

YEAR 19, ISSUE 5

DECEMBER 14, 2022

ODYSSEY



ORACLE

WOMEN OF COURAGE



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

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

608-712-6321
608-590-5862
608-580-5948
608-572-3994

Thanks to literacy instructors Erin Ceello and Ben Shannon and our team of tutors for coaching students as they revised their papers.

www.odyssey.wisc.edu





MY MOTHER, A SUPERWOMAN AND BELIEVER

BY TAMEIA ALLEN

Courage is strength in the face of pain and grief. "It's whatever whatever" was my mom's favorite saying. My mom was the light of the room, and the

attention was always on her. You knew she was in the atmosphere because her presence was always known, whether she was talking or silent. My mom was the most courageous woman I knew because she overcame obstacles as a kid and into her adult years, she always dealt with grief, substance abuse, and a terminal illness with strength, and most of all she was a believer.

Growing up wasn't always peaches and crème. My mother was the baby girl out of five siblings. She lived in a single parent household, and I know my grandmother did everything in her power to care for, love, and protect her children; I didn't get a chance to know my grandfather personally because he was incarcerated. My mom used to bring my sister and me to see him, but I was so young that the conversations didn't stick and his face was a blur also. Over the years he passed away while in prison, and my mom didn't mention much more about him. My mom was taken



into foster care as a young teen. My grandmother said when she came back home, she was pregnant with my sister at 16 and a couple years later she had me. My mother was superwoman herself and stood on business when it came down to my sister and me. We weren't in need of anything because she did what she had to do raising us.



Even though my mom was superwoman, she dealt with so much that often she kept it to herself; and when she wanted to talk about it, you'd never hear the end of it. My mother was sweet as pie and her smile said a thousand words without speaking. She dealt with the pain of losing her first love, my sister. When my sister passed, I saw my mom do a whole 360. She got into this depressed mode. She didn't want to accept the fact that my sister was gone. She wanted somebody to be held responsible for her death, but the answer to that remains anonymous still to this day. After my sister's passing, my mom became very hard to deal with. She would push everybody away from her, and sometimes people didn't want to deal with her out of the fear of getting cursed out for no reason at all. Sometimes the liquor would take over her body, and without the liquor you wouldn't leave her side.



My mother dealt with a terminal illness. She had kidney failure and liver disease due to her constant drinking. She used to always yell, "Y'all don't know my pain!" We didn't know her pain; we never walked a day in her shoes. She was dealing with this terminal illness that was eating up her body, so to deal with that she would drink. The liquor was her source to not deal with reality or the pain that her disease caused. My mother was a believer in God. She dealt with things and overcame a lot in her lifetime. Even though my mom lost the fight of life due to her illness, she didn't lose her faith.

In conclusion, my mother was a courageous person in many ways. She got her feelings across to anyone who walked in front of her. She was the light of the room and most importantly of my life. I learned so much from her: she taught me what to do with my life and what not to do. She is my



inspiration. The things that I'm doing with my life are to show my mom that she raised a "star." Losing both my mom and my sister has taught me to cherish life more and to know that this so-called life that was given to us comes to an end and sometimes unexpectedly. Love on your people while they are here. My mother is looking down on me, watching me conquer every battle and hardship sent my way. She didn't raise a weak woman. How could she have when she wasn't weak herself but was a hard body? She did what she had to do as a kid and into her adult years. She ran a tough race, and now she's given her baton to me.



THE ROCK OF THE FAMILY

BY ANTONEAH ARMOUR

My mom has been a single parent for as long as I can remember. My dad was in and out and eventually just stopped coming around, so it's always really been her, my sister, and me. My mom never let us go without. We always had everything we wanted and needed; even if she didn't have it, she always made a way. We were kept in sports and different clubs and anything we could've possibly wanted to do; she always made that possible for us.

When I started middle school, she adopted my two cousins because their mother had lost them to the system. She has always been that person to help anybody out in any way she could. Being a single mother of four wasn't easy, but she made it look like it was the easiest thing in the world.



I never made it easy for my mother. When I got to high school, my whole demeanor changed. I started fighting, drinking, running away, and getting myself in all type of trouble that I couldn't get myself out of. The very first charge I landed myself as a juvenile got me put in JRC. Me being a child and not realizing what it was doing to my mom, I became so disrespectful. She would let them take me and send me off to group homes or whatever they felt was best for me to get my mind right, and I disliked her so much for that. All the time she was letting me be in the system, I thought my mom didn't love me. She was always hard on me, but I didn't give her room to be anything else. It was just as well, as she was letting me suffer my consequences so I could learn from my mistakes. She was putting herself in debt as well to help me. I always thought what she was doing was a way to punish me, but it was just what I needed to get myself on track.



I graduated from high school and a few months later got pregnant with my twins. I was 18 years old and about to bring two lives into this world. My mom never left my side. She came to doctors' appointments, made sure I was fed, and bought everything I needed for the kids. After I had my kids, a few years later down the line I started to notice they were a little different. My mom had set up some appointments for them to get evaluated, and sure enough it turned out that both of my boys were autistic. I was still young, so in this case I really didn't know what to do. I still wanted to go out and party and be with my friends and basically live my life. My mom has been an amazing grandmother to my children. She took them in because she knew I wasn't ready. She got them in programs that have helped them tremendously. My kids are seven now, and she is one of the main positive figures in their life.

My mother is the rock of this family. She takes pride in helping everyone. It takes a pure and loving heart to be the mother of two and take in four more. I take so much pride in being able to call this woman my mother. I hope one day I can be even close to the woman she is.

**COURAGE: "DON'T GET UPSET"****BY KAITLIN BIRDSALL**

What memories do you want or hope to leave your loved ones with? What lengths would you go in order to protect your children's smiles? What lessons would you want to teach them, even long after you were gone? My mum's strength taught me how to endure anything in life, not necessarily in a way she intended but through smiles, shielding, and love. The thing you should probably know ahead of time is that I don't remember a whole lot about my mother anymore. Surprisingly, photographic memory doesn't last as long as you think. That's a lesson you only learn as enough time passes. When I think about it, the face I remember is only supported from old photos I have of her. I can't recall her voice at all anymore, and her once huge laugh is more like a lingering echo in the back of my mind. What I do remember are tangible little things that feel big to me. Like the way her nails were always so perfectly manicured as I mindlessly played with her long fingers. The cool smoothness of her skin under my cheek when I rested my head on her lap while she played with my hair. Or how she would always 'park' her spearmint gum before she drank her strong black coffee. But the one memory I've always held onto is how she made everyone feel around her. You know the old saying 'to light up a room'? I got to witness it countless times with her. She had a way of making you feel immediately comfortable and secure. It didn't matter the situation or circumstance, that was just her. She was just someone who could make you smile without even really trying, even during the hardest times.

My personal favorite smiles that would appear because of her came when she would sing. I don't mean just pleasantly humming along to a tune or anything, no, this was a performance! Thumb for the mic, facial expressions, putting real feeling in the song! This would happen at home, in the car, running errands, and even down the hall towards the chemotherapy wing at the hospital. The scent of sterile polyester and latex with a subtle hint of melancholia will always linger in my memories. My mother never wavered during her grueling months of chemotherapy. She was quietly resolute to only showing the best sides of her, even when she must have been feeling awful. She even went so far as to not-so-quietly or subtly covering her various favorite bands of the 80's to my sister and me, just to make us laugh. Well, me really. I was too embarrassed and clueless as to what she and my sister were singing on the thumb mic to whatever song was being covered in the given moment. They were completely unaware of their surroundings and of the nurses quietly listening in behind the check-in desk to the quiet concert happening in the waiting room. Or of the other downcast



patients who would slowly lift their eyes with their soft smiles following close behind. She helped me to recognize the beauty in discovering the quiet moments of bringing a little light to someone's life, even if it's just for a moment.

However, now that I'm older, I've recognized that these were the only things I was allowed to see, it seems. The pain and struggles were tightly shut behind closed doors so that my fragile heart and eyes couldn't see. There were attempts, now that I look back on it, to open the door just a crack to a small sum of the struggles of the world, such as helping flush her permanent IV and replacing her colostomy bag when it needed changing. But that quickly came to an end when tears of embarrassment poured out when her uncontrollable body failed her modesty. From there on, it was back behind closed doors. That's how things were—secrets curtained behind veils of modesty. Of course, that's how I viewed it growing up. I can see now that it was just a mother's attempt at shielding her child from the horrors that life could give. Towards the end, we were given the news. Four to six months. That was all she had left.

'Don't get upset.'

That was the last thing she ever said to me. And then she went peacefully in her sleep a week later at home.

There's something that I've learned about losing someone so precious. You don't just mourn in one way for a designated period of time. You discover how to mourn in various unexpected ways that for some reason no one seems to talk about. But most importantly, you don't just 'get over' your grief with time. Instead, you learn to walk with it. Some days your grief will be right in front of you as you walk and it's all you can focus on. Other days it'll be completely behind you and you have the entire clear horizon before you. But most days, it'll be quietly walking side by side with you, still within your periphery but not as demanding of your attention. Only after realizing these things is that what my mum must have really



meant, knowing her youngest's fragile heart, the phrase 'don't get upset' suddenly became somewhat of a blanketed expression for whatever may come my way in life. I'm sure that she didn't plan on leaving us so soon. The wisdom in life that she wanted to give us should have been a bit lengthier and more in depth, but the love she left behind was fierce and something that can still very much be felt to this day. Her type of love was quiet, reserved, and graceful, the kind that sticks around even long after tangible memories wither and fade over time.

Contrary to her final words of wisdom to me, I think it is okay to be upset. Allow yourself to sit in the hurt for a moment. Be okay in the uncomfortableness of it. But do well to remember that is just a moment that will pass. The pains of life will never completely go away, and as crazy as it sounds, it really shouldn't either. Because without sitting in the dark, you can't appreciate the light nearly as much. *"How lucky I am having something that makes saying goodbye so hard."* ~Winnie the Pooh



A MOTHER'S ODYSSEY

BY JONATHAN BOOEY

I chose my mother, Ericka Booe [Odyssey Class of 2022], as my woman of courage. I chose her because she was a single mother of four who had all the odds stacked against her. We lived in a city that

was high in poverty and low in education. Being a single mother of four boys, she wanted better for us, but in order to do that she needed to change her environment and profession. She had a plan and just needed an opportunity to execute it.

Ericka had to drop out of high school at 17 to focus on raising a child. My mother was a very young mother with no help. I remember my grandmother being around and helping out with me a lot. From 1996-2004 Ericka had three more boys with no fathers involved. She had to do everything on her own for her children, which made us respect her and help in any way we could. Since I was the oldest, I tried to help the most to make it easier for her. She was working so hard to provide the life she knew we deserved.

The biggest thing she did for her four boys was to move our family from Indiana to Wisconsin for a safer life and better education. I remember the move being very tough for us because we had no money or a definitive place to live. Ericka didn't let that stop her, and shortly she found a job at Oscar Mayer. She then got us a place to live. Life started to look a lot better here in Wisconsin for my brothers and me, and we had our mom to thank for that.



Ericka's thirst for education grew stronger as she got older, so she eventually decided that it was time to get her GED. It didn't stop there as she enrolled in college to get her associate's degree in Applied Science. She's also currently pursuing her bachelor's in social work as well. She does a lot for the community here in Madison on the clock and off the clock. With her experience with being at the bottom, she's able to help people, whether it be friends or family, with resources or point them in the right direction.

I personally think it's amazing because she's accomplishing so much at a late age in life. Actions taken like that set a strong example for my brothers and me. It taught us to always put education first and to never give up no matter how out of reach the finish line looks. I really appreciate her for always striving to better herself and better her children. I hope to continue to follow in her footsteps and accomplish some of the same things she did.



MY ROLE MODEL AND INSPIRATION

BY JEKEIRIA BOOKER

My big sister, Ikesha Birmingham, is my woman of courage because she came out on top despite every obstacle that was thrown at her in this lifetime. From the ages of 10-16 years old, she was taken care of by two of our aunts and faced many silent struggles unbeknownst to our mother and her siblings. My most vivid memories of my sister are from her teenage years and up. Regardless, she was still able to make a huge impact on my life.

I have the best memories of my childhood with her in them. She looked after us a lot and taught us more. While babysitting, she would teach us to play many games such as card games, charades, and board games. Monopoly was her favorite, and she always won. I'll never forget all the different and exotic foods she introduced us to because our mom didn't buy or eat them. The funnest thing was helping her in the kitchen making extravagant breakfasts and fancy dinners, or all cuddling together to watch movies.

When my four other siblings, mom, stepdad, and two younger cousins our mom was caring for first moved to Madison, Wisconsin, Ikesha was already living here with her boyfriend and firstborn son. We were homeless, and at 19 years old she allowed us to move into her two bedroom apartment and helped care for us until our parents got on their feet.

