeping up with homework, we were pretty much expected to keep up with that ourselves. Getting through school and doing what's expected of me was the easy part. Actually taking the time to soak in the knowledge was the problem. I was the first of 11 siblings to graduate high school, and I pretty much thought that was it for me, and that I had learned as much as I needed to in life. In reality, I knew very little about the world and how to navigate in it in order to be successful in life.

It was when I was about 23 years old, I started to realize that I was in a cave, and that I didn't know very much about the world around me. I was working part time at Sears in the West Towne mall, and I overheard my co-workers talking about the state of the economy and how it's affecting retail stores. I just sat quietly because I had no idea what they were talking about. I felt a little bit embarrassed because at this point I had been living on my own for about four years, had my own car and a four-year-old, and was paying taxes. I realized that I was never taught these things and I wasn't interested in learning these things because I was comfortable where I was and afraid of a challenge, afraid to start getting an education and have to go through obstacles to get it.

From then on, I made it my mission to learn more about society. I learned who my local political leaders were, learned more about the economy and taxes and politics on a national level. From there I wanted to know more and more. I started going to the library and reading every book I could get my hands on. I learned more about African American culture and history. I even went and found philosophy books.

I think that I was in a cave because I just simply didn't know there was more to life. But I was scared

that learning these things would be hard and complicated. I'm so glad that I got the motivation to leave the cave that I was in and was able to motivate my family to come out of the cave that our family was mentally trapped in as well.

(Andrea White)

I think we are all born in our own family cave. We don't have any knowledge of how other families live in their caves. We are taught everything we know from our own family cave. It's from the food we eat, to the languages we speak in, especially on how we are supposed to view life or people. I grew up with a father who was strong in his beliefs, and those beliefs became mine because he had his own allegory already installed in my head.

We have an image of what a relationship should look like. From a very young age, a lot of little girls wanted the Cinderella love story. We sometimes want people to look and think what a perfect couple or family they have, when in reality they are



unhappy and tired. To keep the truth from coming out, they keep up the lies and the perfect image. Things aren't always what they look like.

We grew up in the household with my parents. They would fight and make up. I grew up thinking that was normal, that was love. My uncles and aunts did the same. We grew up in our family cave. My parents were married for years. How could I question 15 years? When I did question my parents on why I couldn't say certain words or question my mental health, I was told that's for white people, not us. We are in our cave, not theirs.

(Roxanna Sobrevilla)

I have been in “The Cave of Perfection” for as long as I can remember. This cave has been the most painful yet also most satisfying, frustrating, and exhausting roller coaster that I never seemed to be able to get off of. When I look back, my very first memory of this was a five-year-old me competing to be better than my mom’s best friend’s son Omar.

My mom and her best friend, Ms. Rosalind, always seemed to be bragging back and forth about Omar and my accomplishments, trying to one-up each other at every encounter. Because of this I was constantly “guided” to new hobbies and activities. There was always a sense of “that’s good, but you can do better” from my mom.

I went from just singing in the choir to being “guided” towards directing the choir; from just swimming at the neighborhood pool to joining the kids’ swim team; then ballet; then becoming the teacher’s helper. The list goes on and on, but at the top of the list was being an Honor Student every year without fail.

Of all the things that I had to be the best at, the one I enjoyed the most was getting my BOOK IT Pizza Hut pizza certificates. One summer I read 247 books. I read countless books throughout the year as well, so much so that I had a stack of these pizza certificates. One of my favorite things to do was on

Fridays to take my two brothers and my two sisters to get their own personal pan pizza from Pizza Hut.

Becoming a mom was what inspired me to come out of that cave. I found myself pressuring my oldest daughter to be the best at everything and would find myself getting upset with her when she wasn’t keen to be #1. It didn’t take me long to realize that that’s way too much pressure to put on a child, and on myself. I found that while I still love being number one at everything, it’s not the end of the world if I’m not. **(Mya Whitson)**

When I was in my country, my friends who immigrated to this country told me about how it was easy to earn money, so that was what I believed. So I decided to immigrate too because I wanted a better life. Once I arrived in this country, I realized that this is not how I thought or how they told me. I had to work up to 16 hours a day to earn money; I did not eat well, I didn’t sleep well either, and the worst part was that I had to leave my parents, who I never saw again, and siblings in my country.

Life in the United States was not what I thought. It has always been very difficult, but little by little I am getting over myself, and I’m not going to stop until I achieve my American Dream!
(Fredy Carcano)



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

*What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.*

—Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*



TAMEIA ALLEN

My name is Tameia, but everybody calls me Mia. My resident came up to me and said, "Did you know 'Mia' means 'mine' in Spanish?" In Egyptian, the name "Mia" means

beloved. When I think of the word "beloved," I think of a caring, nice person, which I am myself. The Slavic meaning is dear or darling. I wonder if my uncle knows that because every time he refers to me he always says darling. "How are you doing, darling? How was your day, darling?" I'm not sure why my mom named me Tameia, and unfortunately, she's not here for me to ask.

My last name, Allen, according to google means handsome. My granddad was one handsome man. That's who I got my last name from. My aunt tells me everything that I need to know about the "Allen" side of the family. It's packed with a lot of uncles who represent "Allen." My aunt also told me that I should be happy to be an Allen.



ANTONEAH ARMOUR

My name has no particular meaning. I am my father's and mother's first kid together. Before I was born, my daddy was obsessed with the fact that I was coming

into this world. Seeing that I was a girl and he could not get his Junior, he and my mom picked the closest female name possible to his. My dad's name is Anthony Deonne Armour, and my name is Antoneah Deonne Armour. In a way, I am my father's Jr. As I grow older, I'm realizing I'm just like him in many different ways, from my personality to key features in my appearance.

I'm glad they chose the name they did for me. It is unique, and I've never met another person with the name. If females really could be a Jr. to their father, that would definitely be me. My name is perfect for me.



KAITLIN BIRDSALL

Apparently, there are over 135 ways to spell "Kaitlin" (and I swear my whole family discovered each way to do so).

Kaitlin: A variation of "Catherine" or "Kathleen." In Greek, Irish, and Celtic origins, Kaitlin means "pure." My personal favorite is the Celtic Irish definition: pure-hearted or little darling. There's something so sweet about that.

Kyle: Gaelic in origin, meaning narrow, straight, confidence, reliance, trust. Kyle is still, to this day, a gender-neutral name; however, not as common for those who identify as female. In a way, I've always liked the fact that it was on the rare side to have a name like mine.

So when you combine everything, my name reads like the lead in a fantasy novel. "A pure-hearted little darling who's trustworthy and reliant and always walks a straight and narrow path confidently."

I wish I could say that were true. Pure-hearted? Sure. Little darling? My fiancé might say so. Definitely trustworthy. But there's no confidence. Straight and narrow paths are walked by braver people who actually make it out their doors.

**JONATHAN BOOEY**

According to google,
"Jonathan" means
"God has given."
"God has given"
means that what's

given isn't from people but given by God. Exp: She has a God-given talent. Jonathan is a very common name in America. 1 out of 422 baby boys are named Jonathan every year. My mother is a loyal Christian, and I believe that played a big role in my name's choosing. I think Jonathan is a very strong, solid name, especially being a black man in America where you can be judged simply by your name.

"Booe" doesn't really have a concrete meaning online. When the average person hears it, they usually compare it to a swimming buoy.

The Booe name was passed down from my great-grandfather on my mother's side of the family. When I was a kid, I heard all the jokes because of the spelling and sound of my name. Truth is, I love my last name "Booe" because of it being so rare and unique. I've never met someone with the same spelling and sound as mine. I'm very proud and would like to build a legacy around the Booe name.

**JEKEIRIA BOOKER**

My mom had a hard time naming me, so she called around the family for advice. She learned of the name from one of my aunts, who said it's of African descent and means "brilliant." My first and middle names were supposed to be one name but were split because it would have been just too long.

I didn't always appreciate my name due to it being so different and hard for people to pronounce and remember. Eventually, it grew on me. Now



I wouldn't change it for the world. I love the uniqueness, sound, and powerful meaning behind my name. Me honoring my name is what drove me to name my children exotic, powerful names such as Emprizz, Majesty, and Dynast. I believe your name is a very important part of your identity. I also believe it determines your path and swag (presence/vibe) you bring to this world. I strongly encourage parents to think long and thoroughly before naming your children.

**SARAH BRANCH**

I was named by my father; it's the one connection I have left to him. I was told I was named from the bible; during my father's later years he was a pastor. Sarah is the name of Abraham's wife. Sarah comes from the Hebrew name "princess." Renee, my middle name, stems from the Latin word "Renatus." The prefix "re" is to be reborn. In the medieval times, Renee was associated with baptism, to be born again. Branch was also my father's last name. In findings, "Branch" was given to people who lived by water.

I personally don't like my name. It doesn't fit my identity. Often, I'm thought to be a white person, which I'm sure helps me. **(Sarah Branch)**

**GABRIELLE BROWN**

Gabrielle: meaning “God is my strength.” Some people interpret it to mean “woman of God.”

Gabrielle is the female version of Gabriel, a name from the French bible. I never knew the true meaning of my name until now. All I can say is, wow! It fits so perfectly.

Gabrielle was chosen from my dad’s mom. I’ve always been told how beautiful my name was. I’ve always thought so too!

Now that I know the meaning of my name, at 31 years old, I can truly be the witness of that.

**FREDY CARCANO**

The meaning of my last name (Carcano): For me, it is like sowing a seed in the place where you live because my children and my grandchildren will continue like

this. I sowed my seed here in this country because my children were born here.

**MARK ESPAÑOL**

Mark – the name Mark is said to have different meanings, but most commonly

is known for being a god of war.

It has significance to me in that I believe that I am a fighter. I have always gone all the way to make sure I end up victorious.

Anthony – The name Anthony is said to mean “the chosen one” or “praiseworthy.” I have seen this kind of stuff happen to me, but I myself don’t feel it to be true.

**CURTRICE FOSTER**

My name is different than any other Trices I’ve known. Everyone mostly mispronounces it, which is funny to me. My landlord broke my name into two syllables because he couldn’t pronounce it, but it still came out wrong. A lot of people ask if my father’s name is Curtis. Is that how my mom came up with the name?

Honestly, I don’t know where it came from nor where she got it from, but I like it because it’s different and most people don’t know how to spell or pronounce it.

P.S. I like to be called Tri. It’s also funny because people cannot pronounce that either. They always say “try.”

**GERESA MARIE HOMESLY**

My name was made up by my grandmother (my dad’s mom). My first name is very different and unique. I have yet to meet another person with my same exact spelling.

I am not able to find a meaning for my name, so I created one. Generally, you can find meanings online, but my meaning comes from my mind, heart, and soul.

Ge = Gentle
Re = Resilient
Sa = Socially attractive

I am very gentle with my words, as they are very powerful when determined. I had to be resilient because there were many obstacles in my life that no other teen had to tackle. For example, I gained custody



of my nine-year-old sister when I was eighteen years old. I was strong and flexible enough to make sacrifices at an early age.

Marie: My middle name is the same exact name of my great aunt Marie. I was given her name because of how swell and chocolate she is. I was a planned pregnancy after my older brother. I believe it means I am a wished-for child by my mother. It's important to me to gain more depth on why I am named after her. I will be having a conversation with her about it real soon.



TYRONE OZEA HUDSON SR.

My name is Tyrone Ozea Hudson Sr. I don't know where my first name comes from. My middle name is my dad's name, Ozea Peters. He died in 2021, three years after my

mom, whose name is Ruth Ann Diqq. Her maiden name was Hudson, before she had gotten married for the first three times in my lifetime. I have five brothers. Three of them live in Minnesota, and their names are Linzy, Otis, and Antonio. My two younger brothers, Roman and Delmar, live in Indiana. My mom died in 2018.

I have five sons and three daughters. Their names are Isaiah, Christopher, Whitney, Tyrone Jr., Dwayne, Candice, Angelique, and Ramone. Five of them live in Illinois, one in Iowa, and one in Utah. I have 34 grandchildren and one great-grandchild. They all call me "Granddada." I love my family always and forever, no matter what we go through in life. Family first, always and forever.