What truly makes my sister deserve the woman of courage title was her ability to leave her 12-year toxic dysfunctional relationship to her two oldest boys' father. This was a very dark moment for her. She turned to drinking and isolation. She also gave up placement of her boys to their father. Due to heartache and stress, she stopped caring for herself, going to church, and attending family functions. Because of this, she became very vulnerable and ended up in the hands of a psychopath. This man came to her as a normal caring guy but ended up being her worst nightmare. He physically and sexually abused her, held her hostage, and secluded her from family and friends. Every time she would escape, he would stalk and catch her. He went as far as forcing her to take a gun charge for him. The most shocking moment was when he beat my sister so severely she ended up in the hospital with injuries that appeared like a car crash. That there was the last straw for my sister. She had to get out. She mustered the courage to seek help from the police and had him arrested so he couldn't hurt her or any other woman. She endured that abuse for two years.

After escaping that monster, her struggles weren't over. Because of the extreme amount of stress, anxiety, and depression, she became ill and developed a massive lump in her thyroid (neck), which turned out to be Graves Disease. It just seemed like she couldn't get a break. Instead of allowing this to take over, she fought back by focusing on her health—eliminating alcohol and cigarettes, getting back into her Bible, following doctor's orders, and starting self-care routines. In the midst of that, she met a kind, patient, God-fearing man. Their relationship blossomed from friendship to dating to two beautiful daughters then marriage. She regulated her health and was able to have a successful surgery to get her health back in order.

My sister has taught me so much from childhood to adulthood, from being a big sister myself to being a woman with class, from beauty tips and tricks to knowing when to leave a bad situation. My big sister, Ikesha Winfield (now Birmingham), is my woman of courage because she is a role model and inspiration. She has overcome many trials and tribulations without losing her kind, affectionate heart and positive spirit.





A TIME TO CHANGE BY SARAH BRANCH

Could you leave everything you've ever known? Could you uproot your family's entire world for a new start, for a greater opportunity, a life

that could possibly be better? Would you take that chance and leave it all behind? My sister showed courage the moment she packed up and left Chicago. Doing just that, leaving everything she'd ever known, she headed with just her two young boys and herself to Madison for a fresh start. This journey allowed her to provide safety for her children, achieve upward mobility, and inspire her loves.



Born and raised in Chicago it was all she knew. She was a part of and accustomed to the pulse of Chicago's culture. A city of love, where summer days were timeless. The fire hydrant busting open, water bursting and exploding everywhere for the children that play nearby. Next door the neighbors were playing the radio. WGCI played summertime anthems while they played Spades and danced along to the music. On the block right down the street was the corner store AKA, the meeting spot for all your friends and cousins. This is the block where she shared her first kiss and memories, with good times, familiar people, and the comfort of knowing where to go and how to get there. Everything, every place, was in Chicago... However, Chicago was changing.



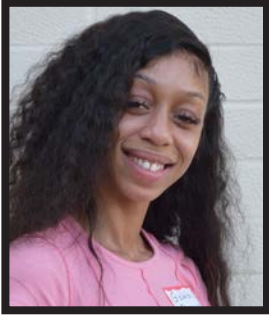
As times changed, so did the neighborhood and surrounding neighbors. The crime Sharon had heard of started to reach her world. Violence became more frequent. Neighbors changed and no longer spoke a friendly word in passing. Drug dealers and drugs were in the neighborhoods and gang members were now invading the parks. It was no longer safe to send her children there anymore. She could literally see Chicago changing for the worst. Even though it was all she ever known Sharon knew that it was time for her to change as well.

So how do you do that? Bravely. The decision to leave the rough streets of Chicago wasn't just to keep her and her

children safe but to achieve upward mobility. So, she moved. She courageously enrolled in Madison College after not being a student for a decade and a half. A new, older student, with newer technology, while working and raising two quickly growing boys, she persevered and earned her HSED. Sharon built a safe environment, to nurture and develop boys that can grow into a future they can see.

In conclusion, my sister taught me the importance of stepping out of one's comfort zone, to explore new opportunities that can have a better impact on my life. Although we may not want to leave familiar things behind, it may be necessary to grow. Her courage to pursue a higher education and to better her family's life will forever be inspiring to me. Because of her courage, I will never give up on my goals of growing my business into one that's well known.





IN MY MOTHER'S EYES

BY GABRIELLE BROWN

Faye's arms wrapped around the bars of the bridge, holding on for dear life. Beneath her, cars sped down the freeway. Meanwhile, three guys beat her, attempting

to cause her to fall to a certain death. Although her grip was firm and she was tired, she held on with everything she had in her until one of her friends came along, swinging a baseball bat, chasing the hoodlums away. Faye was able to climb back over the bridge to safety. Soon thereafter, her parents sent her to El Paso, Texas, to live with her older sister. Although out of harm's way (or so they thought), she missed high school graduation; she was just a few short months from graduating. Faye was uncertain of her future, but she was determined to move forward, to persevere no matter what life threw at her. Therefore, when I think of courage, I think of Faye, my mother.

She soon met my father, who was a young Army cadet stationed at Fort Bliss. After a short romance, they were married. No sooner than the ink could dry on the marriage certificate, the abuse began. Whether it was mental, verbal, or physical, my mother suffered



it all at the hands of my father almost daily. She suffered numerous black eyes, busted lips, and a broken jaw. She told me she was pregnant when this happened. And while in labor, she was unable to cry out in pain because her jaw was wired shut. A few years later, they lived in Maryland with their two young daughters. One day, both girls became very sick and were hospitalized with a deadly bacterial infection. After a while, one daughter became well enough to leave the hospital, whereas the other one became drastically worse. My mom never left her side. They were soon discharged from the hospital and sent to the Ronald McDonald House in Washington, D.C. She stayed there with her young daughter before she was able to go home and join her other daughter and husband.

Ten years and four kids later, the physical abuse stopped, but the verbal and mental continued. My dad was constantly cheating and leaving for months at a time. He even left us for a year. Meanwhile, my mom never wavered when it came to mothering us and bettering herself. She went back to school, earning her GED and becoming a CNA. She always took us to church and prayed over and for us. And one day, she left my father for good.

I wish I could say from that day forward, it has been the easiest, but I can't. Within the last five years, my mom has experienced a parent's worst nightmare. She buried not one but two of her children. My greatest fear is her cracking . . . breaking. But she hasn't. I lean on her for strength, as she holds onto her Bible. In turn, I hold onto mine. I'm sure that without her, my sisters, my remaining brother, and myself would be lost. Times can be really tough and really beautiful. I know my mom and her strength are at the root of it all.

You know, it's hard to tell what a person has gone through just by looking at them. My mother is one of those people. With her blonde hair flowing in the wind, long pink fingernails, and signature mole over her left lip, the modern-day black Marilyn Monroe (or should I say, Dorothy Dandridge?) is a pillar of class, strength, and no doubt courage. She is the strongest person I know. So, without hesitation, I choose her. And I always will.

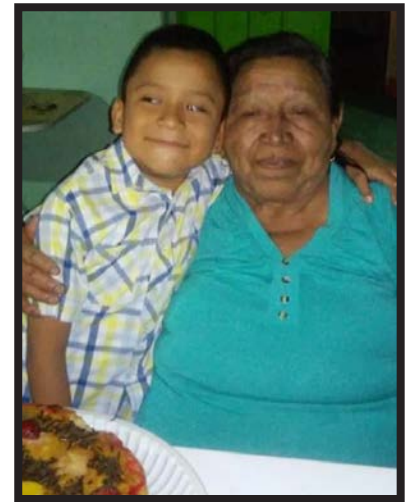




MY BRAVE MOTHER

BY FREDY CARCANO

"Life hits us, but we have to keep going for those who still need us. We have to be strong and continue." My mother lived by these words. Even though she faced many difficulties in her early life, she raised her children with love and caring, and she faced the loss of loved ones with strength. For these reasons, I think my mother was brave and courageous.



My mother was born and grew up in a very poor family. At 12 years old she lost her father, so she could only go to elementary school and only learn to write and read. She had to help her mother with household chores and take care of her siblings. It was very difficult for her. That's how she grew up, until she got married when she was 19 years old. Fortunately, she had a good man who supported her all the time. They didn't have a safe place to live, but together and with a lot of hard work they managed to have one. She had seven children. Unfortunately, they died at a very early age, almost at birth, because she did not have the economic resources for good medical assistance. With the death of her father and two of his children, she was still brave. It was very difficult to get over it, but with her faith in God, she was able to do it.

After a few years, when it was time for us to go to school, she was always there to support us. She did not care if she worked twice. Many times, she helped my father in the tomato fields, and she almost never had a break. Her goal was that we could study because her thought was, "Knowledge and wisdom are the best things to be a better person in this life." Although my mother did her best, neither my siblings nor I could finish college, but my mother taught us to be good people. She was always taking care of us even as adults.

My mother always worked so that we were not only good people, but we would also be good parents.



Life had given her a family, a home, a life full of happiness, and everything was going very well, until one day she received more really bad news: her daughter was sick with cancer. Her faith in God made her strong and hopeful that everything would be fine. But it was not like that, and her daughter lost the battle against cancer. It was the first time I saw my mother broken. With great strength she was able to continue in life. In a short time, my mother lost her sister and her mother too, but she never gave up, and she was still strong and brave. During the pandemic, life dealt her hardest blow, which was losing her husband, her partner of all her life. She couldn't overcome that, and my mother then lost the battle of her own life.

She was always a brave mother, a good daughter, and an admirably strong woman, full of joy. She didn't need to go to college to have the knowledge of life. I feel blessed to have been your son. I could not say goodbye to you for the last time. but you will always be in my heart. Thank you for the life you gave me.



SIMPLY SABRINA
BY MARK ESPAÑOL

Dear Mom,

I begin this letter by first saying that I miss you beyond belief. Not a day goes by that

I don't think of you and wish that you were still here. I am out of prison now and I'm doing good. I'm in school, I'm working, and I'm engaged to a woman who I know you would have been more than proud to welcome into our family. Currently, I'm working on an essay, and it is about a woman of courage. For me you are the poster child for what a woman of courage signifies. I've witnessed you get through the most horrific case of domestic abuse; I've witnessed you build businesses with only a fourth-grade education; and I've witnessed you raise children who struggled with drug addiction and mental health issues. Never once did I see you fold, and never once did I see you turn to anything other than the inner strength that you possessed inside to get through it all.



As I was driving to work today, all I could think of was writing this paper, and tears started to pour down my cheeks. The flashbacks and the images of all the things I saw you go through started to play in my mind like a movie, and then I could hear you telling me, "Gordo, I love you." I also felt you telling me not to write this paper just about you because there are 24 women in my class that are all just as courageous as you ever were. That made me cry even harder because that's who you always were, a selfless person that always went out her way for others. I know that there are many women I could have written this



paper about, Mom, but the assignment is the assignment. I pay attention to everything, Mom, you know that. I see the women that come to class, and I hear their stories. It is encouraging to me as a man that I am around so many strong women who have also endured so much in their lives. There are also my sisters, my sisters-in-law, and there is Rebecca, Mom. Rebecca is amazingly strong, Mom, and she truly loves me, but this one is about you and only you.

I remember when your first restaurant burned down, I was only about seven years old. As a child I couldn't comprehend how devastated you must have been that the business you worked so hard to obtain was now gone. You started off as just a cook at this restaurant,



and you learned the business aspect of it on your own. I also remember when they came to put the sign up, it read, "SABRINA'S RESTAURANT." I know that that had to be an enormously proud moment for you. As an adult that now knows the amount of work and courage it takes to start a business with nothing but a dream, my heart hurts that you had to go through that experience. That didn't stop you from continuing with your goal of being an entrepreneur: you moved on and built another restaurant. You had just got out of an abusive marriage right before all of this had happened. I don't know where you found the strength to continue, but you did.

The man that I knew as Dad had put you through things that I was not aware of until he passed away. The person you were would not allow you to expose him to all the

disgusting things he did to you because you did not want me to look at him differently or treat him with a lack of respect. Had I known while he was alive that he had beat you, locked you in closets, starved you, and cheated on you time and time again, I probably would have spit on him and never respected him the way a son should respect his father. As I write this, the thought of all the things I put you through brings a pain to my chest that is unbearable. You didn't deserve the collect calls from jail, the money you spent on bail and lawyers, and I know it must have been embarrassing that the community we lived in knew you had a son that was a drug addict and a nuisance to the community. There is nothing in this world that I am sorrier for than the hurt and pain I unconsciously put you through. I am so sorry, Mom.

Life isn't easy without you here. I must be honest with you, Mom: since I've been out of prison, I have slipped a couple of times. I'm afraid and there are days that I wish I could call you. Sometimes I call the last number you had, knowing that you are not going to pick up the call on the other end, but I guess it's my way of reaching out to you in the moments I feel the most alone and hurt. I don't know if I'll be able to let go of the guilt and shame I carry, but I promise you that no matter how fragile I feel at times, I will not give up. If it were not for the courage and strength you demonstrated while you were still here on earth, I probably would have given up a long time ago. I know you are watching over me still because on the days I wish I weren't here, I feel your courage carrying me through another day. I love you, I miss you, and I will make you proud.

Love always, Fat Boy.





WHO IS MS. JAZZY B? **BY CURTRICE FOSTER**

On February 8, 1937, in Greenville Mississippi, a woman named Barbara Ann Reeves was born, a woman I call my grandmother. She

was the first of 13 children. My grandma moved to Chicago, Illinois, at the age of five. Barbara was a well-educated young lady. She went to Wendell Phillips High School in Chicago. After graduating high school in 1955, she conceived her first child. That didn't stop her from learning, and she went to Olive Garden College to study nursing. While continuing her studies and working at Illinois Bell Phone Company, she added five more children to her family and received her bachelor's degree in nursing. I was lucky enough to have a woman of courage to look up to who was driven, accomplished, and classy, a grandmother who inspired me to live my life in her image.



While being a single parent with six children, Barbara Ann became a registered nurse. She also bought her first house in 1959, and her family became the first black family to live on her block. As a young black woman, she went through obstacles just to become a black nurse. She worked in the medical field for over 50 years. She worked for several major hospitals including Michael Reese Hospital and the University of Illinois, where she was promoted to head nurse over the mother/baby ward. She remained in this position until she retired in 2010.

I was the only grandchild to have my grandmother as my maternity doctor. What a fun and embarrassing experience that was! I had my second-born child at the hospital where she worked. To look at your childbirth certificate and see your grandmother's name on there as a nurse was weird—and amazing.



Barbara Ann also served the health ministry at her church until her health failed. My grandmother would always tell my uncle he was the head of the house. Because he was the only boy out of five girls, she would place him at the head of the dining room table to bless our food, especially at family gatherings.

My grandmother was affectionately known as Ms. Jazzy B because she was a sophisticated and classy lady. Barbara Ann always dressed to impress, whether at church or family events. She was full of life. She loved wearing expensive jewelry. She was very successful in life from owning small stores, a lounge, and putting her old boyfriend in the studio. He actually made a blues record called 337; it was lee spelled backwards. Her character showed strength, tenacity, and leadership. She was the biggest role model anyone could ask for.

In 2017, though, my whole life changed forever. My heart-to-heart person who I always run to for answers or problem solving had

transitioned over into her new life into her savior's arms at the age of 80. I am happy and grateful and blessed that I had the chance to know and enjoy what a great and amazing woman she was. And I'm blessed that she belonged to me and that the lord chose me to be her granddaughter.



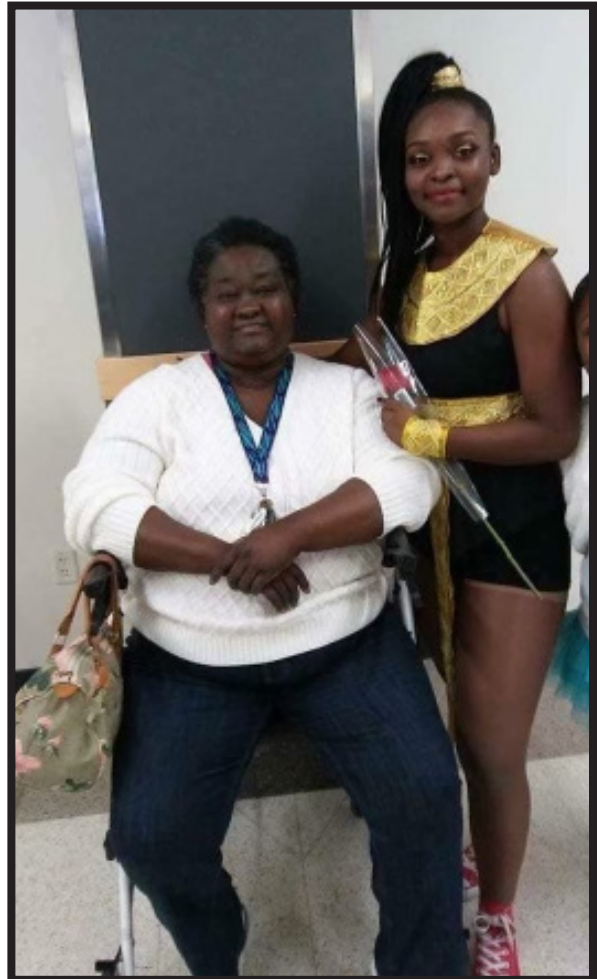


THE ROOT TO THE COURAGEOUS BY GERESA HOMESLY

Can you imagine being the root of every tree you see? Charline Green, my grandmother, is the root to the courageous, wild tales of all her grandchildren. She went through

adoptions, fought pancreatic disease, as well as being brave and strong enough to sit through her firstborn daughter's last breaths. Being courageous is something that you must learn. How did she get through? How did she feel? Why make these courageous decisions? Being the root, knowing that others are looking up to you as a role model, teacher, mom, and an open-minded listener, will pull you in multiple ways to show you how strong and courageous a person can be.

Charline is the most beautiful soul I've ever met. At the age of 55, she longed for her grandchildren and great-grandkids to have a peaceful life filled with an abundance of love and nurturing. Her grandkids were always welcome to live with her, of course serving her and handling tasks around her home. One cold, blizzardy morning, she received an outrageous call from CPS (Child Protective Service). Unfortunately, the news was terrible, discovering that her firstborn great-grandchild was in an accident, resulting in the baby flying out of the dashboard window. Charline waited a few minutes to determine if this was a battle worth fighting, at her tender age. Caring for a newborn was not an issue. Keeping the newborn and fighting against her very first grandchild was puzzling. Triggering emotions Charline faced were outstanding! Overall, Charline beat the odds, and she won! Having the courage to battle against someone she loved so dearly, knowing what's at stake is draining. Having to keep open arms for all family is having courage to understand everyone is different, all while showering them with love.



Furthermore, although Charline spent years caring for others, she needs to care for herself every once in a while. I loved going on dates with her to the spa, hair dates, even going out to spiffy restaurants. On the beautiful, flower-filled walk we were taking, she showed me discomfort. She told me her stomach area was very fatigued. We ended our walk early; I drove her to the hospital... Six dreadful hours crept by. Still no positive results. Another hour went by speedily. The doctor informed us that she had a positive pancreatitis result. Yet another courageous dilemma: either get a body part cut out of her while she is asleep or take meds that'll drain her of her lifetime functions and activities. Charline came to the conclusion that she'd rather take the meds, as she is so terrified of being put to sleep. She knows how this will affect her daily functions; she is brave enough to accept it and get through this hard time. Filled with courage, she kept thriving by doing what she does best, caring for others in need.

Lastly, are human hearts capable of breaking? Well, let's see, Charline's first daughter Sandra grew up with her literally. Charline gave birth to Sandra at the young age of thirteen. They've been through everything together. They had a bond that I assumed would never break, until the day we discovered Sandra had been hospitalized. Sandra had many battles she won against drug addiction. She had been clean for seven years until the one day she was weak and fell back into the treacherous addiction cycle. While sitting at the hospital seeing Grandma bawling her eyes out, Sandra barely had enough energy to talk. Sandra was able to tell her mom, Charline, that the doctor told her if she was to use again her heart would beat so rapidly that her heart would give up. Charline, brave, feeling defeated, feeling as if her world was turned upside down, knew it was time to be there for her first-born child and best friend. Sandra was the first love of her life, the one who turned her into the beautiful mother some people wish they had. Charline was so brave in this moment because she didn't want Sandra to stop fighting. She decided to move Sandra the hospice care, a place where the fight ends. She would be comfortable and at peace, no pain. Charline, with her aching heart, spinning world, had lifelong memories as all she had left of her innocent baby. Charline,



sitting next to her child on her last day on this earth, gave her comfort. Knowing Charline brought her into this world and was there when the life she created left the world crumbled her heart into a million little pieces, something that cannot be fixed. "I can't do this, my heart hurts so bad," cried Charline. Three days later, my Charline, my beautiful queen, wasn't feeling so good. She went to the hospital, but they said she was perfectly fine. On the way home, my dearest grandmother Charline had passed away due to her heart giving up. Her heart couldn't take the pain she felt, and now they're back together peacefully.

Overall, my grandmother Charline is and forever will be my woman of courage. There is nothing too big or too small that she couldn't get through. She showed me how to care for others; she showed me what it means to be resilient against all odds. Her courage poured into me. I wouldn't be as far as I am today without her. Having courage these days will make or break you. She always had great outcomes to see better in the future. Take risks, have some courage because it builds character and you'll be destined for greatness. True heroes go through obstacles you'll never hear about. I'm extremely proud of my grandmother. She took on multiple battles at a time. She is my hero!



MY MOTHER, RUTH ANN DIGGS, WOMAN OF COURAGE BY TYRONE HUDSON, SR.

My mother was born August 19, 1950, in Detroit, Michigan to Linzy and Gertrude Hudson. She was the second oldest of children which included two brothers, Elbert and Charles, and one sister, Freida, who has since preceded her in death.



My mom had attended John Farren Elementary School until 1964, then went on to Dusable High School where she graduated in 1968. She didn't stop there. Later on in her life, she attended Taylor Business School for two years and received her associate's degree in accounting. My mom accepted Christ at an early age as her personal savior. She was very spiritual. She always talked about our lord and savior Jesus Christ. She raised seven boys, Tyrone, Linzy, Otis, Gregory (deceased), Antonio, Delmar, and Roman. Every Sunday, we had to go to church with some of us singing in the chorus.

My mom had talked about how important education was for us at an early age. She would always tell us that without an education, life is hard and would be a struggle without a good education. As we got older in life, she would tell us to put the Lord first and let him help you with your troubles, but she would keep talking about how important education was for us to succeed in life.

She worked for Sears and Roebuck for more than 15 years. She then decided it was time for a lifetime change for us. She would go visit her friends in Atlanta, Georgia, for many years. Then in 1987 she decided to relocate to Atlanta. Three of us were grown, so she took the four youngest sons with her to Atlanta. The reason my mom decided to relocate was that she didn't want my younger brothers to be hurt in any way because Chicago had started getting really violent. So she told us that it was time for us to move, and she didn't want to see any of her sons get hurt or end up dead due to violence going on in Chicago. She wanted them to get a better education. Once she had settled in, she decided to go back to school. She attended Atlanta Area Tech, where she went on to receive her bachelor's degree. She had many employers before she finally secured her final job with the Georgia Department of Transportation, where she retired in 2012.

Before she retired from Georgia D.O.T., she met a group of women at work who became best of friends. Out of this friendship they would get together and share recipes. They then went on to form the Gourmet Divas Cooking Club, which was my mom Ruth Ann Diggs, Awen Grant, Salathia Powell, Erina Green, and Brenda Reeves-Johnson. She had plenty of friends, grandchildren, and great grandchildren who miss her beautiful smile and sense of humor. She is very loved and missed by many. To know her to love her! My mother, dear, we miss you very, very much! With love, your boys.





MY MOM IS A COURAGEOUS WOMAN BY AIDA INUNCA

I don't understand how my mom, even though she was badly oppressed and subordinated not just for being indigenous but for being a woman, always stood strong for herself and for

her family. She is a very strong and courageous woman. My mother survived poverty and all those social scourges that killed the human conscience and wounded the body with whips. She is that kind of strongest woman for whom hard work, respect for her traditions, and love for others and giving back to the community are important principles in her life.

For one thing, she is a hard-working mom. She always told me that I should do my best in any work that I have been assigned to do, and she was a live example for me. When I was a child, my mom woke up at 3 am to start the day. She was always embroidering new traditional colorful outfits by hand; and every Tuesday and Thursday, she went to sell them on the other side of the community knocking door to door. This is how she worked in order to bring some money and pay school expenses for my sister and me. Now that she is 72 years old, she still gets up every morning at 4 am, cooks some breakfast, and goes up to the field to milk the cows. Then, she brings the milk in bottles and sells it to the nearest dairy company at 7 am every morning. She takes care of the food and water for the cows and goes back home after that. At the same time, she is attending all the needs of the animals and seed plantings in her field, such as sawing the seed, removing the weeds, and harvesting, no matter if it's a rainy day or sunny day.



Second, she respects her tradition. Since I can remember, she was always a strong conservator of Indigenous Ecuadorean traditions and beliefs. For instance, when she delivered her babies, she did it at home alone and with the help only of a community midwife. A community midwife was someone who was strongly a believer in the indigenous traditions. My mom believes that in the native community, honoring childbirth with great freedom and kindness and respect are key principles to pay tribute to human life. She firmly believes that coming into the world with love, naturalness, and patience is a human right all should have. Moreover, even though in the place where she was living it was prohibited to speak her native language because white people would beat and kill her if she was found speaking Kichwa, she managed to teach my sister and me her native language. I admire her so much that I am teaching my son the native language that my mom taught me.