AIDA INUCA

My parents told the following story about my name:

It was in the rural community called Pijal, where my parents were living, and no education nor health sources for families were available in this place at that time.

One day my parents met a white lady whose will was to help people in need. One day, when I was newborn, and when I did not have a name yet, I felt extremely sick with dehydration and almost passed out. It happened that this lady was living at one of the community houses doing her work at that time. My mom went to see this lady and asked for help. This lady took me to the emergency hospital that was located two hours away from my parents' home. There, the doctors were able to immediately assist me and kind of resuscitate me.

The name of the lady was Aida, so, in gratitude for her support to my family, my parents called me Aida after her.

So my name Aida means gratitude for me. I always remember this lady as someone who was always there to offer any support to my family. **(Aida Inuca)**

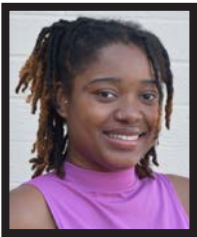


**TIERRA KIMBREW**

My name is Tierra. Tierra means Earth in English, Soil or Dirt in Spanish. My middle name is Marie. Marie means “Star of the Sea,” and it is a traditional French name. I

wasn’t named after anyone in particular. My father chose my name. One night when my mother was still pregnant, he had a dream about the day that I was born. In the dream, my dad said the doctor pulled me out and announced my name as Tierra Marie.

I personally never thought that my name holds much significance to me. I don’t think a name has that much impact on someone’s life or identity because they aren’t truly all that unique. It’s someone’s footprint, or impact that they leave on this world, that shapes whether or not a name has any REAL significance.

**MONÈL LONG
(ALSO SHAMELL HOMESLY)**

Google search: intuitive, spiritual, charming, creator, promoter, idea, God

Family history: my mother has an identical twin. Their names are Melody (Mom) and Michelle (Aunt). When they were younger, they agreed whoever had the first daughter, her name would be “Shamell,” a reflection of the twins.

**MARICELA MARTINEZ**

Thank you for asking about the transcendence of my name.

My name is Maricela, and this is thanks to my sister, Elvira, who is ten years older than me. My name is inspired by that of a singer from that time who my sister used to listen to. Coincidentally, while my mother was pregnant with me, so were my two aunts, my two neighbors. Knowing how they were going to call me, they decided to

name their daughters Maricela too. It’s good that the last name is different.

My mother always called me Mari, but when she called me Maricela, whoops, that meant I was in trouble.

Most of my family and friends call me Mari and for a long time I wanted it to continue that way, but later I embraced the strength of my name and I prefer to be called Maricela because for me it sounds like a lot of power, character, determination, genuine identity, and my roots. ()

**LAVINIA MILLER**

Lavinia – primarily a female name of Latin origin, woman of Rome. Different spellings: Lavenia, Levenia.

Ashanté – African, Kenyan Tribe in West Africa.

Miller – 19th century old English. Lavinia Ashanté Miller is my name. It was given to me from my mother’s sister. My name means influential woman. I take many challenges. I take risks and am progressive. I’m a free thinker, logical, and sexual at times. I handle unexpected changes. I’m forever youthful with a great sense of humor. But most of all, I’m an occupational person.



**SAUL NAXI PEREZ**

My name is Saul Nazi Perez. My mother and father gave me the name Saul

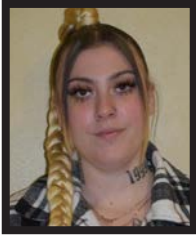
from the bible according to their beliefs. However, this is what Saul means to me. Saul means I'm forever thankful to my parents, who brought me and raised me in this world. Moreover, my name is an identity of my strengths and talents. For example, I needed perseverance, fearless, and adaptability to move to a new world of the unknown. Also, my name is expressing my feelings in the art I'm discovering in my drawings, my art of cooking traditional Mexican dishes, and the art of dancing my favorite dance (Cumbia). Saul means willingness to learn something new, open my mind to different points of views, accept others for what they are and how they are. In all, I'm very proud of my name because it represents my Mexican culture, it represents a male Latino who is still fighting and never gives up on his dreams. My name represents a proud father of two amazing human beings as well. And last, Saul means love and compassion for all living beings in my own beliefs.

My two names Nazi and Perez are a connection of love from my parents, and a collision of two worlds. Nazi comes from my dad's family, and it goes back to my indigenous roots. This name carries so much history with me, but it also carries so much suffering from my ancestors, the native Cholultecas in Cholula, Mexico. I'm so proud to still have this name with me today after many generations had passed. The name Nazi truly identifies me as a real native descendant of my people before the Spaniards enslaved my Country. I wish I knew more about the name Nazi or who my ancestors were. Unfortunately, like many records in Mexico, these



records were destroyed by the Spaniards who conquered Mexico. Therefore, there are no records to recall anything from my ancestors today.

On the other hand, Perez is a Spanish name of which I'm very proud as well because it comes from my mother. Perez means going to my grandparents' house and enjoying a different vibe from my father's family. Perez means a new way to see me getting involved with new horizons like a new religion in my childhood. This name also brought me many questions of the past. For example, what was it like to carry a Spanish name as my ancestors were being oppressed in their own homeland and stripped from their language, culture, and beliefs? But as today, Perez means I was lucky to be born in a household filled with love and compassion to one another. And overall, Perez means that I love my mother and for all the sacrifices she made to give me life so I can enjoy being all that I'm today. In the end, Nazi Perez means I can't wait to see where these two names will take me in a near future and what I will be able to change in my life for good.

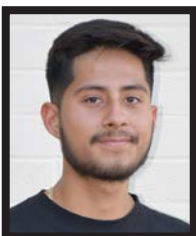
**KEELY NELSON-GRAY**

Keely: My first name, I was always confused why my mom decided it for me, but as I've gotten older, it's become clearer to me. I've always been different from my peers, or it always felt that way. I'm unique, just like my name. All my life, I never felt like I "fit in." I always felt like an outsider. As I've gotten older, I've realized it's better to be unique and be no one other than yourself. Keely defines me perfectly in so many ways.

Marie: Marie has been a family name on my dad's side of my family for generations. It is my great grandma, great aunt, aunt, cousin, and my middle name. So I gave it to my first daughter, Analia, as well.

Nelson-Gray: I share both my parents' last names. I always wondered why they gave me both. Personally, I don't like it. It makes paperwork long, confuses people, and people always question if I am married.

Punky: Short for "pumpkin," this will always be important to me because my mom has called me it since I was little (she still does to this day.) I think it's cute.

**GAEL RODRIGUEZ**

My great grandpa's name was Gael. My middle name is Antonio because my dad's middle name is Antonio. The name Gael comes from Gaelic, which is from Ireland, Scotland. Gael is a term for descendants of the ancient Celts in Scotland.

**KIANA SIMS**

Kiana: Well, my mom named me after a doll in a magazine. I am named after my third oldest sister on my dad's side. Sims is my last name; it comes from my

grandfather. I don't know much about him, but I remember visiting his farm in Michigan when I was very little.

**DOMINIQUE SMITH**

If you look up my name "Dominique," you'll find the biblical meaning, or "belonging to God." The truth is, my mother was a huge fan of the hit television show "Dynasty" and chose to name me after a character on the show: Dominique Deveraux played by the great Diahann Carroll. She then went on to give me the middle name of "Devoe," which is fairly similar to Deveroux but is actually the namesake of my grandmother.

My maternal grandmother was one of the strongest, most determined, most loving women I knew growing up as a child. I recall sitting with her in the morning imitating her drink coffee, as I would drink milk, and we'd watch "The Price is Right" followed by a lineup of soap operas. I'd help fold clothes (only the towels). Even then, I wanted to be more like the woman I'd received part of my name from. Last but not least is Smith, my last name. This is the most important part of me, the part that connects me to the rest of my family.



**TIARA SMITH**

"A tiara is a sophisticated headpiece, which unlike the crown, is worn by only women."

To my family, my first name has no meaning behind it. I was named Tiara because my older sister's name is Kiara.

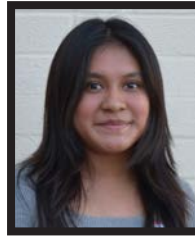
Monique is my middle name, passed on from my auntie. They called her Big Mo and I was Little Mo for as long as I can remember. To this day, my family still calls me that, or "Lil Ma" because I'm the youngest and I look just like my mother.

**ROXANNA SOBREVILLA**

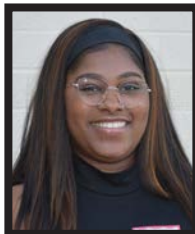
My name is Roxanna Sobrevilla. I don't have a nickname. In my era, middle names weren't common, or so my parents said. My birth certificate has my name listed as

Roxanna, and my social security has my name listed as Roxanne. One letter has been haunting me my whole life.

My name means a lot. I am my father's first child, and he also named me. He named me after a song he heard on the radio on his way to the hospital to see me. The song was by The Police – "Roxanne." My mom wanted to change the "e" to an "a." They came up with Roxanna. I'm proud to carry my father's last name because he worked hard to make a better life for his kids. I'm proud to carry his last name, and I enjoy helping people how to say it and spell it every time. It's an honor to carry on family's legacy.

**GUADALUPE VALERIO**

My name is Guadalupe Itzel Valerio Aragon. My first name was given to me after our lady of Guadalupe. I was a very sick baby and my mom had so many problems during her pregnancy. She prayed a lot; she promised that if everything went well during her pregnancy, she would name me after the virgin of Guadalupe. She originally was going to name me Itzel, but she kept her promise, and my second name is Itzel. I rarely use Itzel, but it's a beautiful name. I love it, but all throughout my life I used Lupita, short for Guadalupe, also Lupe. My last name, Valerio, I've never actually looked it up. When I was in high school, I did a project on Catherine of Aragon. That was so cool we had the same last names.

**ANDREA WHITE**

Andrea; a gender-neutral name that originated in Greece. It is connected to the meanings "strong" and "brave." I feel like the name is versatile because each Andrea that I know put their own little spin on the name and truly made it theirs. Some Andreas go by Drea, like me. Others go by Andy or Andi, which I don't like very much, but it doesn't stop my brothers from calling me it. I personally think the most interesting thing about my name is that, as simple as it is, people still manage to call me everything but Andrea (I get called Adrian, Angie, and Adriana a lot).

I was given this name because I was named after my grandmother, who goes by Annie. Many of my family members tell me that I've looked like my grandma since I was born. I believe that because I look at old pictures from when she was my age and there's a huge resemblance. I don't believe that my name has shaped my identity. I didn't always like it because I felt that it was boring and plain. I started embracing my name when I was around 21-22 years old.



MYA WHITSON

My name is Myesha; it means “woman” and “life” in Swahili and Arabic – specifically Urdu. I feel that my name suits me completely.

Well, firstly, I am a woman, and I am capable of giving life physically and emotionally. I was given this name after my older cousin Aiesha. The story goes that all while my mom was pregnant with me, Aiesha, who was three at the time, followed my mom everywhere and would talk to me in the womb. She could make me dance around or calm down inside my mom. My middle name is a family name; the first-born girl is always named Marie.



AMANDA WILLIS

Amanda is a Latin name meaning “loveable” or “worthy of love.” The name was first recorded during 1212 in Warwickshire, England. It was a popular literary name in the

17th and 18th centuries and was also a staple of the 1980s. At first, I hated my name and thought it was so plain, boring, and common; I really had to grow to like it.

I think my name matches my identity very well. As a child I was always super affectionate to my parents and my mom is just not that type. She gave lots of hugs and kisses and knew how sensitive I was, so she endured it from me, but she didn’t overdo it. As a mother I totally understand her because it drives me crazy after a while of my kids using my body as their own personal amusement park! Now my dad, on the other hand, he’s the kissing bandit, and that’s why I gave him the name Smooch. My mom wanted to name my eldest sister Amanda, but my grandmother told her, “No, that’s too old-fashioned.” Years down the line she had two more girls and allowed other family members to name them. When my mother had me, my dad wanted to name me Maggie after his great-grandmother. My mom told him, “No, I’m naming her Amanda.”