Third, love for others and giving back to the community is very important for my mom. Every time someone comes home to visit, she always offers some food and makes them feel at home. If she doesn't have any cooked food to offer them, she offers sacred seeds from her field, cheese or milk from her cows. Also, she is always there to help others. She said, "We don't have to help others just because we think they need help, we help others because we feel that doing so is soothing our freedom. Otherwise, help is not worth it." She always puts others first. During the COVID 19 pandemic, my mom along with other women in the community made some herbal infusions and shared this herbal medicine with families and friends first. She courageously desires to give back to her community. The government has never

been there to support the needs of the families. My mom's voice, along with the voice of other women in the area, supported bringing clean water from the mountain, electricity, and access to the households. She has been a great fighter for indigenous rights, and the soles of her feet depict the marks of her struggles, fights, stories, and dreams that were impregnated during her journey.

All these values show that my mom is a courageous woman. Even though she is 72 years old now, she continues being who she is. She continues doing the work that she loves to do and continues maintaining the values of traditions that make her to be the person who she is. She will continue helping others, fighting for her rights and the community's rights. No matter how hard she has to work, and no matter what kind of sacrifice she has to make, I know she will always be as strong a woman as she is. That is her unique and admirable nature.



**RESILIENT****BY TIERRA KIMBREW**

Sarah Ellenbolt is the strongest, most courageous woman I have known in my lifetime. She inspires me because of the way she has overcome the struggles of teen pregnancy and single parenting in her early life. She also dedicated most of her years to nurturing her education, with an infinite lust for knowledge. She moves through life so gracefully, as if it's effortless, even in the most trying of times. Sometimes I think that her resiliency is her superpower.

"I love you to the moon and back," my mom would say to me every night. Growing up, it was always just my mom and me. She had me when she was 17 years old. After I was born, she took me to her high school with her every day. The teachers there would hold me while giving their lessons, and the other students would take turns caring for me while my mom completed her schoolwork. She also worked at the local Dairy Queen full time to be able to support me.

From the very beginning this is how I remember it: me, a child just playing or simply just being there while my mom was buried with her nose in a book, studying, or staying up all night writing a paper with the goal to give us a better life. Watching my mom study late into the night most nights put a higher value on education for me. Sarah ended up working on her degree slowly throughout the course of my life, and she obtained her bachelor's degree in Business Management with a minor in Criminal Justice when I was a junior in high school.

Sarah then went on to complete her master's degree shortly afterwards. She was one semester away when she was diagnosed with a rare mitochondrial disease. Unfortunately, her health hasn't allowed her to complete her next phase, but nevertheless I will forever be amazed at how far she came. She sacrificed so much to get there, and I have learned so much from her entire life's educational journey.

It is because of my mom and her lifelong learning battle that I feel that I too have been on a similar path of lifelong learning. It is because of my mom that I will someday have a bachelor's degree.





THE SECRET LOTUS

BY MONÈ LONG

Standing against the majority is one of the most courageous things you can do in today's society. One of the first ways to stand up against corrupt organizations is through education. Anita Simansky is a union activist and has spent the majority of her life speaking up against organized leadership groups, educating the youth, and fighting for a better tomorrow.

There are only a few that understand the truth about feeling like an outsider, and Anita is one of them. At a young age Anita was discriminated against due to her nationality. Her family originated from Russia and experienced the impacts of the Holocaust. The people in the world were very cruel and couldn't fathom the idea of women having equality when it came to politics, education, or any role outside of motherhood. These are the events that helped guide Anita into evolving into a movement louder than herself. She became a part of the few and used her voice to speak against the many. I am inspired by her ability to grow in murky waters, just like a lotus flower.

In 2000 Anita accepted her position as a counselor at Shabazz City High School in Madison WI. For 18 years she assisted and guided youth into becoming stars in their own unique way. She was overseeing trials and tribulations, never losing sight of the bigger picture in her eyes. Teaching is a gift only God could give, and that is exactly what Anita dedicated her life to. I was blessed to be able to attend Shabazz City High School in 2012 and reconnect with someone I felt I'd known way longer than I'd physically been alive. Still till this day I recall being pushed and guided to overcome anything because Anita spoke life into me day in and day out through my high school experience. Helping others is what brought joy and fulfillment into her life, and in return she continues to shine onto others, blessing them with her presence.

Labor Notes National meetings, SAL and what race got to do with it are two different movement groups that Anita is currently a part of. Still till this day there is a fight that any of you could be involved in to make a better world. There is never a time where there isn't work to be accomplished. There is always a time to add a lending hand, help someone with less, and use those resources to promote peace into our imperfect world.

In our own way we are all a part of Odyssey, working on improving ourselves and embracing the journey for exactly what it is. The best forward action is commitment and consistency in your endeavors. The term courage originates from Latin Middle English focusing on the bravery component or the heart. It is easy to be silent; it is also easy to be a follower. It takes the bold and fearless to be considered courageous, and Anita Simansky is just that.





VIGOROUS COURAGE FOR LIFE

BY MARICELA MARTINEZ MUNGUIA

The most courageous woman I have ever met is my mother, Andrea Munguia Flores, a woman of strong character, with vigorous courage for life, strength of spirit, and great faith. She always encouraged my four brothers and me not to throw away the gloves (this means that we should not be discouraged in life).

My mother took on the role of father for me and my four siblings when my father had to emigrate to the USA. My mother went through many difficult and critical moments that made her cry and feel sad, but later she regained courage. She dried her tears and maintained a serene, resilient character with a lot of mental strength. My mother always told me about hope, life, and the effort for education. She used to tell me, "Give it your best, Mija. You have a good brain and you shouldn't waste it."



She had never been to primary school, and therefore she didn't know how to read or write. That caused her many difficulties in life, but at 45 years of age she enrolled in the adult classes that were being offered in my community. I remember the day she graduated from the reading and writing course, she was very proud of having managed to finish classes despite the opinions, ideas, or perspectives of other people. The custom of the town was that women should only be in the kitchen, working in the fields, and taking care of their children, especially if the husband was absent. But above all, despite her hearing loss, she did not give up on continuing her education and moving forward.

The need and the desire to get ahead led her to open a miscellaneous business and another for the sale of pigs and chickens. Her serious character for business allowed her to take leadership in the drinking water cooperative and on the school's board of directors. a primary school in my community. Thanks to this, she



taught me how to better manage money, to know how to save, to know how to buy merchandise myself, to not be afraid to speak my truth, and to express ideas no matter how strange they were. She always gave me the space to learn from her. My mother was a very good merchant but also a great person with a lot of compassion, empathy, generosity, and wisdom. As my mother prospered in her business, people from my community came to my house to ask for favors or economic loans to my mother. I rarely saw someone leave home empty-handed; my mother always gave them food to take home. She used to say these words, "Today for you, tomorrow for me."

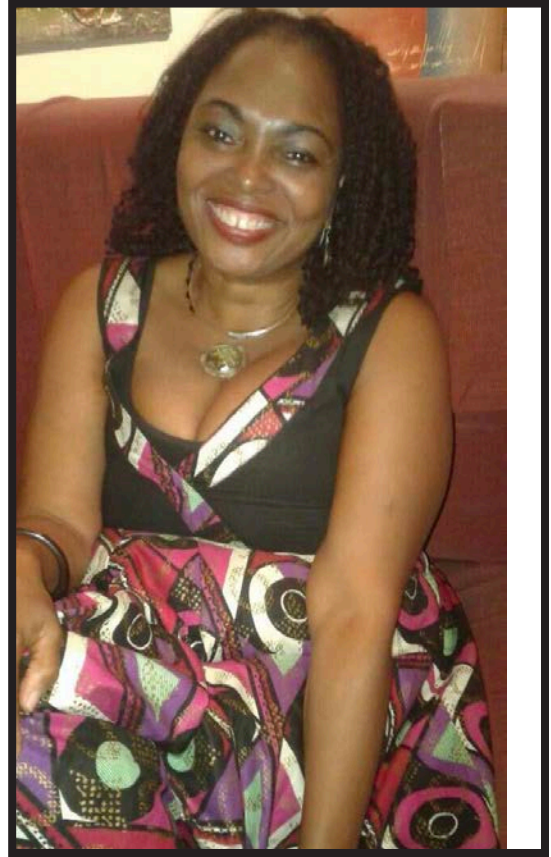
Life in the village was hard but also beautiful. My mother taught me a love for the land, for animals, for nature, and for the rain because it is the one who waters the harvest. These are some of the many reasons that make my mother be a woman of courage and bravery to get ahead.



MY FUN, COOL, COURAGEOUS AUNTIE BY LAVINIA MILLER

My awesome and cool Auntie Tina Jones Savadogo is my woman of courage. She is my mother's baby sister, and she is my aunt/mother. The reason why I say my Auntie is like a mom to me is because

she took me and my siblings and my cousins in (all seven of us) when others couldn't or wouldn't. My Auntie Tina taught me about having faith and courage and not to give up, no matter how difficult life can be. My Auntie never quit once, no matter how crazy many people thought she was for taking care of so many children that were not hers. She never wavered in knowing that she did the right thing in fostering her nieces and nephews. She didn't give up her goals, and she wouldn't allow us to give up ours; throughout most my life, she gave me hope and courage, and still to this day she does the same. My Auntie is encouraged by the importance of family and family ties. It is all about the ancestors – grandparents, great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents, and the sacrifices they made for us to be here. My Auntie always reminded us that her grandfather, my great-grandfather, was born into slavery or born near the end of slavery. She wants us to trace our family ancestral line and know more about who our ancestors are; where we come from is important to the family history. Auntie says, "It is good to know who you are and not be ashamed to be an African American because we have been through a lot as a people, and we are a resilient people." Auntie reminds me often that we should remember that "we stand on the backs and prayers of our ancestors" and that "without them there is no us."



My Auntie has always been a force to reckon with. She managed to finish high school, go straight to college, and finish two bachelor's degrees. She would tell me and my siblings that because they say you are a statistic does not mean you have to become that. She says things like, "Just because 70% of black men will drop out of school and go to prison, that 'Prison to Pipeline' stuff does not mean you have to make that become true for your life and your reality. Or that 70% of teenage African American girls ages 13-17 will become teen moms and drop out of high school, that does not mean that will become your life." I think about it now, but neither myself nor my siblings became teen moms. I thank my Auntie for this advice.



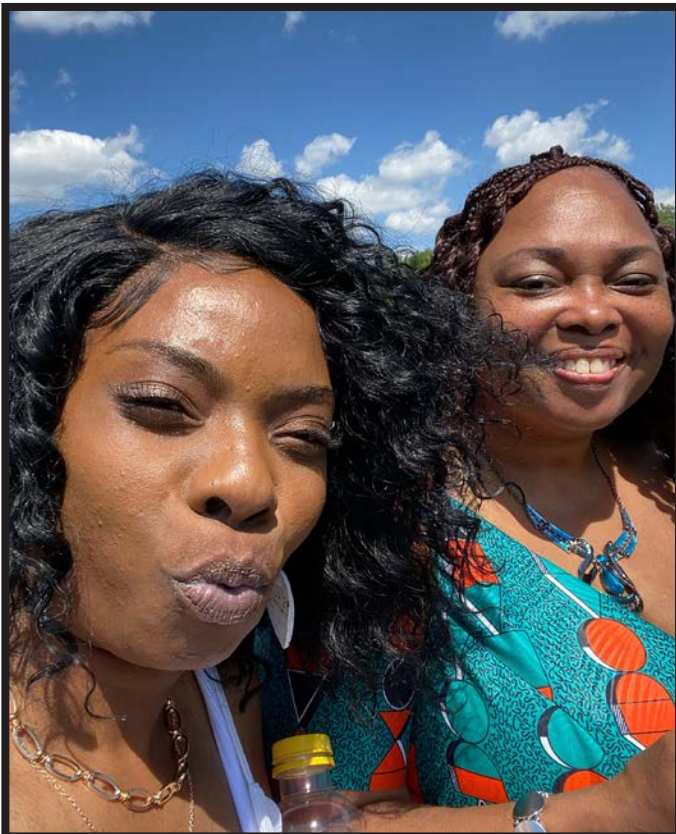
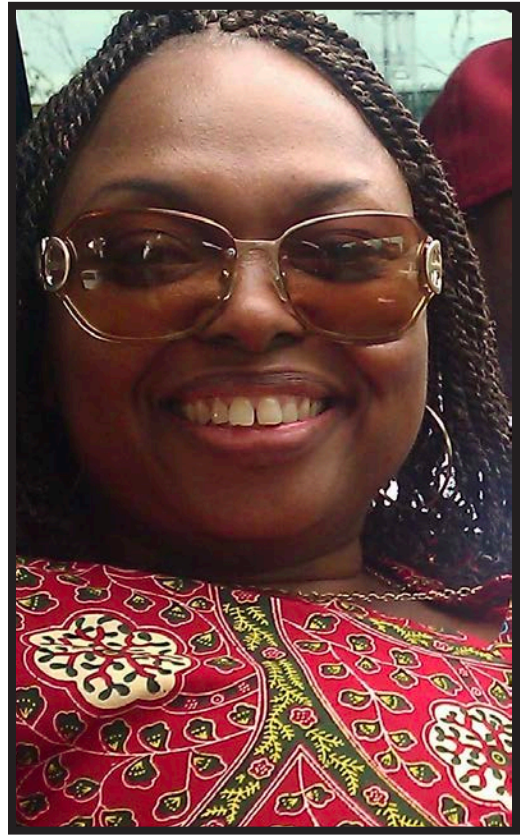
I remember the time when she took my siblings and me in as foster children. She had no children of her own at the time, and she dropped out of graduate school to care for us. What an amazing sacrifice! People did not know how hard she was having it. No one would support her on this decision because folks just didn't understand her. My Auntie also took care of her mom's elderly sister, Auntie Maggie, who was 87 years old at the time, along with my siblings and me. Many people and some family members were against her taking care of so many people (the elderly, teenagers, and school age kids) but she still did it anyway. She did not care what folks said. Auntie only knew that she could not sit back and watch her sister's kids be out there in the world suffering alone like that with no one to care for them. She also could not watch Auntie Maggie live in a nursing home somewhere not being taking care of properly. She would say we are her blood and her mother's and father's grandkids, and that Auntie Maggie was her mom's big sister – and that is all that matters, Family! And what happened to us being in and out of foster homes – our condition was not our fault. When she has a dream she goes after it, and I learned this deed from her as well.