Marie is my middle name, and I share it with one of my aunts. Marie is a traditional French name

that is believed to have several meanings because the name has a complicated origin story. In France, Marie came from the Latin “stella maris,” which means “star of the sea.” However, it is also a biblical name because it is the French version of the name Mary, the holy virgin mother of Jesus. Origin: Marie is the French version of the English name “Mary” and the Latin name “Maria.” It also has Hebrew origins, having been derived from the name “Miriam” or “Miryam.” The name Marie has long been popular in France, Belgium, Austria, Germany, Denmark, and Norway, but it didn’t appear in English until the 19th century. All of this is new information for me. I never looked into the meaning of my middle name, so I’m learning a lot about myself.

Willis is a surname of English, Norman French, and Scottish origin. The oldest extant family of the name, the Willes family of Warwickshire, formerly of Newbold Comyn and Fenny Compton, has used the spellings ‘Willis,’ ‘Willys,’ and ‘Wyllys’ and appear in records from 1330. In English, German and American the meaning of the name Willis is resolute protector. The proctor of my family is my father, and he and my mom have always told us to make sure you look out for the little ones in the family, so I can see that being a great fit for my last name.



SINETRA WILSON

My first name came from Frank Sinatra. My mom’s side came from Italy and my mom’s mom loved him. I’m also named after my biological father. My name is super hard to pronounce, so I’m always correcting people every day. Most of my family calls me Tink, like Tinkerbell.



ZYKIA WILSON

My name means “faith.” It comes from Africa and my mom named me. She just came up with it, along with some friends.

I also have a middle name, Ayanna, which means beautiful flower. All of us have the last name Wilson on my dad’s side of the family. My name is very hard to pronounce, but I love it and it’s very different.

SHOWING OFF STYLE

Before writing as Frederick Douglass, students experimented with a variety of persuasive writing techniques and literary devices.

ALLITERATION

Lupita likes to laugh. (**Lupita Valerio**)

Oliver only once outdid himself. (**Gael Rodriguez**)

The big black bug with the big black bear made the big black bear bleed blood. (**Amanda Willis**)

My mind makes me crazy. (**Sinetra Wilson**)

We are the most magnificent, marvelous melaninated breed of women made of pure love. (**Monèl Long**)

I am a working woman, a money-making woman, a bill-balancing woman, and a hardworking happy woman. (**Keely Nelson-Gray**)

ALLUSION

To my children I wear an S on my chest.

(**Dominique Smith**)

I wish I could just click my heels and be back home. (**Gabrielle Brown**)

ANALOGY

Coffee in the morning is like a warm hug from family, whereas wine in the evening is like a kiss from a lover. (**Kaitlin Birdsall**)

Hunger is to eat as thirst is to drink.

(**Fredy Carcano**)

Robert played basketball the way a fish swims in water. (**Aida Inunca**)



ASSONANCE

She looked for books I'd hide. (**Geresa Homesly**)

Feel the sweet breeze and hear the silent cries among the weeping of our seeds. (**Monèl Long**)

You risk lives when you drive. (**Dominique Smith**)

No pain, no gain . . . chips and dip. (**Maricela Martinez Munguia**)

Reading and teaching fills my heart with joy. (**Roxanna Sobrevilla**)

CHIASMUS

Let us take control over our phone instead our phone taking control over us. (**Gael Rodriguez**)

God is good all the time, and all the time God is good. (**Dominique Smith**)

For a slave to read and write is dangerous to the master, and the master is dangerous to a slave who can read and write. (**Amanda Willis**)

There were 1,000 of you and one master, but in your head it was 1,000 masters and one of you. (**Monèl Long**)

EXCLAMATION

I will never go back to prison again! (**Mark Español**)

Think big! (**Tiara Smith**)

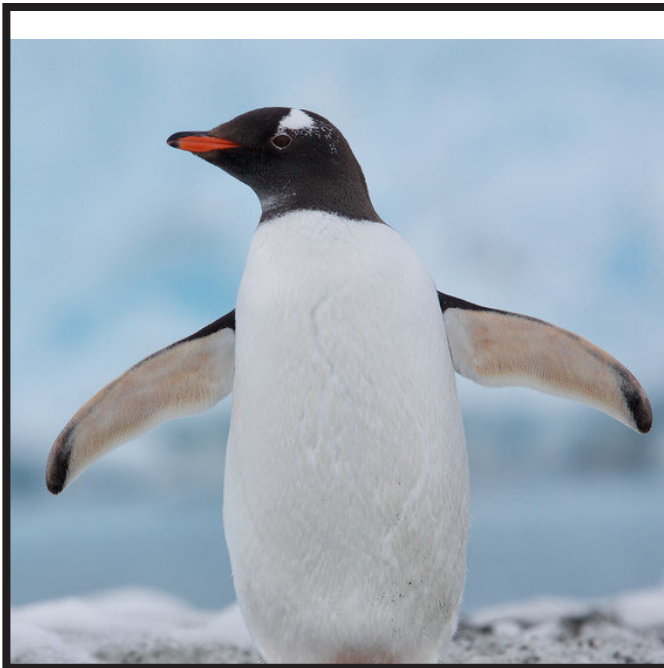
The weather has changed! (**Tyrone Hudson**)

I will get through college! (**Sinetra Wilson**)

I want my freedom! (**Roxanna Sobrevilla**)

It is my firm belief that I have never, before becoming a parent, used the phrase “STOP THAT NOW!” so frequently. (**Mya Whitson**)

“Mommy, I want to go to your school!” Azalea says when she’s excited about going to Odyssey. (**Keely Nelson-Gray**)

**FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE****Simile:**

Working in retail on Black Friday was terrifying, as customers would look at you like weakened prey behind the register, and they were the ravenous wolves on the hunt. (**Kaitlin Birdsall**)

I woke up this morning and was as cold as a penguin in the North Pole. (**Mark Español**)

My headache was so intense that it felt as if there was a tiny person inside my skull hitting my brain with a sledgehammer. (**Mya Whitson**)

Metaphor:

Crying a river to relieve my blues breathes life into me. (**Dominique Smith**)

Life is a Pandora’s box; you never know what you’re going to find. (**Maricela Martinez Munguia**)

IRONY

People who have failed in life teach us not to fail in ours. (**Fredy Carcano**)

She was so intelligent she managed to spell every other word in her essay wrong. (**Andrea White**)

I want to be a pilot but have a fear of heights. (**Andrea White**)

We humans are WONDERFUL caretakers of our planet. (**Aida Inunca**)

Mr. Auld believed education would do harm and no good to an enslaved person; however, this awareness only would be harmful to the oppressor. (**Monèl Long**)

A fire station burned down. (**Maricela Martinez Munguia**)

ONOMATOPOEIA

One day I bent down to pick up my daughter and my knee gave a CREAK as loud as an old rusty screen door. (**Mya Whitson**; this also contains a simile)

When I saw the large crowd in the audience, my stomach PLOPPED to my feet. (**Dominique Smith**)

WHACK! WHACK! The master is taking his anger out with the whip. WHACK! (**Roxanna Sobrevilla**)

OXYMORON

Raising kids can be painfully rewarding. (**Jonathan Booeey**)

In class today there was such thunderous silence. (**Mark Español**)

The ending of my job was bittersweet. (**Kiana Sims**)

My baby girl is like a sour patch kid both sour and sweet, my beautiful monster. (**Amanda Willis**)

Halloween is the night of the living dead. (**Andrea White**)

Trying to find a new place to live is a living death. (**Sinetra Wilson**)

My kind bitter mistress showed me the ABCs. (**Geresa Homesly**)

Gentle killers and soft kidnappers are the ones idolized for their heroic ways. (**Monèl Long**)

PARALLELISM

We respect our community's right to dignity as much as we respect our own right to dignity.
(**Aida Inunca**)

We grew crops we could not eat, picked cotton we could not wear. (**Keely Nelson-Gray**)

REPETITION

I desired to read all day but did chores all day. (**Geresa Homesly**)

I have to repeat the practice, over and over and over again, so I can learn them.

(**Maricela Martinez Munguia**)

An open invitation to open a door to an open opportunity will open success. (**Dominique Smith**)

Every day I get loaded with homework, and every day I forget to do it. (**Sinetra Wilson**)

Every second of every day in every way I am needed by the people in my house for every little thing.

(**Mya Whitson**)

Every day I wake up to two children, every day I get them dressed in their clothes, every day I drive them to school to retain knowledge, every day I pick them up, every day I bathe them, and every day I put them to sleep. (**Keely Nelson-Gray**)

RHETORICAL QUESTION

If you cut me, will I not bleed? (**Dominique Smith**)

When my daughter asked if she had to go to bed on time, I said, "Do birds fly?" (**Andrea White**)

Do I not deserve free time because I'm a mother?
(**Keely Nelson-Gray**)

SUPERLATIVE

The quietest of voices can demand the attention of the most inattentive ears. (**Kaitlin Birdsall**)

I'm the sweetest and most loving person.
(**Sinetra Wilson**)

Denzel Washington is the sexiest man in the universe. (**Curtrice Foster**)

The history of slavery is the most sickening, most horrible, and most dehumanizing topic I learned about this year. (**Saul Nazi**)



CHANNELING FREDERICK DOUGLASS

After reading Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Odyssey students were given an editorial from the Southern Quarterly Review of 1852 claiming that slavery was God's plan, that slaves basked in the sun and were happy, and that only whites could understand the conception of liberty. Students responded using the fiery voice and oratorical style of Frederick Douglass, including alliteration, rhetorical questions, exclamations, irony, and other techniques. Here are excerpts.

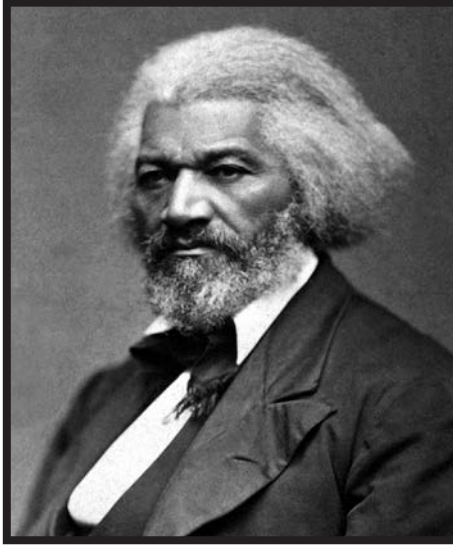
Dear Editor,

You are uneducated, and the things that you say about my people are not of God. You are supposed to judge a man not by his color. Just because I have color on my flesh does not make any man without color better than I am. I have not done anything to receive such judgment! You are supposed to judge people by their actions and contributions to society.

Not only that, no slavery of any shape or form is appropriate! How would you like it if I tied up your people to a tree to get beaten? Or how would you like it if the black man enslaved your people? That is why you did not want to teach us how to read and write or learn.

You thought that we were ignorant and uneducated. The only ignorant and uneducated people are you. You mention God and Christianity, but God did not create man to get treated as such. God created man with the ability to think and act on his own. A freedom of all people should be not just for the white man but for everyone with or without color! **(Tameia Allen)**

I have a multitude of questions for you regarding your conception of what a slave and slavery is. You have stated that, left to himself, a slave does not dream of liberty. Why do you assume this notion? What is this cruel task of disruption you speak of? When I see my brother's head under the heel of the slaveholder, is the blood gushing out of his nose and ears the "enjoyment of life" that you are referring to?



Are you confusing their strung up, morbid, mangled, misshapen bodies for this supposed enjoyment of basking in the warm sunlight? Here I can assure you, you are mistaken. Or is it the benevolence of sending off those who have aged long past their owners' legacies, their tired and overused bodies left to be separated from anyone to care from in their old age—is it here where we find happiness, being left to die alone and forgotten?

Perhaps you have heard the songs sung in the fields throughout the day, but clearly you have not really listened to the torturing, tormented tones that taunt the very soul that takes the time to listen. Here I will admit, it is hard for me to listen as well.

To which I ask, as a good Christian man, do you normally turn a blind eye to a man in need? A blind eye to human suffering?

To you, sir, I challenge your way of thinking. God, in fact, did not destine this upon any living soul. This was brought to life by men seeking power and to reign above all else. I am here to tell you that not one slave has been basking in the sunlight. There is no such thing as a "happy" slave. A slave is but a man, woman, or child seeking the same joys in life as any other man, woman, or child on God's green earth.