Learning about religion and the importance of faith is important in family life. Auntie kept us in church (it was not forced, and she always gave us a choice) and in church programs and social programs in the Madison community. She would keep us working and volunteering in the community with progressive Black organizations and social programs. For example, I worked for *Umoja Magazine* for five years doing my youth and volunteered with ACE (Academic Centers for Enrichment) Program through Nehemiah Community Development. We had our own planning and youth committee for organizing for the Million Woman March, which I attended alongside my sisters and cousins; we took a long road trip and attended it in Philadelphia, PA. I feel very fortunate that my Auntie exposed me to different faiths and taught me to hold on to my faith and spirituality when I need it. She would remind me that I should never be ashamed of my



faith or family, that many families go through hard times, that Black history is especially important, and that I should never be ashamed of being a Black woman. My Auntie likes to write, and she says it is a mood thing for her; she likes writing poems, short stories, and sometimes prose. She likes reading about world history and traveling. My Auntie traveled since she was an early college student in the 80s. She was a foreign exchange student, which was different for a Black American in her time. She also traveled to Africa and the Caribbean studying, working, and seeing the sights. She encourages me and my siblings to study, do journaling if you can, and try to see the world. She says you can travel to a lot of places by just reading a book and that not having any money is not a reason that you cannot travel.

Overall, the most I can say is that my Auntie has taught me so much and so many things about life, so I am truly grateful. Yes, she is courageous, tenacious, and quite resilient. As we get older, we do not realize how influential people can be in our lives. I know I have been through a lot in my life, and I have learned how to be courageous, I have a good sense of faith and sisterhood, and I am a hard worker. I never really stopped to think about those who surrounded me positively and how they played such a big role in my life until writing this paper. It is good to have mentors in life, whether family or not – imagine if you look hard enough, those who encourage you might just be right underneath your nose.





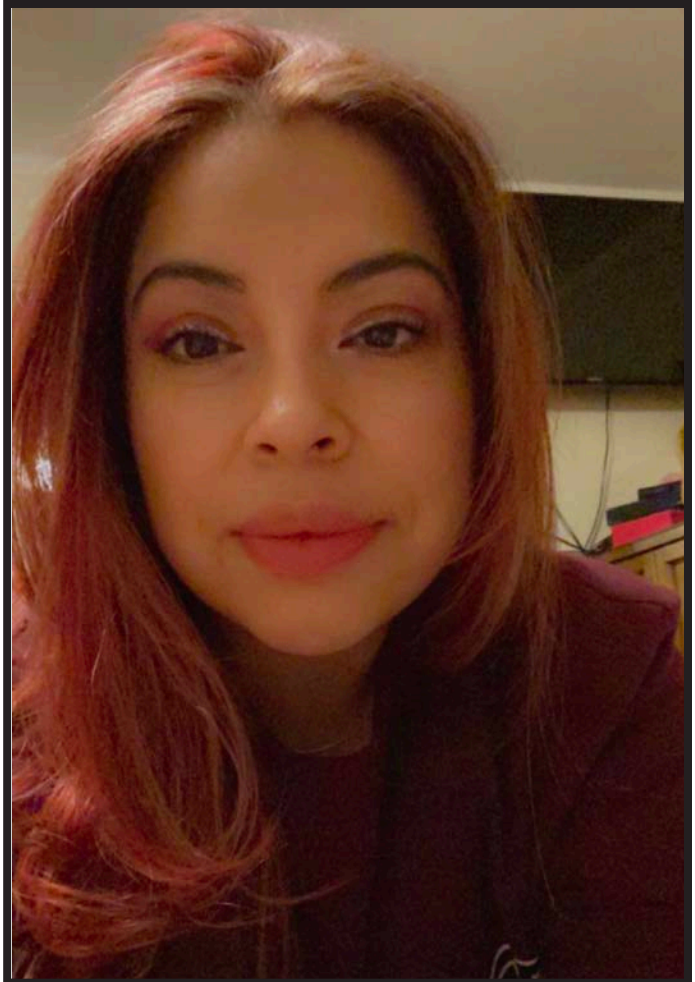
WHEN LIFE GETS HARD, YOU PUSH HARDER

BY SAUL NAXI PEREZ

“With all I have gone through in my life, what is to lose?” This is what my best friend, Rocio, will say every time she opens her mind to a new

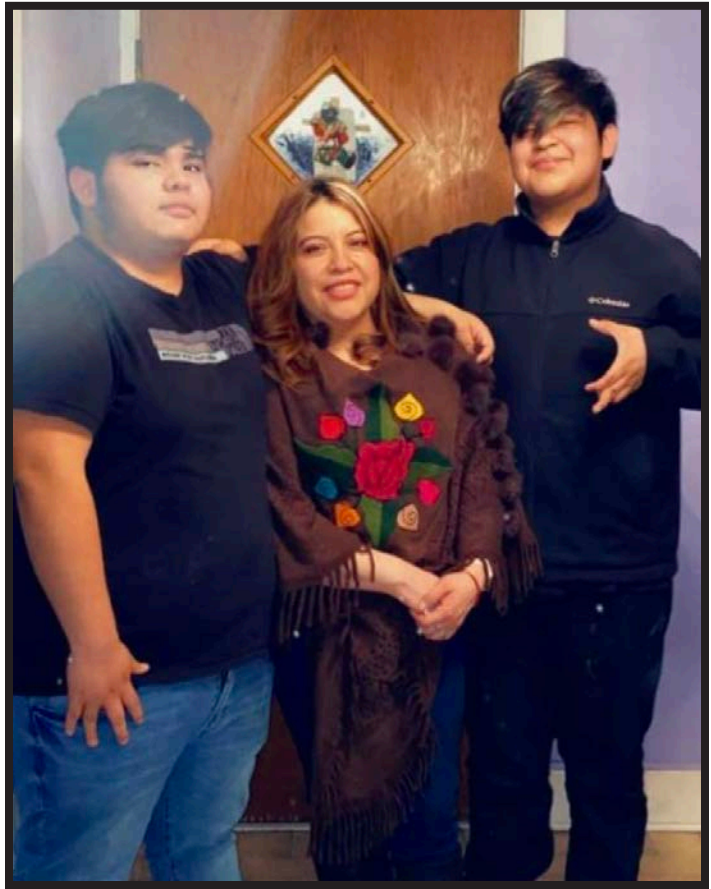
idea. I see Rocio as a woman of courage because she has gone through lots of hardship in her life, such as starting a new life as an immigrant woman in the USA, overcoming domestic violence, and becoming a single parent to take on the full load of being a mom and a dad. I admire Rocio for her love and compassion, for the good she has in her to love anyone, and for her courage to overcome hard obstacles. Rocio has the true spirit of a woman of courage!

It took Rocio an incredible amount of courage to make it as an immigrant woman in a new world. For example, Rocio wanted to learn English but without the knowledge and support needed, all she could do was to work instead of educating herself. Without knowing English, it is really hard to be independent! Being a woman and not knowing English made it even more challenging to survive in the USA. The difficulties Rocio had to overcome such as finding a place to live, getting a job, and getting to know her surroundings were not conquered. Not having an education or the knowledge to know about medical assistance or other resources made her life harder, and she pretty much had to live day to day in survival mode. Fear and shame were always in her mind. She was fearful of getting in trouble and being deported back to Mexico. It takes lots of courage and perseverance to live in these conditions, and it takes a love of oneself to fight in this country. I admire Rocio’s courage for overcoming the shame and fear of being a woman living in a world where Latinos are still fighting for their rights.



In addition to all the challenges of being an immigrant, Rocio also had to break free both from domestic violence and her traditional culture. Rocio suffered in a relationship marked by domestic violence, and she felt like her existence did not matter. She felt trapped in this relationship because in her culture, marriage is forever no matter how a woman is being treated. Rocio had no choice but to break the cycle of the traditional Mexican immigrant woman by leaving her abuser. It took so much courage to take herself and her kids out of this toxic environment. It took so much love for herself to start over with her life and her energy to be a free woman and give herself a better life. In all, Rocio suffered a great amount of physical abuse, oppression, and lots of mental abuse as well, but overcoming these horrendous traumas is what I admire about my friend Rocio. She has done a great amount of work to recover her self-confidence and to heal her heart.

Despite all of the other challenges she faced, Rocio is also a full-time mom (and dad) to her kids with no help at all. The amount of strength and courage it takes to become the main provider for her kids is one of the most courageous actions I admire about Rocio. For example, Rocio does not have a well-paid job, yet she was able to buy a house for her and her four kids. She is managing to take her kids to school and day care. Plus, she recently managed to buy a new car to meet her and her kids' needs, such as taking her oldest son to work and going to family activities. Also, Rocio is a great cook. After all the craziness that goes on in her everyday life, she still cooks homemade meals for the kids. Rocio has taken the role of a father, a mother, and the primary caregiver. Rocio also takes care of the house and does chores such as snow plowing in winter and gardening in summer. Rocio is doing it all by herself, and this is amazing. I admire the amount of courage she shows, how much pride she takes in being a single parent, and how much love she has for her kids. Rocio loves her kids so much and would do pretty much anything for them.



In conclusion, Rocio's life is so inspiring, and I'm so very proud to call her my friend. I admire her personality, strength, love, and compassion. Rocio's life is smiles and love, regardless of what she has gone through. Rocio believes that her past is only a thing of the past and what matters in life today is how she sees its present and future. I love Rocio, and I'm so proud to call her my best friend. I can't wait to see where and how her life will transform in the near future. Rocio is an amazing woman of courage!



LONG ROAD TO RECOVERY

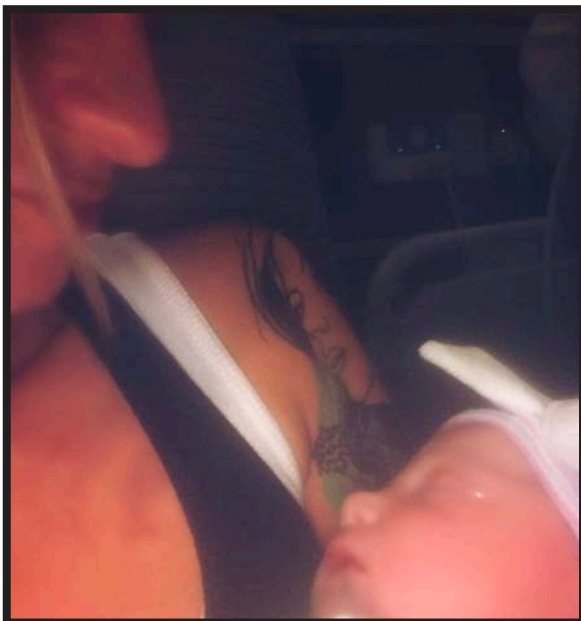
BY KEELY NELSON-GRAY

Years ago, a woman's addiction started just by using legal prescription drugs. Doctors give out prescription drugs not knowing what type of impact it can bring to people's lives. Just one prescription

can change someone's life forever. Drugs may take away the temporary pain, but the long-term effects go far beyond the purpose these drugs once had. Soon the unforgettable high and euphoric feeling isn't enough; once the prescription is gone and doctors refuse to provide more, some people who yearn for the high these drugs once gave begin to use illegal drugs, which can impact their lives far more than they ever imagined. Addiction is a neuropsychological disorder. Approximately 21 million Americans struggle with at least one addiction in their lifetime, but only about 10% receive treatment. One of these 21 million Americans was my mom, who struggled with arthritis and anxiety at a young age. She was prescribed pain medication by her doctor. Her addiction grew into using illegal drugs, such as heroin and crack-cocaine. My mom went through many obstacles during the few years she struggled with her addictions. She struggled through incarceration, near death experiences, and overcame many relapses on her road to recovery.