Not a single slave dreams of staying a slave. Not one. **(Kaitlin Birdsall)**

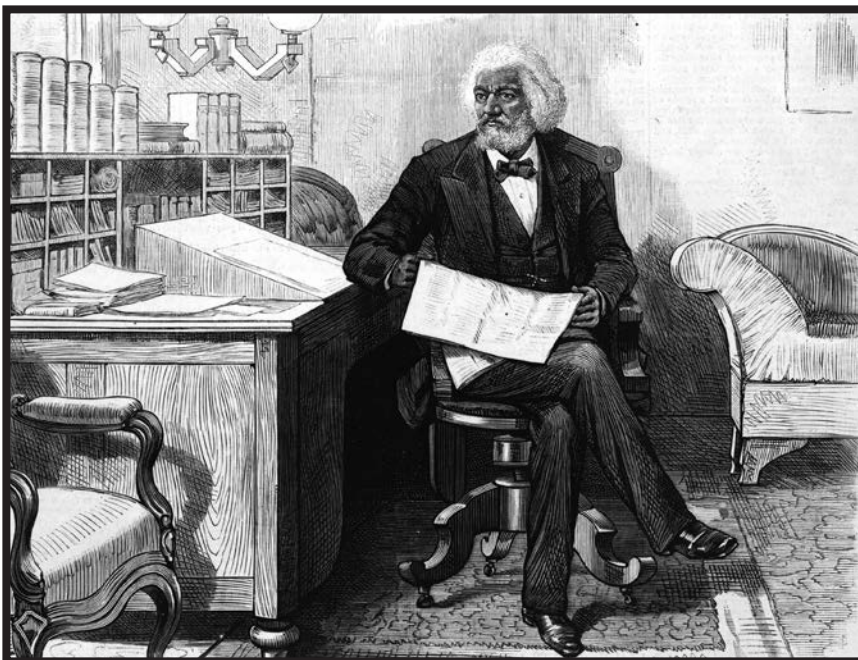
My name is Frederick Douglass, not “the negro.” I have my own mind, can honestly think for myself. Learning is not a disturbance. No man was destined to be a slave. This was something bestowed upon the black man by slave masters. God would not have done this because in his eyes we are as one. There was no basking in the sun, no happiness. There was hard work, sweat, and tears, praying for freedom, seeing no other way out.

There is no such thing as Christian slavery; there was no enjoyment, only suffering. In my opinion, slavery and “bright sunbeam” should not even be mentioned in the same sentence.

In closing, I would like to say that “we” as black people will remain proud and continue to excel in all that we do. **(Gabrielle Brown)**

I read recently a description of slavery in the newspapers which I disagree with.

First of all, I disagree with the name “Negro,” since all human beings have the right to be called by our names. Of course, we dream of our freedom, since we want to know where we came from, who our parents are; we are against family separation, and we are tired of being sold and mistreated like animals. We want to go to school to learn to read and write like white people.



We are tired of being forced to work without rest or any privilege in return.

God created men with the same rights, regardless of color or race. I don't believe that it is God's work for anyone to be a slave. The lives of “Negros,” as you call them, would be much better if we had our freedom.

For all these reasons, I disagree with the newspaper article you wrote. **(Fredy Carcano)**

I begin this letter by asking you a question: have you ever lived a day in your life as a slave? In your editorial, you state that it will be cruel to disturb the enjoyment of life of a slave, and it is beyond me that one would think that any human being could ever find enjoyment in being whipped and treated as if he or she had no worth.

I implore you, sir, to think of what it may feel like to see your daughter, your wife, or your mother raped; to sit and watch your family be sent to distant lands in this country and sold like property. I assure you that as a man that has been a slave and who has endured the life of a slave, freedom is the only thing a slave dreams of.

Mentioning that God has destined people of color to this wonderful life as you are almost referring

it to be is outrageous. It is the white man who, with a heart full of greed, entitlement, and hate, has placed this destiny on us. We, even if viewed through the laws of nature, desire and dream of the same liberties which are afforded to the white man.

For these reasons and more, I live my life as a testament against the institution of slavery, and I live my life working diligently to abolish slavery throughout this country and anywhere else it might exist. I assure you that every slave wants to bask under the sunshine of liberty and be treated with the same respect and dignity as the white man. **(Mark Español)**

How could you say the things you say? It is wrong to know that you talk like that and have that attitude. How dare you put the enjoyment of slavery in your life and use the Lord in such an agreement? We as people have true value to life. We are not fugitives. We are committed to justice, freedom, and love. We must be free from slavery; we must be free for life. **(Curtrice Foster)**

Me, dangerous? I was born into the power of the white man, with no say at all, of what is next to come. Growing, dwelling on roaming free as the other white children, I always wondered, "Why?" Why do they not let Negro children, as I am, gain knowledge? Stuck in fear, struck in fear, I followed my peers with same-toned skin. Barely clothed, barely fed, I spent my precious daylight hours listening to a master with no future plan for me to be destined for greatness. Everything I never had was taken from me. I never grew to know my name, my birthday, even my mother. Am I not a human too? I knew I was of no harm. I wanted to be happy, but how could I be, for I would be tortured 'til the power of my happiness was drained out by the white man. I was not free to express myself, let alone help one another! Free for all, only for the free, most certainly was not for me.

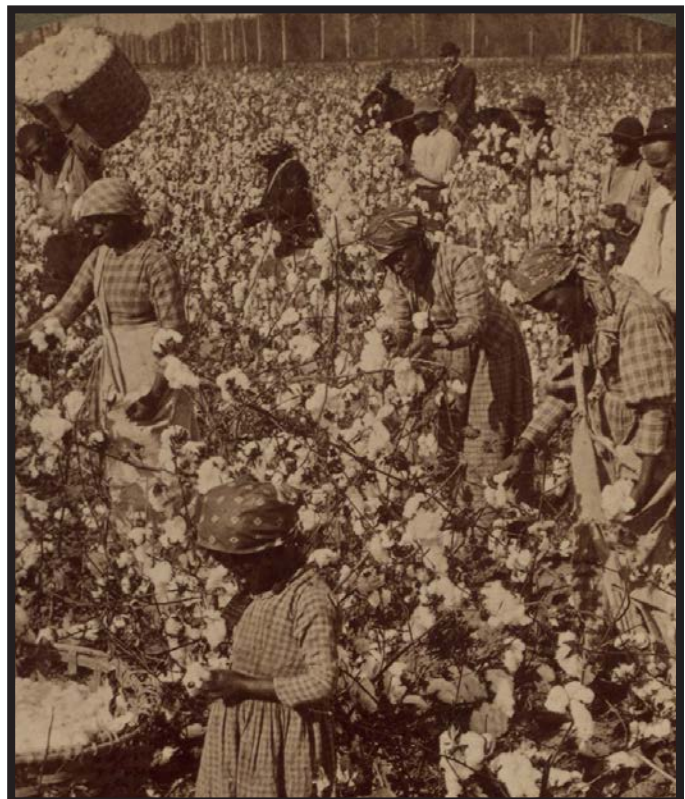
Growing older, I never knew my age... something in me sparked! Do I want to live in fear? Is there a way I am able to get through a day where one of my people was not screeching and hollering for their lord and savior? Could you actually bear hearing so many painful screams that make you want to bawl along with them? Hearing them in the morning, hearing them throughout the afternoon, even hearing them during rest time? Being alone with myself made me more at peace. I felt safe in my mind, the only sacred place I had. I dreamed of more than to be free; I lived to be free. In my mind I was free... only my body was not.

Picking that cotton in the hot, horrid hazes, I wondered is there a God? Why did he make us slaves? God is so powerful, but I began to believe and discover knowledge. The more we talked, or I mean the more I talked to him, I began to view my life as a cage. The only way to get out was by

asking questions and learning what not to do. I was scared...scarred.. and very curious... this led me to books. I love books.

Dangerous... me? I think there is no way to harm a pale-skinned person with such soft and intelligent paper. Please do interfere while I am picking cotton... please do interfere while I am watching a traumatizing whipping, rape, torture. I am not happy; this was not God's plan for us negros. We are not destined to work for the white man, nor against. This is pain, terror, horror, as if life would never end. So, let the negro, me, read, lead me to education. It will lead us all to freedom, power, and happiness. Knowledge brings me peace. **(Geresa Homesly)**

I, Frederick Douglass, feel that your editorial is a disgrace to the black freed slaves. I have lived the life of a slave, but fortunately I was given an opportunity to leave that bondage behind me; I still feel that I am living my life in slavery, even though I am a freed man. I educated myself by reading and writing. I had a book in my hand every day when I came outside, and I had a very good teacher who helped to get started. **(Tyrone Hudson Sr.)**



I was upset to read the article about how you perceive slavery as something good and positive for society.

I was a slave; and as one of them, this is my answer to your article. You say that the negro, left to himself, does not dream of liberty; but I say that I dream intensely of liberty. I dream just like any other human who has a dream. I have dreamed of liberty since the first day I was conceived in my mother's womb. I just need a space where I can have my words heard and respected.

You say that "he cannot indeed grasp a conception which belongs so naturally to the white man." I do not belong to the white man. Indeed, the conception I grasp is that I do not belong to anybody. My ancestors taught me that I belong to mother earth. When our last breath cessates, our wisdom will spread around just like the seeds toward the soil. We are here on this planet to respect and care for each other, not to destroy ourselves.

You say that "it is a cruel task to disturb him in the enjoyment of that like-slavery-to which God has destined him." I say that I did not enjoy my life as a slave. This is not God deciding my destiny. This is a white man deciding to keep me as a slave. There is not a worse cruelty in the world than to hide your own truth and to hurt other humans just for the sake of fear of other white men.

You say that "he basks in the sunshine and is happy," but I say that you do not know what happiness is. Maybe you have never experienced happiness. Your heart only beats to the suffering of your own trauma. Your mind battles to tame your own internal monsters, and you do not know what happiness is. You say that "Christian slavery, free from interference, is the brightest sunbeam which Omniscience has destined for his existence." I say that slavery is not Christian, and it is not the

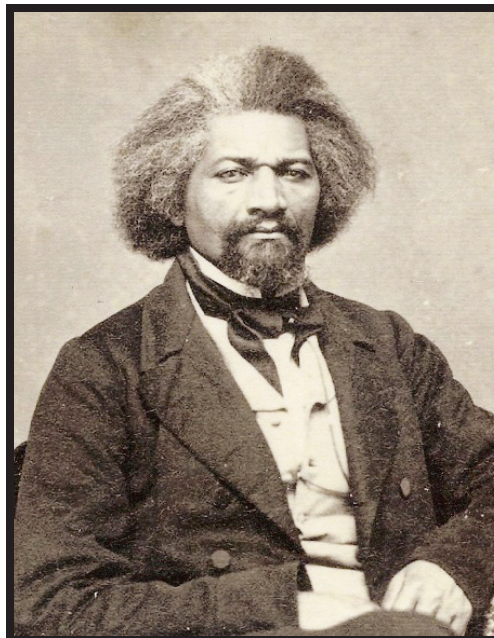
brightest sunbeam which omniscience has destined for his existence. That is not true. I can say you are just using God's name to release you from your blame.

Abolition of slavery is the right that all humans should enjoy, now more than ever. Thank you for your attention. **(Aida Inuca)**

Your editorial shows the pure ignorance of a Caucasian to label slavery as "enjoyment of life." What pure stupidity of any man or woman to think senseless beatings, hangings, raping, assaulting, and degrading could be an enjoyment in any life. The pure slow-wittedness of mankind to believe oppression of another individual to be anything close to being joyful proves my narrative through and through. **(Monèl Long)**

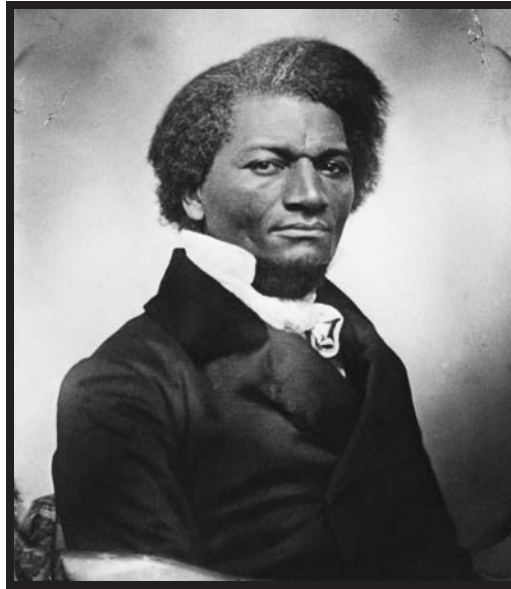
The point of view expressed in the newspaper is very condescending and incorrect. Your opinion and point of view sees only one side of slavery, and it does not include the opinions and points of views of a slave and an abolitionist like myself. You do not know what slavery is!

First off, I was a slave, and I did dream for my freedom and liberty for myself and for all the slaves. We, the Negroes as you call us in the article, want freedom, and we want our rights as human beings to be validated and respected.



Next, I do wish to pursue the life of happiness, just like you and everyone else in this country without any exceptions. Moreover, my existence and the existence of other slaves should not be up to white men. Continuing on, you are wrong to say that I "cannot grasp a conception, a conception that naturally belongs to the white man." To illustrate how wrong this is, I do exist because my white father raped my mother! This is the most sickening thought to have in mind, to think that this is the reason I exist.

My slaveholder white father forced my mother to conceive a child against her will, just so my white father could satisfy his lust! These are the sickest and saddest thoughts that go through my mind when I read your words! Again, learning and knowing that my own slaveholder father sold me, his own son, to another white slaveholder when he was just a baby is a very sickening thought in my mind. Dear editor, think for a second about the mental consequences this action creates in one's life. First, I grew up with no parents, no brothers or sisters, and no place to call home, no education, and the most miserable living conditions an infant or teenager can ask for. Your point of view is full of pure ignorance, and it devalues the pain and suffering slavery causes.



miserable life, and neither do I want my children or more generations to experience being treated worse than animals. I am tired of watching white people torturing and killing black people. And last, I was not happy being a slave, and God knows I begged him every day to free us all from this living hell. God did not invent slavery; white men invented slavery!

I have lived and witnessed firsthand the living conditions one has to endure to make it through slavery all the way to adulthood. First, I was separated from my mother as a

baby. Consequently, I never got to know my mother or father as a baby. I did not have the support from my family to live a happy childhood. I spent most of my life wearing rags for clothing and being hungry. Moreover, I did not receive an education, and I had taken it in my own hands to learn how to read and write, but with the fear of being punished to educate myself. Also, I did not sleep in a bed my whole life as a slave, and the clothing we got did not protect me from the brutal weather of winter. For example, I had to sleep inside a bag used to transport grains during the bitter cold of winter to avoid dying of cold. These living conditions, consequently, caused my skin to be covered with dead skin and bloody creases. Hunger was another pain to endure because the mere food we got is not enough. Again, I did not enjoy being a slave, and I did not like to live in these miserable conditions; the living conditions slaves are provided make life a living hell. The dehumanized living conditions I experienced are not what I or anyone deserve, no matter what skin color one is.

Furthermore, I believe that God did not create black people to be slaves! And God did not give the power to one race to be superior to others! Moreover, white men created this evil mind of power to oppress anyone who is not white. Furthermore, it is outrageous to believe that God wants for me to starve or that God wants me to be beaten and be covered in scars all over my body from the unnecessary punishments I received because I disobeyed an invented order. Moreover, my mind is traumatized because I witnessed firsthand many black people being mangled by the punishments created by white men. I saw with my own eyes the pools of blood and the torture out of pure ignorance, and against God's wishes. It is hard to believe that God wanted my existence to be happy and enjoy my life being a slave with no right or freedom.

Once more, God did not give white men the power to dictate how I live my life, my mother's life, or for my life to be taken away against one's will. White men created this God power out of pure ignorance. I do not want to live chained up to this

Dear editor, I strongly recommend you review your article and compare my point of view with what you wrote and understand the mental damage slavery does to both white slaveholders and to us black people. We humans are not happy living in these horrendous living conditions. We are not animals to be bred and sold; our lives matter. White men do not have the right to decide how I want to live my life. Slavery needs to end now! **(Saul Naxi)**

In fact, what you believe does not come naturally to the 'negro' as it does to the 'white man' has been forced upon us. We were stripped from the many rights to feel liberty or to feel equal to the "white man." The "white man" has been given this liberty just from the color of his skin. It does not indeed come naturally; it came forcefully. It came from taking my brothers and sisters from their homeland, forcing them to follow rules, engage in many labors, strip them from their dignity, strip them from their families, and strip them of the rights to feel that liberty. The "white man" felt happiness in our pain and suffering. He believed this was the way of God. I went through the times where we grew crops we could not eat, picked cotton we could not wear, took pain but could do nothing but endure. This was not liberty. So how could we ever feel something we were not given the choice to have?

The answer is we cannot; the liberty we feel now is far from the liberty the "white man" once felt. I created my own liberty with my ability to provide myself with knowledge, and that is a liberty the "white man" cannot take from me.

(Keely Nelson-Gray)

The heinous humor projected through these words to which you proclaim to know the desires or rather destiny of the slave is astonishing. You use Christianity to mask the cruelties of slavery and deny the negro the life of liberty, built on the backs of the slaves; the same backs you would find on road maps and blueprints and embedded permanently from whips of their masters to maintain ownership and manipulate the meaning of their purpose. Do you understand the woes of the motherless child, who forfeited natural natal nurturing to be avenues of revenue and prioritized as property? You could not think this opinion is one celebrated by the majority of slaves? Fortunately, my enlightening has allowed me the self-entitlement to seek beyond means to which you see fit for a slave. I WILL NOT die in this bliss, basking in the sunshine permitted, yet limited to the expectation of men who could never understand the sorrows and anguish of the enslaved, a light limited to the bare minimum and lost to liberty. With the courage to comprehend that this life is not befitting to any conscious living being, I will

continue to correspond about the plight of the slave until it concludes with the Emancipation of the Enslaved. Best regards. **(Dominique Smith)**

Freedom, justice, and liberty for all. Is that not the goal of America? Dignifying everyone, not just the heathens who claim this land to be theirs? It is true, I cannot grasp a concept deemed only for a white man. I will never understand the act of unlawfully stealing a man from his homeland, forcing him to build a new land that he can not only live freely in but has no freedom in, being brutally whipped with cowskin, lynched for entertainment, and disposed of at any given moment. The tyranny on our people is something I will never comprehend.

Anti-abolitionists like you are a disgrace to this country, deeming that a black man is only good for one thing: being the pet of the white man. Your hate-filled words only prove how insecure you are. You are afraid that our people will overcome and become greater than our owners. Race-based slave holding is so embedded in your mind that you cannot grasp the concept of liberty at all. You have no power besides your despicable words, and that soon too will come to an end.

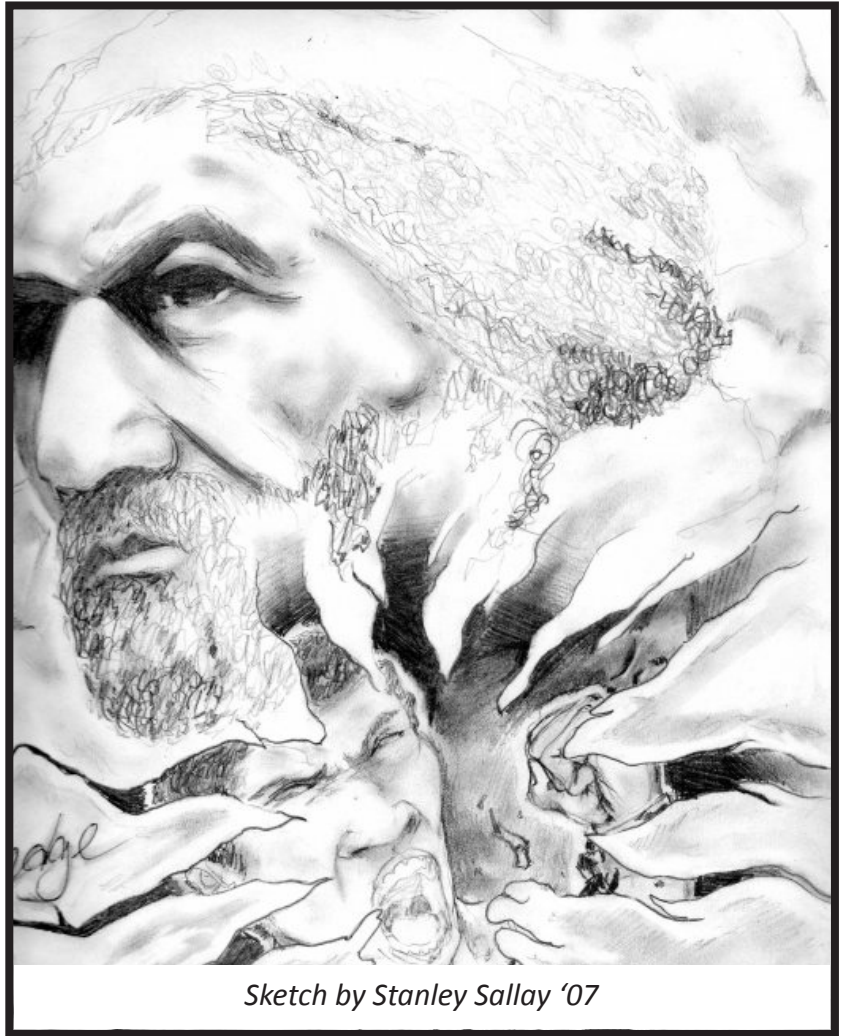
Disturbing this culture is righteous! This is and will be the only thing to uphold this country of its responsibility. We must give every man and woman freedom, justice, and liberty for all. **(Tiara Smith)**

As I read your editorial, something really hit home to me as you said, "The negro, left to himself, does not dream of liberty." As a former slave who rose to become a well-known leader, I completely disagree with this statement. I recall not knowing my age, the alphabet, or how to spell basic terms like those I am using in my letter today. Imagine, you get taken away from your mother and do not get to spend time with her. Imagine being taken away from your land. Imagine losing your liberty. You cannot because you are legalized kidnappers and murderers who went to underdeveloped nations thousands of miles away simply to steal my people's freedom. Because we are stronger, happier, and more united as a group when we work together, we know a time will come when slavery will no longer be imposed upon us. **(Lupita Valerio Aragon)**

I, Frederick Douglass, am coming to you as one educated individual to another to ask, who does not dream of liberty? The white man in 1607 came to America in pursuit of LIBERTY! We Negroes can in fact acknowledge the concept of liberty because it is something that we know we unjustly do not have. What an inhuman thought to assume that we enjoy hard conditions, lack of food, whippings, and living with illiteracy! From a young age with no mother or father, I was forced, against my will, to work for and serve an owner who thought no more of me than he did his livestock. How wonderful of an owner I must have had to not recognize that I did not have a pair of trousers of my own until I was sent off to Baltimore around the age of five. So I ask you, what sunshine do we have to bask in?

Me learning to read and write--Illegally might I add--was the sign that not only was Christian slavery brutal, coldblooded, and barbaric, but also that it needed to be abolished. EVERY slave from EVERY plantation has experienced almost EVERY act of abuse that I have. So why would one not interfere with a whole race of humans being treated worse than animals? Being sold away from every family member that we have ever known, starving all day, only to come home to cornmeal mush and sleeping on cold, hard clay floors is not anything that any innocent human being should endure. A grown man such as myself, or a grown woman with multiple children, should not feel as though they BELONG to another human like one would own a pencil or a book.