In the beginning, drugs began to take over my mother; it took over the things she once cared so much about, including herself. At the time, she was the main caretaker for myself, my stepsister, Michele, and my baby brother, Jared. When my stepfather would leave early in the morning for work, I remember she would leave shortly after him in hopes she would make it back in time to get us ready for school. One day she did not return. She was under the influence, nodded off, and hit a semi-truck head on. Luckily, she survived the crash. After this incident, everything started to become very real. At this time, I was young and did not fully understand this change in my mother. I did not become aware of the severity of her addiction until I started to actually see everything myself. I witnessed my mom go through very heart-wrenching withdrawals. She would lie on the bed in my grandparents' home, drenched in sweat



but freezing cold, describing the feeling of bugs crawling up and down the inside of her skin, tossing and turning uncontrollably as her addiction demanded to be fed.

My mom had begun to get to the point in her addiction that she could not afford it on her own, so she started to allow the wrong people into her life. A man named Alvin Siller, aka "Slim," is now facing life charges for human trafficking among other very serious charges.

He would force her to do things she did not want to do in order to feed her addiction. At one point he choked my mother until she was unconscious and pistol-whipped her. My mother thought she was not going to make it. This incident was brought up to authorities, which led to his arrest. My mother also ended up being arrested during this time, and this began her first journey to sobriety.



My mother had been in and out of prison multiple times throughout a few years. When she would get out, she relapsed. My stepfather did whatever he could to make sure my mom was put behind bars. I'm not sure if this was out of anger towards her because he was forced to be a single father to two children or if he actually wanted to help her get clean. Even when she was out of prison, it was still not an easy time for me. She would often live at my grandparents' house where I had been living, and I would witness her going through bad withdrawals or using. During this time, I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety. It was very hard for me as a child to process how to deal with these situations. So I began to self-medicate with marijuana, alcohol, and tobacco. I would run away from home for days and get in trouble with law enforcement. I didn't know how to cope because my mom was all I ever knew and I loved her so very much. I wanted nothing but to go back to a "normal" life. I remember my grandma had driven me to Taycheedah Correctional Institution

to see my mom. I was so happy to see the mom I once knew: a clean mother and loving mother despite the circumstances. While my mom was at Taycheedah she obtained her high school diploma through a program at the prison. I was so proud of her! My mom ended up getting out once again on supervision and was living on the northside of Madison. I had moved with her, and we were living by ourselves for the first time in what felt like a lifetime. This time was cut short when she relapsed once again. She called me from the Dane County Jail. I had left for a short period of time. When I returned to our apartment, there was an eviction notice on our door, the locks were changed, and I could not get any of our belongings. We lost everything and I had nowhere to go. Shortly after my mother was released, she fell into a serious relationship. From what I knew my mother was clean, but behind closed doors what looked like a healthy relationship became the complete opposite. They began using drugs, but not any of my mother's drugs of choice. She would drink when she usually never drank before and he began to use crack-cocaine and became verbally and physically abusive. One day, she called me and I drove to pick her and all of her belongings up. She didn't want to go back down the path she finally grew out of. My mom ended up back with my stepdad, and she entered a course to be an advocate for people who are suffering from addiction. She completely turned her life around. While she was in school, she was working with my stepdad doing electrical work. Soon after she graduated from her program, she began working with homeless people for an organization called Facing Forward to End Homelessness as an advocate helping people who struggle with addiction, domestic abuse, and other underlying diseases. She was finally free and was there to help others through their hardships.

My mother has been clean from heroin for nine years. She is currently working with people with disabilities to help them be able to live life with normal employment opportunities, is currently still with my step dad, and is a full-time mom to my teenage brother. I am so proud of her. In the time she has been clean from heroin, there have been many things that could've tempted her to go back, but she made the decision that she was done with that lifestyle on her own. I am honestly so thankful for everything I had to go through throughout these times because it allowed me to grow, and I would not be the person I am today if these situations did not occur. I believe it has done nothing but make me stronger, help me find myself, and be the person I need to be for my children. My mom is my woman of courage because she could've allowed these situations to break her. Instead, she took accountability and made decisions to not stay in situations that would've left her for dead. If it would've been me, I would have given up a long time ago! But she never did, and that takes so much courage. She is the best "Nana" I could ask for to my children. She is always there if there is anything I need! I cannot thank her enough for being who she is: my courageous woman.



SUPER MOM

BY GAEI RODRIGUEZ

In July 1999 Grisel Tapia [Odyssey Class of 2017] first stepped foot in the US at the age of 11. She came with only a few dollars and with her mom. She met up with

some family members she had here in Madison and stayed with them for a while until she and her mom could find an affordable apartment. She started to go to school here while working part time in the afternoons cleaning offices so she could help her mom by pitching in for rent, food, and supplies. And in the summers, she would have a full-time job working in a chocolate factory. She turned into an independent woman. She is very brave and does things that are out of her comfort zone, she is motivated to accomplish her goals and never give up, and she really likes to help and give back to the community.

She was very out of her comfort zone when she talked at the women's rights march in downtown Madison at the capitol. As she was getting ready to give her speech, various people were interviewing her also. In front of her were about 100,000 people. She was very nervous when she was giving her



speech, but at the end when people started cheering for her, she knew she said something that impacted the audience. She has not just done that but has also given press conferences about social justice, too.

A big goal she has set herself and that she accomplished was getting the job she has right now, which is a social worker. She supports families that have language barriers and need help translating. She supports families in need of help finding food pantries, clothes, toys for kids, and so much more. Apart from that, she also reached the goal of getting out of poverty. She has a great job she loves doing, a beautiful family, and a nice warm home, which would be one of her biggest accomplishments in life.

She also loves giving back to the community. She has provided senior citizens with computer classes to learn the basics of how to use a computer. She has also served as a board president at Nuestro Mundo Inc by helping to get funding for the school to buy new materials for the school for kids' better education. Organizing school events helps raise money for kids going into college who needed scholarships. Apart from that, she was also a vice president for the Latino Educational Council, which was similar to what she did at Nuestro Mundo Inc helping high





school students going into college get scholarships. She attended plenty of educational meetings, looking for volunteers for events they had. She also organized field trips at different colleges for families with first generation college students to start looking at schools. And if you think that's it, you're wrong: she was also a part of Voces de la Frontera, Luces Latinos United for College Education Scholarships, Vera Court Neighborhood Center, and the Latino Academy.

Overall, she feels like she still hasn't done enough. Still to this day, she tries to help others in any way possible she can. She has her dream job, lives in a beautiful home, is still getting her education in school, and has overcome poverty. But apart from being a very kind person to the community, she is also my mom/best friend. She has always helped me get through my life problems and has never said no to me. I am proud to say you are my mom.





MY GUARDIAN ANGEL

BY KIANA SIMS

My woman of courage's name is Andrea Traverse. We are not related, but she is my partner in crime. She is a case manager I met



**Family Support and
Resource Center**

on December 2, 2021 at the Family Support and Resource Center. Three things about my woman of courage are that she stands up for my son and stands with me, not against me, even when others look at my child as bad and crazy – not right! She helps me solve all issues when the odds are against me and him. And she pushes me when I don't want to fight anymore.

She is a positive, strong woman, always laughing and making humor out of any negativity. I will never forget her laugh. She always finds answers. She told me about the UW Odyssey Project. I didn't think I was going to even get accepted. My woman of courage stands up for what's right. She fought for me to even get my children into the Boys and Girls Club, which I am thankful for.

I am thankful for help; my children touch her in so many ways. She never gave up courage and is standing by my side because it's not easy. She's amazing. She leads me my way. There were times I wanted to leave and give up, but she gave me my little push.

We went from talking every day to talking once a week. She's off helping and supporting another family, but she's still my partner, and as I am writing this, it looks like we have to team up again for me and Princeton like old times.

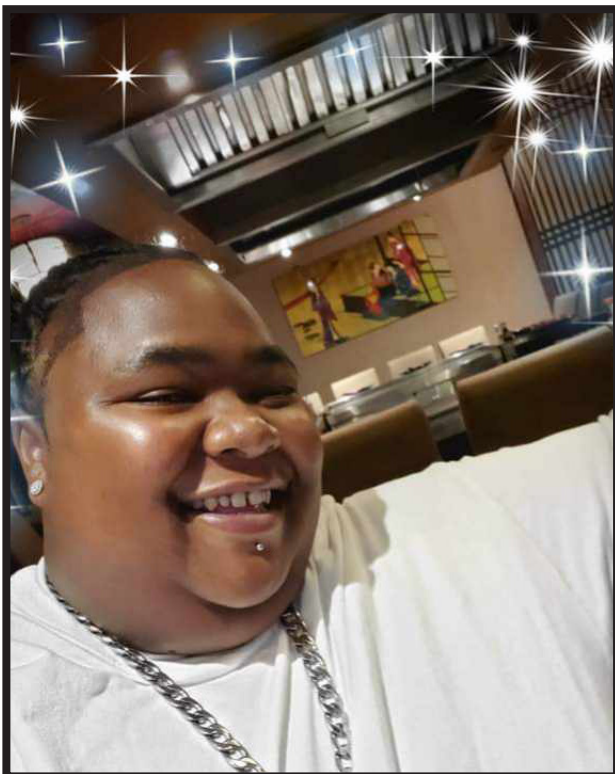
My woman of courage is needed again. Andrea Traverse is kind of like my guardian angel.



**JASMINE ALEXANDREA BENSON: A JAB AT LIFE****BY DOMINIQUE SMITH**

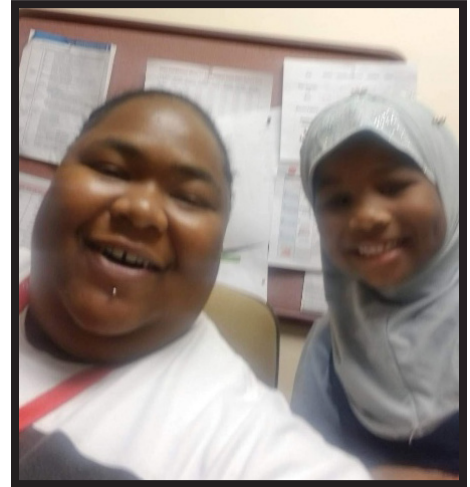
When I think of home, I think of a familiar face emanating courage, a friend who became family while fighting her own silent battles. As a young adolescent she stood firm in her stance as the protector of our pack, the educator wise beyond her years, and the equalizer to conflicts that could potentially affect us all. I knew that with her as my friend, I was always safe and secure. Naive to anything outside my immediate world, I never considered the trials my friend was navigating through in life. It wasn't until my own lived experiences as an adult that I was able to understand the fuel behind her motivation to make a difference. As she would say, "When climbing the ladder, don't forget to reach back down." Through courage, Jasmine found ways to give back, get involved, and build others up, all while finding her voice that could have been silent forever.

As a child Jasmine was not afforded the privilege of a nurturing, safe, and stable environment. At an early age Jasmine was failed by the foster care system set up to protect her. She was exposed to harsh punishments, food deprivation, and the advances of monstrous acts of pedophilia. Each day was a battle of survival. Her only relief came when she was able to participate in extracurricular activities through local youth programs. Here she was able to live out her youth and escape the uncertainties of tomorrow. At the age of 10, I remember meeting this confident girl who was equally equipped with humorous wit as myself. I did not know the magnitude of pain and precariousness of the day. She fought through, to live in the moment and engage with other youth whose biggest concern was their choice of snack, or getting the latest pair of popular shoes. She did not get bitter and she did not envy. Instead, she protected this peaceful safe zone she had established among her friends and basked in those moments of innocence and happiness.



Jasmine found her calling when she became a program director with the Salvation Army's youth center. Here she was able to tap into her own experiences as a child and provide resources and guidance to many youth who, like her, would have been lost to the systems designed to categorize them solely on their financial status. With a passion to inspire and educate the youth to live out their full potential, she created programs that allowed them to indulge their aspirations. With her support their dreams are always possible. She went above and beyond to create a safe haven for not only the youth but for their families, too. Recently she transitioned to working with youth who are experiencing behavioral issues. She understands that they may require that extra dose of patience, persistence, and positive influence in their life. She strives to implement those aspects by redirecting their behaviors and offering outlets for redemptions. Through community service she helps youth rectify their actions, reinforce morals, and accept responsibility for their future. Jasmine saw an outcry and planted a pillar of support in a community for our youth.