One's existence should not be based on how hard one can work—with no reward—for a great, reputable, charitable master, who whips, rapes, and chains up hundreds of people daily because he simply does not feel like they are as human as himself. The Negro, and I speak from experience, desires education, wealth, and the ability to obtain the life that is offered to his white slave owners. The Negro never asked to be brought to America



to take the place of slaveowners' livestock. Set us free! Give us liberty! We are human, just like you.
(Andrea White)

Liberty belongs to all men, not just the rich white men. I dream of being treated like a human and not like an animal you keep locked away. Liberty should come naturally and not be restricted by white greed. As a black man, I do not see happiness or sunshine. I see pain and suffering. Switch places with me to be owned and abused by a man no different than me. God made us equal and to be treated equally. Do you hate me because of my skin, or do you hate me because I hold so much power and knowledge? I am destined for greatness, not slavery! Black is natural and powerful.
(Sinetra Wilson)

Sincerely,

Frederick Douglass

EVALUATING THE “EMANCIPATION GROUP”

In Fall 2022, Odyssey students viewed Thomas Ball’s “Emancipation Group” at the Chazen Museum of Art. They were asked to describe what they saw, consider how Frederick Douglass might have designed the sculpture differently, and give their own reaction to the artwork. On November 2nd we welcomed Chazen Museum of Art staff and artists Sanford Biggers, Wildcat Ebony Brown, Mark Hines, and other MASK Consortium members to our Odyssey classroom for a lively discussion of their ongoing re:manicipation Project. We look forward to collaborating with them as they respond artistically to the problematic “Emancipation Group” when they return to Madison in February.



When I look at the statue, it’s Abraham Lincoln with his hand above a kneeling slave, saying or giving the image of “I’m your master.” The kneeling slave isn’t looking toward the master. Abraham Lincoln, the “master,” is looking down at the slave.

The statue itself to me is very heartbreaking because that’s what actually went on in the older days—slavery; and the “master” is posing as such and having the slave kneeling down to him. The slave is so traumatized and too scared to even look up; so he remains looking straight ahead, doing what his master said to do. If Frederick Douglass had been the sculptor, it probably would have been the other way around. He would have been in Abraham Lincoln’s position, and the “slave” would have been the white man. **(Tameia Allen)**



The marble statue is of Abraham Lincoln holding the Emancipation Proclamation and a slave kneeling down with his handcuffs broken free. It is showing how unequal blacks and whites are. It is showing a black slave being free because of a white man’s doings. Lincoln is fully clothed, while the black man is kneeling naked; this shows that Lincoln is the one that holds the power.

I believe Frederick Douglass would not look at this as a good act of faith on freeing slaves but look at this as a way of the white man once again humiliating the black man. If Frederick Douglass was the

sculptor, I believe it would be the other way around with the free slave fully clothed and him standing up freely and proudly because that is the real purpose of it all. I think the statue is humiliating to the slaves no matter what it represents and instead is being used to glorify Lincoln. **(Antoneah Armor)**



While immaculate in its execution, it is deplorable in its symbolism. I understood what he was originally trying to convey, but it got lost on the creative journey and wound up with a completely different creation. It doesn’t symbolize freedom at all; it just brings oppression to the forefront of the eye. It invokes the feeling of unnecessary fear and desperation. **(Kaitlin Birdsall)**



This is a really big white marble statue of Abraham Lincoln. He is standing over a man with a script in one hand and his other is placed above the man’s head. The other man is kneeling down and appears to be a slave. He isn’t fully clothed with having just shorts with metal shackles on his wrist.

This statue dehumanizes the slave. It shows how superior the white race was over any race. Abraham looks comfortable and happy with life, while the slave looks miserable and defeated. **(Jonathan Booe)**



The statue represents the freedom (emancipation) of slavery. My reaction to this is disgusted because a man is playing as though he is God. An example is the quote at the bottom of the statue. These same men never had the right of

God to enslave people in the first place but have the audacity to honor themselves for releasing these people after hundreds of years of abuse, neglect, and trauma.

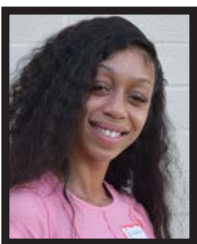
If Frederick Douglass had been the sculptor, I believe the statue would be more respectable and empowering towards the man on his knees instead of the man standing. **(Jekeiria Booker)**



It stands as a figure with two men carved out of stone. One man is standing while the other man is kneeling at the feet of the other. The standing man looks to have finer clothing, dressed in a fine overcoat, while the kneeling man

looks to have a cloth over his lower half. Lincoln stands with a sense of ownership, a letter in the right hand, and his left hand is hovering right above the kneeling man. The kneeling man, a former slave, or one slave, is a man with broken shackles on his wrists.

If Douglass had been the sculptor, the statue wouldn't show Abraham Lincoln still having ownership of the slave. The two men both would have been standing. The clothing would also be finer. **(Sarah Branch)**



The statue represents the freedom of slavery. It seems as if he's petting his pet, looking down on another human, making sure they stay beneath him. The slave has cuffs on his wrists chained.

If Frederick Douglass had been the sculptor, the statue would show both men standing, as equals, together. **(Gabrielle Brown)**



First, it looks like a slave can't do anything, has no choice but just to obey his master. If Douglass did the statue, the slave would be dressed, standing up, and talking about his rights. **(Fredy Carcano)**



The statue is completely white; there is no color on it. The sculpture is of the former president of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, and there is a slave kneeling down in front of him at his feet. Lincoln also has his hand stretched out over the slave as if gesturing his authority over the slave.

I myself have a very one-sided opinion of this piece. To me it makes a statement that this country was founded on and continues to run under the rule and might have a corrupt government with one-sided laws that benefit only the higher class. It is pieces such as this one that continuously remind us of the cruelty that slavery was. Had this piece been sculpted by Frederick Douglass, I believe the statement he would have been trying to make is that President Lincoln was a major part of the ending of slavery. Or, he could have been making the statement that no one was innocent when it came to slavery. **(Mark Español)**





A man kneels down while the master puts his hand over his head as if he was praying for goodness, while holding his declarational letter to free him. The slave looks sad, sorry or hurt, a person with no say at all.



I see this statue as Lincoln having the slave to bow down to him as his master. If it had been Mr. Douglass, they would have tried to tear down the statue of him having a slave bow down to him.

(Tyrone Hudson Sr.)

As a human we shouldn't be kneeling like we're asking for forgiveness. Why the shackles and raggedy clothing, and why must Lincoln have his hand over his head to state that he's freeing him? This shows the disrespect of being treated like an animal with no purpose in life. Why were there only black slaves, and why was there so much hate towards African American humans?

(Curtrice Foster)



I see a man who is standing tall with a rolled-up script. The man has a full beard, with a tux on. He is looking down at a man who is kneeling as if he is about to receive a pat on the back from the tall standing man.

The kneeling man has on a hat, no shirt, and a pair of trousers. The crouching man is almost naked as compared to the fully suited man. I see the silky texture of the man's hair who is standing. The kneeling man has curly hair sticking out of his hat. The man standing is holding the Emancipation Proclamation.

If Frederick Douglass were to sculpt something like this, I believe the black man would have been standing versus kneeling. The man would have, in my opinion, the scripture, and the writing would be about freedom or the way to freedom (education). Somehow, some way, I feel like he would also have them both standing, sending the message that tells us we all could be equal. "We just need more freedom to learn and educate oneself." **(Geresa Homesly)**



There are two men. One is a white man, probably from the upper class, and he is holding a paper, which I assume contains white supremacy rules, rules that justify slavery. Also, this white man is standing in position and his eyes

are looking down as he is dominating anything that is around him. Moreover, the statue depicts a second piece, a man on his knees who stays by the feet of the white man. The eyes of the white man are looking down, and his left hand is putting pressure on the man on his knee and obligating him to stay down.

The whole image of the sculpture is showing



slavery and how white supremacy is ruling the nation. Frederick Douglass would have sculpted two people standing on their feet and shaking their hands. What the Emancipation Group makes me feel: I see the image and it makes me feel very angry and disappointed by those who promoted slavery. I would have sent someone to tear down a statue and rebuild a statue of equity and respect for each other.

(Aida Inuca)



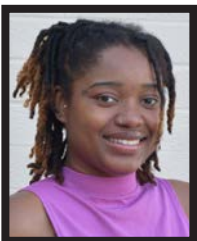
When I look at the statue, I see a seemingly rich “master” or slave owner with his slave kneeling beside him.

Honestly, I’m not really sure what I am looking at or the purpose or message behind it. All I can really say or touch on is how looking at this piece of art makes me feel.

In a way, I think it’s beautiful. The time, effort, and details displayed make it clear as to how this piece could have made it into an art museum. I do wish I would have been along (on September 21) to have seen it in person. I am curious about the discussions that were taking place as my peers were viewing this art piece in person, as well as just different interpretations between different people.

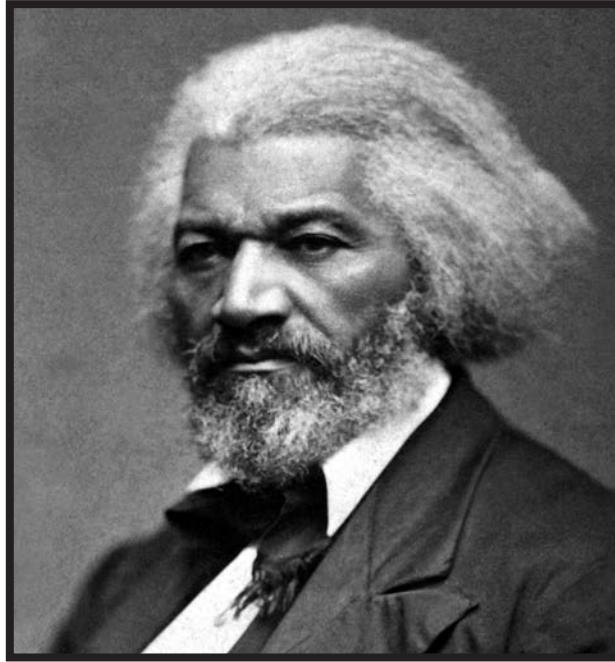
The statue shows a scroll in one of the master’s hands, while he lays the other hand in the air, above the kneeling slave. This makes me wonder if the moment has something to do with this master emancipating his slave. The master looks down upon the slave as if he is doing the slave a favor. I guess my optimistic perspective suggests I want to believe some sort of good is happening here. On the other hand, the statue is ugly—not necessarily appearance wise, but more so the representation of slavery itself and the negatives associated. Being more pessimistic, I wonder if the slave is being traded or being “dealt” with in some way.

(Tierra Kimbrew)



Imagine a time when you only saw your kind of people being oppressed. You were constantly battling and trying to survive day in and day out. Then one day a man who is lighter-skinned, slim, and tall is allowed to decide the fate of

every African American person in the United States. I suppose we should be thankful for Abraham Lincoln.



But from Douglass’ viewpoint, there is no God in man but man in God. Freedom is laudable. He deserved righteousness through his peers, but his ancestors received no praise. Slavery caused eternal hardship. Let the best man of all continue to be undefeated, self-empowered, and with eternal energy.
(Monè Long)



This statue of Abraham Lincoln was created to represent the liberation of slaves in America and was based on Archer Alexander, a black man who escaped slavery, a freed slave who appears to kneel at the feet of Abraham Lincoln. The man is

shirtless and wears what looks like short pants. On his wrists you can see the broken chains that were surely the way to keep him in submission to the wishes of his foremen. Abraham Lincoln is holding in his right hand some reading scrolls that recite the Emancipation Proclamation; with his other raised hand, he commands a kneeling slave to rise from his humble position.

But personally, I don’t like this statue very much and the visual way it is presented. It would have seemed better to see the man standing and not on his knees. I also think about the freedom of spirit. Many times, when you have lived for a long time under a system of oppression, it takes a long time to change your body language; there is a lot of pain and oppression to heal.

Emancipation does not mean full equality and equal opportunities. This type of symbol represents the philosophy of racial superiority that we should eliminate from society.

(Maricela Martinez Munguia)



This is a figure with two men carved out of stone. One man is standing while the other man is kneeling at the feet of the other. The standing man looks to have finer clothing, dressed in a fine overcoat, while the kneeling man looks to have a cloth over his lower half.

The first impression would be a slave who is kneeling to a slave owner. Keeping in mind the intent of people in those days, in men who didn't see it like others, Abe Lincoln thought all should be treated equal in all eyes. The sculpture would have looked different if Frederick Douglass had been the sculptor: it would show a black man with a book, and the white man would have accepted the knowledge of all men having the chance to be free. You would see a man who didn't run from slavery; he despised it. **(Lavinia Miller)**



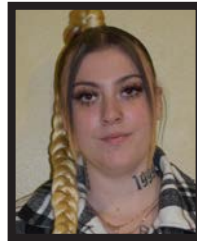
First off, Lincoln is above. Abraham is standing tall, looking down at the slave. Lincoln is holding a scroll and is dressed very rich-looking. It looks like his clothes were very costly. The slave is on one knee. He still has the bracelets with the

remaining chains. The slave is not wearing clothes. He is only wearing something to cover his middle body. It looks like the slave is in pain and looking lost. Moreover, Abraham Lincoln has his hand on top of the slave. It almost looks as if he is controlling the slave.

This piece of art suggests that Abraham Lincoln is above the slave; that white people are more than black people. This art is wrong in many ways because



not only Lincoln freed the slaves. There were others who did a lot of work, but this art suggests that Lincoln did all the work. This representation of Lincoln and the slave would not even exist if Douglass' dream of equality and freedom was taking place. **(Saul Naxi)**



This statue pictures a replica of Abraham Lincoln "freeing" the slaves. I believe this photo/statue is not a good visual representation of slaves being freed. It still shows dominance in the white man.

Lincoln is seen standing over the male slave instead of standing at an honorable level together. The reality is no man will be free until treated equally, which, again, this does not represent.

I believe if Douglass created this statue, it would represent my beliefs to reflect the "white man" and "black man" to be treated equally and with the same respect as one another, not for the "black man" to be kneeling down to the "white man," not representing any change at all. **(Keely Nelson Gray)**



Well, this is a statue of Abraham Lincoln while a slave is taking a knee looking up at Abraham Lincoln. It is in white stone, very detailed artwork with lettering on the bottom which says "And upon this act...I invoke the considerate judgement of mankind and the gracious favour of Almighty God." What I think of this artwork is I think it makes it look like a slave will never move from his position and never stand up to Abraham Lincoln. **(Gael Rodriguez)**



It looks like Lincoln is bowing down to him as if Lincoln is a God, as if he is doing the black man a favor. It looks like he is petting a dog. **(Kiana Sims)**



Here stands Abraham Lincoln, standing, holding a document rolled up in his left hand as a male slave kneels at his right side. The whole time Abraham has his right hand raised above the slave's head.

To the enslaved, this statue represents the class of liberty afforded to the enslaved by a white man. No matter what a document states, the Negro/Black/slave will always be viewed as less than. Frederick Douglass would have sculpted this with both Abraham and the unknown man standing at the same level, representing their levels of equality. He would have both men holding the document while making eye-contact with one another.

(Dominique Smith)

The statue shows Abraham Lincoln holding the emancipation proclamation in his hand while a slave kneels before him. I think it suggests that slaves were grateful to him and praised him for setting them free.



If Frederick Douglass were the sculptor, this slave would not exist; I don't think he would ever picture a slave doing such a thing as bowing down, especially with such a great law being passed.

Being grateful for something that shouldn't have taken place in the first place is crazy. Giving thanks to a man because he acted on what people knew was moral is crazy. Slavery is crazy. The emancipation proclamation is crazy. **(Tiara Smith)**



The statue is still presenting slavery. Abraham Lincoln has his hand over the slave. The slave is on his knees. Abraham is raising his hand like he's giving the slave orders to stay down. The slave is in shackles on the ground.

What a beautiful statue it would look if Frederick Douglass had been the sculptor. Frederick Douglass would be outraged. If the slaves are free, why



would he be on his knees and in shackles? The slave should be standing up next to Abraham Lincoln. **(Roxanna Sobrevilla)**



This statue is featuring Abraham Lincoln and a slave. Lincoln is standing up with his hand over the slave's head, and the slave is on one knee. This statue has no color; it's all white. If Douglass had done the statue, I think he would've

represented forgiveness. The slave is not wearing any clothes besides the piece covering him.

(Lupita Valerio)



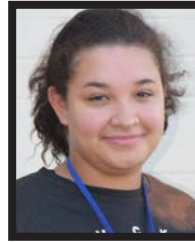
The statue is made completely of white marble. Abe is standing with his left hand extended and his right hand holding a document on a podium. He is looking down in the direction of his left is reaching towards below his left hand is what

appears to be a newly freed slave man. He has broken shackles on both wrists and he is kneeling before Abe.

This statue would not look like this had it been sculpted by a Black person. When I look at this, it is reminiscent of all art from this era depicting Black people. It shows them in a position of situated always beneath. No Black person would sculpt in this fashion. **(Mya Whitson)**



A statue made out of white Italian marble, Abraham Lincoln is well dressed from head to toe standing with his right hand over an enslaved person that has broken chains on each wrist, with only enough fabric to cover his private areas and no shoes. Abraham Lincoln's left hand is touching the scroll. Seeing his hand over the enslaved person shows how powerful he was and how powerless they thought enslaved people were. At the bottom of the statue there is a quote that says, "And upon this act I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God." I believe if Frederick Douglass was the sculptor, the enslaved person would not have been on his knees but standing tall and well dressed in appropriate clothing holding an open book with the world sitting on the pages of the book showing that everyone deserves education, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, not just the white man! **(Amanda Willis)**



The statue of Abraham Lincoln looks as if he is petting the man and is more powerful, instead of making it seem like he is actually trying to uplift him and free him. The man should be standing next to him, not on his knees still with shackles on his wrists. I feel it's still very degrading and not as hopeful as they thought it was. I think if Frederick Douglass made it, it would be Abraham and the man holding hands with the former slave in a suit and tie, not chained up. I also think the man would have colored skin and not white. **(Sinetra Wilson)**



This is all white, with someone kneeling down, words at the bottom of the statue, a man standing with his hand over the other man's head. The man kneeling down has shackles on. **(Zykia Wilson)**



The statue is Abraham Lincoln with a slave kneeling at his feet. Abraham Lincoln has a stern face, and the slave has a sad look on his face. Abraham Lincoln is also fully clothed while the slave is barely clothed and has no shoes on.

To me, it suggests that Lincoln is higher and mightier than the slave. It looks like a slave to master relationship. If Frederick Douglass made the statue, the slave would be dressed just as well as Lincoln and they would be standing side by side. The slave would also have a more confident face and be dressed as well as Lincoln. The emancipation group makes me feel uncomfortable because I feel like this statue celebrates slavery. **(Andrea White)**

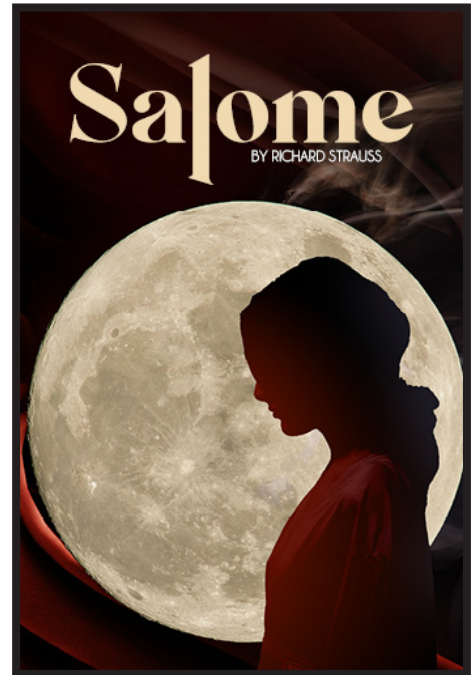


Visiting artists brought a 3-D black sculpture with them to our Odyssey classroom as an alternative to the "Emancipation Group"

OPERA OVATIONS: SALOME

Thanks to donations from Madison Opera and an organizational tour de force by Jenny Pressman, Christina DeMars, and Char Braxton, over 50 Odyssey students and alumni plus their guests were able to attend the November production of “Salome.” Huge thanks to Madison Opera board member Pete Lundberg, director Kathryn Smith, patron services manager Chloe Agostino, and the rest of the board and staff for making it possible for Odyssey students to experience “Salome.”

The Madison Opera website describes the opera this way: “The princess Salome becomes obsessed with Jochanaan (John the Baptist), the prisoner of King Herod, her stepfather. After a banquet one night, Herod promises Salome anything she wants if she will dance – so she does, and then asks for a violent favor in return [the head of John the Baptist on a platter]. Based on Oscar Wilde’s play, Richard Strauss’s opera shocked the public when it premiered in 1905. Religion and desire combine in an extraordinary work that maintains its grip on audiences over a century later, with intense musicality and taut drama.”



Here are reviews and photos from Odyssey students who attended:

The “Salome” opera was magnificent, I was on the edge of my seat most of the time. Oscar Wilde, Richard Strauss, and Hedwig Lachmann deserve endless standing ovations! My guest, Dre, loved the singing!

Our Odyssey alumni were amazed with the performance and the atmosphere at the Overture Center. Also, Chloe Agostino (Public Services Manager) was so gracious and kind. She made the night with her genuine hospitality. Thank you for another great experience! (**Char Braxton**)



I had the opportunity from Odyssey to experience the opera for the first time at the Overture. The set was magical. It takes you back in time with the ancient Roman architecture beautifully detailed with Corinthian columns. It was a story from the Bible about Princess Salome and her sick-minded royal family, cursed by their sins while being warned by John the Baptist of the coming of the Messiah. The characters put on a great show and sang adroitly. Thank you again to Odyssey and donors for the opportunity to experience the opera at the Overture! **(Amanda Willis)**



I was so excited to attend The Madison Opera performance of Salome by Richard Strauss, thanks to the Odyssey Project's generous donors.

Not quite sure what to expect, I attended the pre-play conversation and was surprised to learn that Richard Strauss had performed in both Madison and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Even though the storyline was rather intense, it was a beautiful, thought-provoking, and entertaining piece.

Thank you to those that made a contribution of tickets to the play for Odyssey students. The arts are an amazing thing. **(Jasmine Banks)**



Most importantly, thank you! The seats were amazing and the experience was even more amazing, thank you!

Salome was a Jew killing the prophet. Most currently in the news, Kanye West says he is a Jew and prophet type. He says the Jew rulers of this day and age want his head on a platter. This play was excellent and everything beautiful/truthful within a biblical story and modern times. I have yet to learn more but this story is like the story of Jezebel too.

Thank you again for this amazing experience!
(LaTrease Hibbler)



Being at the opera with my family was amazing. I am beyond grateful for what Odyssey is doing to help me build a life and a future for myself and my loved ones. The art and the history portrayed in this play will forever be embedded in my mind and soul. There's nothing like experiencing new things that will help me become sophisticated and prepared for who I need to be to help usher my children into their future. Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of such a wonderful piece of art and history. **(Mark Español)**



Heyyyyyyyyyyyyyy. The Opera was amazing. I actually didn't get any pictures with the ladies I was with. My guest did express their love for the seat selection as well as the length of the opera. Absolutely superb! I am GRATEFUL! **(Sarah Galinski)**



I really enjoyed the plot of the opera. I felt like the cast did a wonderful job performing and that the story was played out wonderfully. They did a really great job intertwining the role of Jesus with the adulterous woman. I like how it showed/ explained the damage caused by generations previously (the mother) and how that impacted so many people. I believe that in our choices we can have this effect. The daughter was led astray, and she herself ended up in the dark pit of evil. There was remorse at the end, but by then it was too late.

I feel like personally, the opera was a bit long for me to sit through, for two hours straight. I did enjoy the experience, though. Thank you all for your hard work. **(Michelle Mack)**



I want to take a moment to thank everyone who helped get me tickets to see the opera on Sunday. It was a magical experience being close to the orchestra. It's an entirely different experience when you get to see the orchestra playing and being up close to the actors and actresses on the stage. It literally made me feel even more immersed into the play. Thank you so much Odyssey for giving me this opportunity!!! **(Kala Taylor)**

I can honestly say that this performance of Salome has left me entirely and utterly speechless, and not in the usual way after I leave a performance. Normally after going to the opera, I'm left in a state of bewilderment and still captivated and lost in the show's world.