As a woman of color and someone who decided to love outside of the religious requirements, Jasmine faced many days where she was met with discriminatory practices. In employment settings she was perceived as uneducated or completely dismissed because she was a woman of African descent. She eventually found her voice and the courage to remain confident in her stance to be heard and accepted as an equal contributor of intelligence. She found her voice and created herself a path of opportunity for continuous growth in her career field. That was only the beginning. Jasmine found the courage to live out loud in her truth, something she had battled with for years because of the fears of being shunned by society or even close friends or family. Courageously, she was willing to leave herself vulnerable and open to humility and accept the uncertainties of whether she'd still be accepted. Fortunately, she was met with overwhelming support and understanding, but she knew that there were many others who did not have that same support system. She made it her mission and found ways to educate others on the LGBTQIA community, putting herself on the front line to proudly advocate for tolerance, acceptance, and equality.



Home is not always what it seems from the outside looking in. Often, we must take pieces of experience to decorate our character. Jasmine Benson took a jab at life and fought through many obstacles that could have broken the average person. From surviving a flawed foster care system setup to protect her, she took that experience and became a pillar of the same community that failed her as a child. In her fight for acceptance and stability, she found the courage to advocate for others educating on tolerance and inclusion so that no one feels discriminated against or at a disadvantage in their life. It is this courageous nature that allows Jasmine to take her own trials and create trails for others to navigate with support and guidance. Courageously, she faces every day ready with an armored heart fit for a warrior. She is ready to battle life's many obstacles and open doors for others to feel accepted, supported, and protected. Jasmine is a woman of courage who selflessly thinks of others.

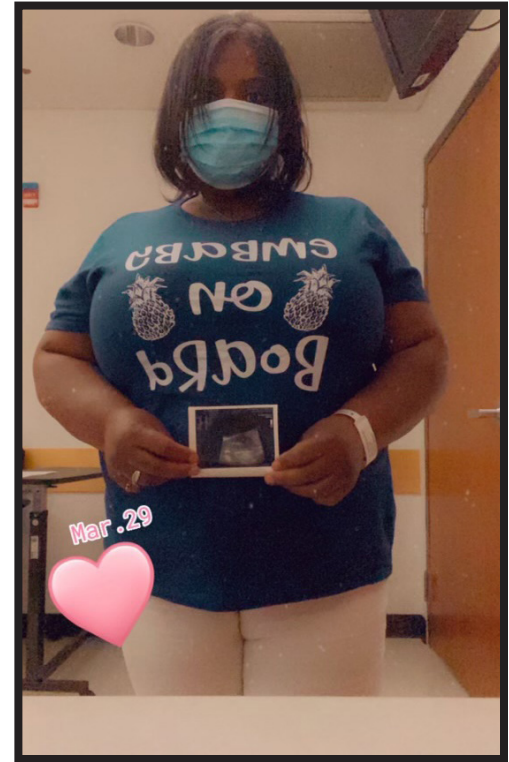


8th grade youth basketball picture (Jasmine top left, Dominique bottom left)

**PSALMS 46:5****BY TIARA SMITH**

"The English language lacks the words to mourn an absence. For the loss of a parent, grandparent, spouse, child or friend, we have all manner of words and phrases, some helpful, some not. Still, we are conditioned

to say something, even if it is only, 'I'm sorry for your loss.' But for an absence, for someone who was never there at all, we are wordless to capture that particular emptiness. For those who deeply want children and are denied them, those missing babies hover like silent ephemeral shadows over their lives. Who can describe the feel of a tiny hand that is never held?" (Laura Bush, Spoken from the Heart). In the United States, among heterosexual women aged 15 to 49 years with no prior births, about 1 in 5 (19%) are unable to get pregnant after one year of trying (infertility). Also, about 1 in 4 (26%) women in this group have difficulty getting pregnant or carrying a pregnancy to term. One of those courageous women happens to be my Aunt Latoyia. Finding out at a young age that she had problems with infertility, she decided to keep trying even through fertility doctors, and she had the motivation and courage to attempt again after so many failed attempts. In my eyes that is what a real courageous woman is.



Latoyia Mosley, born August 10th, 1984, decided at a young age that she wanted children. In her early twenties she finally gave it a try for her first child but unfortunately miscarried shortly after a confirmed pregnancy. She was unaware of the hard trials and tribulations her future would hold. She simply brushed it off until a few years later in about 2013 she had an ongoing menstrual period that lasted months! Her concerns grew and she finally decided to go see a specialist. During her visit with the specialist, he ran several tests and came to the conclusion that it was most likely that she could not have children and if she became pregnant would not be able to carry full term. During this time, she had become sheltered. She felt like less of a woman because she could not have children. Growing up in a family where all of her siblings had children and were continuing to have more left her devastated. Regardless of what she was told and how she felt, she kept trying naturally.

With no luck in her natural journey, she was saddened but she kept on going. Deciding to go to a fertility doctor was a breakthrough for her. Almost a decade later she had taken the step to meet with a fertility doctor. During her visit with this specific doctor, they ran tests and discussed medications and what the necessary steps were to make her dream a reality. My auntie told me the doctor looked her right in the eyes and said, "You are going to have a baby." These words filled my aunt's mind with hope and excitement for the future to come. As the process began my aunt was overwhelmed. She started her IUI and IVF treatments during the pandemic, which meant she was secluded from her friends and most of her family. She had no one to share all her concerns or emotions with during this process. She had to take on different forms of medication to get the best results with a very strict schedule. Oral, vaginal, and injections were all taken at a certain time every day for a long period of time. Missing one dose could cause her treatment to have to start all over. Having a full-time job made things more difficult, and

she had to stop most of her work activities just to stay on track with this process. Although she wasn't doing it alone, she felt like she was due to her and her partner having totally different work schedules. In her own words it was an 80/20 split and she took on the bigger chunk. She had finally gotten to a point where her doctor felt like it was okay to proceed with her IUI treatments; during an IUI treatment the sperm of the male donor is placed directly into the uterus. Unfortunately, after two attempts there was no luck, but she did not let this defeat her. She moved on to her IVF treatments. The fertility doctor removed and collected six eggs from my aunt. Four of them were fertilized, but only two of the four were placed back inside of her. One lucky egg made its way and stayed there, filling her with excitement. She had become pregnant! That excitement was short-lived; she eventually suffered a miscarriage. Coming to a point where any other woman would have given up, she didn't.

Currently she has not been doing treatments due to other health concerns, but she is determined to get back up on her high horse and try again in the near future. She is planning on going through IVF treatments again next year when she is feeling better mentally and makes a full recovery physically. The process is very hard, but my aunt wants children and she will not give up for her own reasons. Having a child to call your own is an amazing feeling. Throughout this process she has turned to God for prayers and guidance. All things are possible through Christ, and that is something she truly knows. The motivation she has is powered from her family, love of Christ, and the courage to keep moving forward.

Choosing a courageous woman to write about was easy to do. I have many women in my life who are the sole definition of courage and for that I'm proud. My aunt is not only courageous, but she also shows me every day what it's like to get knocked down again and again but to get back up and keep trying. Since a young age I have always looked up to her and valued her opinion. She is the purest form of love any person can know. Finding out she had infertility problems, going to several specialists, and continuing to try when the odds are against her truly showed me how powerful the courage of a woman is. I aspire to be as courageous as she is. Putting my pride aside and seeking help is something I truly have trouble with, but she does it proudly because she knows there can only be positive outcomes. I have the utmost faith in my aunt and her journey. Her courageousness reminds me of a verse from the bible, Psalms 46:5: God is within her, she shall not fail; God will help her at break of day.





COURAGE!

BY ROXANNA SOBREVILLA

When I think about courage, I automatically think superhero and cape. Courage comes in all forms. As I sit here writing this paper over and over, it takes big courage! I'm trying to figure out who and what to write about – and it has me ready to give up! The woman I am today will not let me! COURAGE! Let's talk about the woman and the reason why I have COURAGE!



Who can remember age 15? Many of us were blessed to have experienced a good childhood. At age 15 I was talking on the phone, getting ready for Homecoming. We weren't rich but we had what we needed and some. I didn't have the latest things. My parents would buy us shoes twice a year, during tax time and back to school. A family of seven, we had to compromise. My parents were born and raised in Culiacan, Sinaloa, a city in northwestern Mexico, a home with dirt, rocks, and gravel as the actual floor; an outhouse for a bathroom. My parents worked hard for a better life. My parents did a great job!

My mother, Lilia Gallegos, made sure we had everything in life that she didn't have growing up. Starting high school at 15 years old with the biggest guava fruit tree in her backyard, what more could anyone ask for? She could eat as many guavas up high in the tree as she wanted and watch her mother chop the head off the chickens, preparing dinner for eight. But Lilia, being the second to youngest, didn't have many clothes or any shoes. She walked barefoot most of the time, only owning one pair of zapatos for a whole year and going to school in them. Can you imagine one pair of zapatos for a whole year? My mother enjoyed her life. Yes, she wanted things, but she remained humble and managed to look good on a budget!

My mom went to school happy and proud to wear the only shoes she had. School had started and she got an invitation to a party, and she decided to go. When she arrived, a group of girls made fun of her shoes. "Look at her shoes; they have holes in them; she needs new shoes!" My mom didn't care – it was all her mother could afford. Despite the bullying from the girls, Lilia walked around unbothered and kept walking like they cost hundreds of dollars. It takes COURAGE overcoming BULLYING, POVERTY, STATUS! My mom loved her zapatos!

The next day her boyfriend, my dad, went to her house and asked, "Los vamos a America?!" My mom didn't think twice. That night my mom and dad ran away to America. They had to swim and cross the border to change their lives forever! The courage she built to leave her mom and family is something she never regrets. She was only 15 years old! I can't imagine running away from my mother, let alone to another country. My mother, having no one but herself and my father, not knowing English or how to be a woman yet, left. Sometimes we forget to be humble and thankful for everything we have. My mother had to no choice but to have courage as she left her family for her future family to have a better life! My mother wanted a better future. She wanted more out of life, more than one pair of shoes! Lilia Gallegos is the lady with courage!





MY MOTHER IS A WOMAN OF COURAGE

BY GUADALUPE VALERIO ARAGON

My mother's determination and fearlessness are what makes her a woman of courage. My mother's life starts in Mexico. She grew up there with many stories that made

her who she is now. My mother is a person who does everything for everyone and never asks for anything in exchange but is often under-appreciated. A better future for her kids, better education, better jobs, and overall better opportunities were the reasons that brought her here to this moment.

I remember the stories about her life in Mexico as a little girl when she was my age. She didn't have the opportunity to attend school when she was my age; her highest level of education was only elementary. Her dream was to go to school for cosmetology, but



she couldn't follow that dream because her parents wouldn't let her. Living in Mexico isn't easy, especially in little towns called pueblos, where poverty is seen a lot but humble and hardworking people live. My mom is from a small little town right next to Atlixco, Mexico. She was known for selling coal and was one of the best. She was 10 when she worked selling candy as a little girl, and having the big responsibility of owning a little business was really inspiring to me. I couldn't imagine myself at that age with such huge responsibilities; my only responsibility at that age was to go to school. For that reason, I like to say I take school very seriously. My mom didn't have the chance to get an education, but she made sure that my brother and I received one.

Giving without expecting anything in return is how I would describe my wonderful mom in one sentence; she is a very kind person. For as

long as I can remember, when she would send money to her parents, whether it was for their birthday or a holiday, she always made sure to send extra and would tell her mom to give that money to people who are in need back in Mexico. She knows how hard it is to earn money. When a family member ever needs help with anything, she is always determined to help the best she can. Even when she can't help, she finds assistance and goes out of her way to seek it.

Growing up, I understood that not all families look the same. Yes, I had a dad, but I also had a mom who is both mom and dad, and she was the only one I saw taking off of work just so she could watch me perform a dance in the talent show. Then, there was very little talk, small fights for the littlest things, and never wanting to go out in public with each other, and it didn't take a long time to notice in public that my parents weren't happy with each other; in fact, the only thing keeping them together was my brother and me. My mom tried her best to hide it from me, but as I grew older, she knew she couldn't

hide it from me. As humans, we try to hide our emotions from the people we love most without noticing that we are actually hurting them. I knew my mom was not happy, but she put on her happy face—well, she tried, especially for my brother, who was too little to understand a divorce. My mother has always been strong for her children, thinking she was going to hurt us for not being a family. She is the one who raised my brother and me, cared for us, and loves us unconditionally no matter what. This made us stronger as a family; even though my parents are not together anymore, they worked through their differences for their kids.