This one? I'm just disturbed. Utterly and entirely disturbed. From witnessing a woman spiraling into a psychosis, to the blood spilling over the alarmingly slanted stage. Don't get me wrong, it was still an absolutely captivating performance... However, I can see why it was a banned performance for so long. **(Kaitlin Birdsall)**



I want to thank the Odyssey program for the opportunity to attend the opera, something I may have never done without them! The experience was amazing!! I got to attend the preview that discussed the history of the opera before the show began, and that was so informative. I'm glad I was able to attend it. My seat was right up front so I got to see the orchestra play in their setting; the conductor stood so close I could've reached out and touched him!! It was sort of magical to see how easily he moved through the music and how he conducted himself and the orchestra members. The conductor of the orchestra became one of my favorite parts of the entire experience!

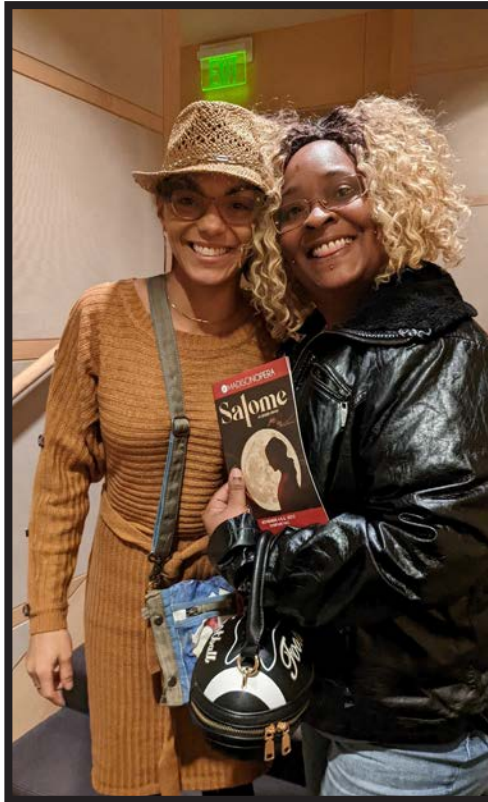
There were also subtitles above the stage and, although helpful, it was a little distracting because I couldn't read them and watch the opera at the same time. (That was the only downside.) The actors and actresses were amazing, and I'm happy to say I'd go to another opera based on this experience!

Thank you again to the Odyssey program and to Emily for the opportunity. I look forward to the next Odyssey event!! **(Jochebed Jones)**



What a wonderful play! I had great seats two rows in front of the orchestra. I learned some words that I never heard of that made me go home and google them, like iniquity (immoral or grossly unfair behavior) and ghastly (causing great horror or fear).

This play had my full attention. The singing made my body shiver in awe. The orchestra was beautiful, but I kept wanting to watch them and the play at same time and I couldn't. The musicians made you feel the play. They had a deep desire to deliver, and I was blown away. John's head on the silver platter looked so real. The artist who did that understood the assignment. I wasn't surprised at the end by the kiss she kept demanding, which was funny to me. Salome did a fantastic performance. Thanks again for the opportunity. **(Bettye Emmanuel)**



Dear donors, thank you so much for the opportunity you gave us to have a nice date at the opera. Those tickets help us to make new memories together.

To be honest, I didn't like the story of Salome. I feel they portrayed the women as crazy, stupid, and cruel. I don't get the point of doing that particular story. It made me frustrated and angry. It's time for different stories, where we can see woman as leaders, successful, emotionally healthy... Honestly what a waste of talent because the actors are extremely good. Thank you! **(Marisol Gonzalez)**



I had read this work before and it is based on the story marked in the Bible about the events that occurred in the time of Christ. I really liked seeing the story in opera. Thank you very much for the opportunity. **(Maricela Martinez Munguia)**





I really enjoyed the opera Salome. I've heard this story from the Bible years ago, but to see it acted out as an opera was amazing. My sister-in-law and I shared some laughs and shock with others near us. My take on the story is that this young girl was driven crazy by the people in her life, but then those same people acted shocked when she did crazy things. It's a very sad, intriguing, yet disturbing tale. Thank you. **(Mya Whitson)**



First off, I would say I'm very grateful for the opportunity to experience an opera. So to the donors I thank them. However, my honest opinion of it would be that I found it to be awkward. The way the words were expressed in the brochure said for certain characters Jew 1 Jew 2 Jew 3

etc... so I felt curious right off the bat. The story line itself felt sexist (of course) considering the time it was originally made. I felt really uncomfortable reading the words of what they were singing when the one character that was obsessed with the princess kept on talking about how beautiful she was because of her pale white skin. That too made me wonder especially because it was said so many times. The story line paints a picture of the evil seducing woman and a man of God fighting her tempting. Thank you for the opportunity and experience. Much gratitude for this. **(Jessica Jacobs)**



My mother's name is Salome, and I named my youngest daughter after her. She really wanted to see the opera, so when tickets were available, we jumped at the chance. I thought that the opera was amazing! However, I can see why it was banned in so many places. I found myself simultaneously disgusted and intrigued with it. Herod openly lusting after his stepdaughter and her response were positively scandalous. Also, the ending was quite graphic! The extended kiss to the bloody decapitated head took me out. Why was she so obsessed with making him want her anyway? I thought I knew this story from the Bible, but this version seems to suggest that maybe Salome suffered from some sort of mental illness.



I have never been to the opera before. I wasn't sure what to expect. I will not soon forget the experience and look forward to attending another in the near future. Thank you so much for this opportunity. **(Tamara Bradley)**



Salome was a very interesting opera, and it left me thinking about the way the brain can operate. Mental health is real was a thought I had leaving the show. It was interesting and unusual how Salome was surprised and upset when

Jochanaan's head, after being beheaded, would not look at her. It was also shocking how she walked around carrying his head. The king, queen, and princess did not have normal family values. There was incest going on in the family, and the queen did not have a good reputation. I heard about this story before I attended the opera, and it made me eager to see the show. It was even more interesting than what I already knew. I'm so glad I attended the show.



I really appreciate the exposure to the opera. I would have never experienced the opera and found out I like it if it wasn't for the Overture Center's generous donation. I was just telling the young adults at the Dane County Jail that we mentor about exposing themselves to different things like the opera. They have become interested since they've met Prenicia Clifton. One day she hit a high opera note to quiet them down when they were loud. It scared the heck out of them. LOL, it even scared me. **(Ericka Booley)**



I was very excited to experience an opera for the first time. We had great seats. I could see the orchestra and the actors' features well. The theatre had a nice ambience, as expected. I have never heard German sung before, so that was a lovely experience. The subtitles made

it easier to understand, but you definitely could make out the storyline even without them due to good acting.

The story could be considered very offensive and perpetuated many stereotypes but also at the same time seemed to poke fun at the obvious but socially accepted "sins" of the world as a whole. The opera highlighted the sickness of the human condition, especially of what is envied. What is thought of as being better, richer, more pure, royal, and beautiful is actually full of ego, hate, incest, separations of humanity, perversions, and mental illness. All in all, it was a beautiful show of talent. Thanks! **(Feather Lloyd)**



I enjoyed this new expedition as I am expanding my horizons, and I am happy to accept these invitations or opportunities, I would say.

I loved the concept and the read along. I cannot understand an opera unless I know how to do it. Also, it sounded very beautiful. The demands of the women's singing were very intriguing.

It was very different and put in their own way of using words, I can say. I do believe it was like this B.C., but I don't know.

At the end when she was going to kiss a carcass's head, I am going to be honest: I got a stomach ache. I took a picture coming back in from the restroom (TMI).

It was a good experience, and I'll definitely do it again if I had an opportunity. Thank you. I loved it! **(Dana Stokes)**

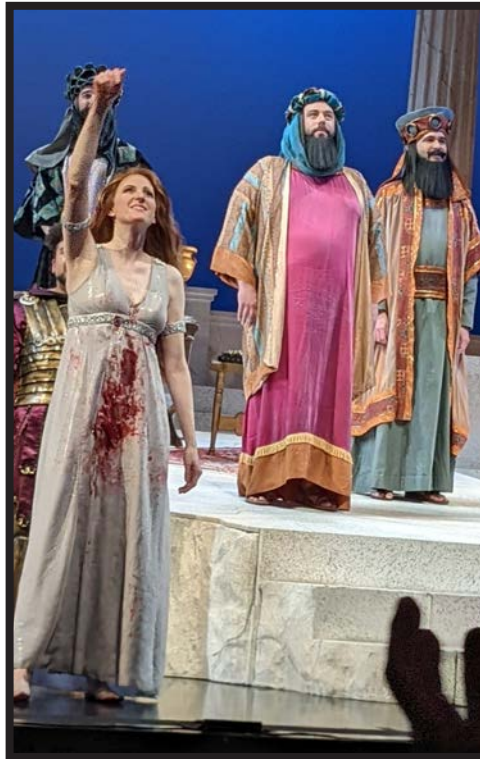


My afternoon at the opera Salome by Richard Strauss started with a lively awakening and recognizable voice saying, “Munroe, is that you?” It was Jasmine, a person I talked a lot with between 2012 and 2013 when we were in Odyssey together. She asked if I was planning to listen to the talk about Salome in the Wisconsin Studio on third floor. I said sure, and she led the way. We flowed into conversation as though we were just with each other yesterday. It was nice catching up with Jasmine as we decided where we wanted to sit, in the middle of the room in the middle of the aisle—ah, just right.

Kathryn Smith introduced herself and began to share a wealth of knowledge about Salome, including the fact that it was a play in the beginning written by Oscar Wilde in 1891 and that Richard Strauss used Wilde’s play to create an opera which opened in Dresden in 1905. She said the review for both, play and opera, was embarrassing. The opera was banned in London, Vienna and Berlin. Well, the people of the Metropolitan allowed the opera to open but shut it down after one performance.

Kathryn Smith went on to preview the opera and said this religious man Jochanaan was stirring up trouble by revealing the history of Salome’s family. By then I’m almost sitting on the edge of my seat because I think I know this story.

We exit the Wisconsin Studio on the third floor and head to the Overture Hall. We get to our seats, and they are perfect. The performance starts, and the artists’ voices are carrying all around Overture Hall. Their costumes are of the Roman Emperor Era. Emotions are flying all over and around the stage which is set in



that era, with a dungeon below the stage floor where Jochanaan is kept because of what he revealed about Salome’s mother.

There was anger, frustration, shame, guilt, hurt, confusion, desire, power, and control. Then there was madness, I mean real madness, insane asylum madness. But John DeMain and his orchestra helped to carry us, the audience, through all of those emotions, the movements and struggles we experienced from the words spoken and sung by the artists on stage as we tried to know and understand

the words we were hearing and reading on the closed captions on the screen above the stage. The orchestra highlighted, accented, mellowed, and enhanced every scene.

It was exhausting, exciting, stimulating and depressing. It was great, I mean it was awesome. **(Munroe Whitlock)**





This was my first time going to an opera performance. I did not know what to expect; all I knew was that I wanted it to be an experience that can live in my mind and heart for the rest of my life. And even if I can never go back to another opera again, I felt very happy

checking this special event in my life off my bucket list.

First, I was very thrilled about the idea of doing something new, fancy, and out of my comfort zone; it felt right. I invited my friend Luz to go with me, and she mentioned that she has never gone to an opera as well. So there we went, two people heading to a big show with lots of wonders but a lot of smiles as well.

Second, the show was amazing! It was nothing as I pictured it in my mind, it was so much better. The opera was so well done, and the singing was amazing! However, watching the show brought

me a lot of questions. For example, what would've happened if I never moved out of my little town in Mexico--would I ever have seen an opera in my life? What would have happened if I never made the decision to push myself into going to the Odyssey Project? Would I ever have gone to an opera show or to the other events I have gone to thanks to Odyssey? The answer to all is probably not!

And third, thank you, Odyssey Project, for making all of these dreams possible. Thank you to all the staff for working hard to make these events available for people like me who cannot afford to go to places and events like this. Directors, staff, and donors, thank you! Your true act of kindness, your hard work and dedication has already transformed my life with these opportunities to experience new things. Moreover, these experiences have already opened my mind to new possibilities and I cannot wait what fruits will ripen in my life thanks to these experiences.

In all, I loved the opera and I cannot wait to check the next thing off my bucket list. **(Saul Naxi)**