So, if you tell me to choose my woman of courage, I will choose my mother. She is a role model to me and my brother, always wanting the best for her kids, never giving up, and working so hard for her dreams. My mother made sure that my brother and I always received the best even if it was just herself. And all the experiences, whether good or bad, are what has shaped my mother into the strong beautiful woman she is today.





A FIVE-FOOT GIANT WITH A HEART OF GOLD

BY ANDREA WHITE

When you think of courage, you may think of a soldier, warrior, or a hero of some sort. When I think of courage, I think

of a five-foot little lady who knows a lot about everything. The saying “real world experience is your best teacher” is the most accurate quote when it comes to my mom, Halimah Muhammad. She’s endured so many trials and tribulations. She was one of the youngest of 16 children and had to care for and at times feed herself. Gaining the strength to free herself from an abusive relationship at a young age and raising 11 kids and adopting an extra along the way are the main examples of this woman’s courage, strength, and resilience, the three things I admire most about her. As she would say to my siblings and me as kids, “Sometimes you have to just decide that you’re going to be happy”; through all of the ups and downs, she was just that.



As a young child, you look to your mother for love, comfort, and your basic necessities, but this wasn’t always the case for my mom. My grandmother had 16 children and was an alcoholic who would often leave her children home alone for days, sometimes weeks at a time. My mother was one of the youngest few of her 16 siblings, so she would get left with her older siblings when she was a younger child. Her older siblings were left to clothe, feed, and get the younger children to school and most times figure out how the bills were going to get paid. When she was about 10 years old, my mom’s older siblings moved out of the house, leaving my mom, her older sister who was only a year older, and her younger twin sisters to figure things out on their own. My mother would tell us as kids about having to steal food from the grocery store just to have groceries in the house. She shared stories of how she didn’t have shoes for a whole summer, and her mother showed up at the end of the summer with a pair of shoes for each of them so that they could go to school. Learning life by yourself is tough, but it’s especially tough when you’re an elementary school child.



When she was a teenager, life didn't get any better because without an adult present to guide my mother, she ended up pregnant at the age of 14. The guy that she got pregnant by was 18 at the time and was very abusive, mentally and physically. My mom ended up dropping out of school because of this. She moved into her first apartment at the age of 16 with her child and boyfriend. By the time she was 17 she had three kids and would work odd jobs here and there to make ends meet. By the grace of God, she was able to get out of this relationship and move on to try to make a better life for herself and her kids.

After another failed relationship, she ended up moving from house to house, job to job making ends meet. She found herself homeless with nine kids, so she sent them to live with various aunts and cousins, due to her family being so big. When she was at her lowest, she ended up getting a call from a low-income housing program in Galesburg, Illinois, saying that she was approved for a five-bedroom two-bathroom townhouse. From there she was able to secure a high paying factory job and move her kids to a safer town. She was so secure that she was able to stop her nephew from going into foster care and legally adopt him. She would always say, "When you catch a blessing, try to be a blessing to someone else," and she lives by that.

I could go on and on about all of the things that my mother has overcome, but these are a few of the things that stand out to me when I think about her. Over the years I've seen her make a change in many people's lives and give them nothing but support and inspiration. Watching her struggle and overcome so many obstacles throughout my life is the reason why I push myself so hard to be successful. I want to give my kids a better life than she was able to give me. Her kind words, thoughtful gestures, and tough life lessons gave her the courage to overcome hard times and inspired me to overcome mine.





A PRIME EXAMPLE BY MYA WHITSON

When I think of a woman of courage, my mind instantly goes to my mom. If you've ever met my mom, Regenia, you'll know that she has a huge personality. She's silly, social, stubborn, and sincere, but most importantly she's determined.

Although she has come across many obstacles and hurdles in life, she's never backed down from a challenge. With more courage than anyone I know, she's always stood up to anything in her way. My mother has shown me how having courage and a little bit of faith can make miracles happen.



At the tender age of just 17, Regenia had everything going for her. She was a great student, a star of track and field, and even on the swim team at the all-girls Catholic school she attended in Chicago. But as life goes, she found out she would soon be embarking on a new journey that would be much harder than anything she had done before then. She was going to become a mother. Sadly, my grandmother wasn't able to help my mom once I was born, so my mom had to drop out of high school and find a job. With very little help, my mom had to give up life as she knew it and take on a role that no one is ever really prepared for, but she did it with her whole heart. As the years went on, my mom found herself with three biological children and two adopted, for a grand total of five—two sons and three daughters.

Raising five children in Chicago has so many worries that come along with it, from drugs to gangs and police violence, but my mother was determined that she would not lose her children to the streets. My mom knew the way to keep her kids out of the streets was to make sure that they had a love for family, education, and music. We spent a lot of time at the public library and at church. Being at the library opened our minds to places that a little kid from the South side of Chicago couldn't even dream of. She also instilled in us Christian values and morals to keep us on the right path. We spent a lot of time singing in the church choir and even made a singing group of our





own. While my mom knew she was on the right path to helping her children become successful people, she felt that she couldn't expect them to be good students and understand the importance of having an education if she herself did not have a degree. She made the decision then to go back to school. She had always wanted to be a teacher, and she would soon realize that dream. In her late twenties Regenia went back to get her high school diploma. She could have gotten a GED, it would have been easier, but Regenia wanted to show us that anything is possible. If she could get her high school diploma while caring for five children and working a job, we had no excuse not to excel. Our new family norm was sitting around the kitchen table quizzing each other for tests. My mom helped us with science and history while we went over her flashcards for Biology vocab and Algebra terms. These were some of the

best times because I got to see my mom working hard right alongside us; also, I'm pretty sure I was the only fourth grader in my class that knew how to use $A^2+B^2=C^2$. After all her hard work, my mother not only got her high school diploma but graduated salutatorian!

I will never forget how proud I felt watching my mom receive her honors and give her speech at her graduation. Regenia didn't stop there; she went on to college and made her dream of becoming a teacher a reality. Thanks to my mom's courage and determination to show her children just how important having an education is, I know that anything I want is possible. Regenia had the courage to expand her horizons so that the sky's the limit for her children and mine. I will forever be thankful for that. I love you, Mom.





THE MATRIARCH BY AMANDA WILLIS

Could you imagine at the age of 10 tending to the garden, plucking, chopping chickens, slopping hogs, cooking, hand washing laundry on a washboard and tons of other chores to

complete with the help of your 14 siblings that you are also in charge of in a four-bedroom home? It takes tremendous courage to be the support system to your family at such a young age, and it takes even more strength to maintain that support throughout your life. This relationship to the family perfectly describes my mom.

When she was young, my mom took on all the responsibilities of her parents while they were working. She would say, "As a young girl I ran my mama's house." At 17, she not only took care of her siblings, but she also started her own family when she became a mom herself. Despite being a teen mom, she finished her education and graduated high school in 1972. After finishing high school, she got married, moved to Joliet, Illinois, and had her second child.



Around 1973, she became a Jehovah's Witness, which conflicted with her husband's "worldly ways" and resulted in a strained marriage over the course of time. Despite having two more children, by 1985 she felt like she needed to leave her situation, and with no money, no job, no home, and no car, she packed up her daughters and moved to Madison, Wisconsin. After spending a few weeks staying with her in-laws, she found a home with help from local Jehovah Witnesses in the area. They went to the property management for the town homes formerly known as Summerset Circle, gave her a good recommendation, and an opportunity to raise her girls. Even though she received only \$600 a month from the government, she was still able to put food on the table. As a mother, she has always been a good role model. She didn't smoke, drink, or do drugs because she was too busy investing in her family.

Throughout her life, she has remained family oriented. When her dad died in 1985, she moved her mom and some of her siblings to Madison in order to take care of them. Later, when her second daughter experienced family troubles, she gained custody of her grandson and raised him for a few years. She even took care of her extended



family. At one point, she moved her 80-year-old uncle into her home and took care of him until he died. More recently, she has cared for her mother, and right before her mother passed away her husband started to experience life-threatening health problems as well.

As I have gotten older and have become a mother myself, I appreciate and understand my mom on a deeper and more mature level. I even find myself saying things to my daughters that my mother would say to me. I still don't know how she does it: she is literally a super mom! The steadfast love she has for her family is what makes her truly courageous. To this day she continues to support her family any and every way she can.





PERFECT STORM

BY SINETRA WILSON

Amber Wilson is a hardworking and caring mom to four crazy kids, but specifically she is my safe place. My mom always put us first no matter what. She worked so hard so she could give

us everything we needed and more. She drove 24 hours and 1,723 miles to Tucson, Arizona, so we could start fresh and live a better life. She got her CDL and still to this day always puts a smile on her face, even when life has thrown her the worst of the worst.

My mom sacrificed so much for her family. When I was a little girl, I always gave my mom a hard time. She always gave me space and never let how my brothers and I acted change the way she treated us.

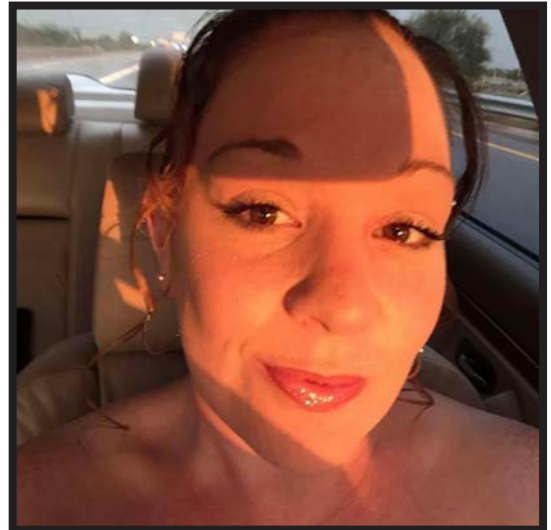
Growing up was a challenge when our dad would come around. He was everyone's nightmare. He hurt all of us emotionally, physically, and mentally. My mom got it the worst. She deserved the world but got nothing but pain. She loved so big but did not know when to leave. The abuse got worse and years went by, and she finally had the courage to leave. She was a different person, and you could slowly see the worry leave her beautiful, tired brown eyes.

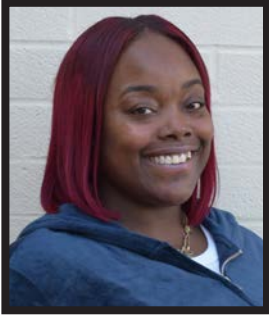
When we moved to Arizona in 2015, she was so happy. She felt she had won the lottery and she did



because all her kids were happy in a big new home in a gated community with white picket fences. She decided to go back to school and follow her dreams to get her CDL. We were so proud of her as she worked so hard every day going to class. She worked crazy hours and would even leave for weeks at a time. Soon she started to get sad about how long she would be away from us and how much she missed my little brother at home. Despite feeling depressed, she continued to make money for us, and I will always be so grateful.

Fast forward back to today, 2022. My mom is now in a women's correctional facility facing 25 years. When I get to talk to her, which is not often, she always makes sure my sister and I are okay and the babies are healthy and growing. I miss my mom and I know she misses me. Even though she is locked away and can't watch my son Malakai and nephew Royal grow, give us hugs every day, and drive us crazy, she found a way to make the best of her time and situation and is going back to school through a community college program in prison in January! My mom will always be so brave and never gives up.





A LOVING MOM

BY ZYKIA WILSON

Cherita Martin, my mother, has a French name meaning “dear or darling cherry,” destiny, and heart’s desire, with a very good personality as a natural born leader. I chose my mother as my woman of courage because she is my inspiration. She is my person, from struggles to her success. My mother is my everything, and this story is about her.

I have seen my mom face so many ups and downs, from being a single mom of two to battling with drugs and overcoming them. Although my mom didn’t complete high school, she got her GED. No matter what, she made sure my brother and I had everything we needed. Seeing my mom struggle was not easy, but she made it work. She’s a very strong black



woman, in my eyes. That’s what I used to always say, and I still do.

No matter what the situation is, you will never know what she’s going through because she always keeps a smile on her face. That’s what everyone likes about her. She’s always helping someone out all the time, and it’s her time that we help her out, which I do all the time. Watching my brother while my mom was at work to make ends meet, I couldn’t go out and have fun a lot because I had to help out my mom. I wanted to help her because I hated to see my mom cry when things didn’t work out for her. But she still managed to smile and keep it together for my brother and me. I knew what was going on, but I just pretended not to. My mom was both mom and dad, and she never gave up on us.



Losing my grandmother was a very hard time for her. She was in a very dark place because my grandmother was the glue to the family who kept it all together for all of us. My mom needed her. Seeing her go through this was the toughest, but I was by her side through all of it. Moving to Madison, WI, in 2010 was the best decision she ever made for us. It was a chance for a better life for us. We had to get adjusted to this new environment. It took a few months, and then we had a house and car and she had a great job as well. It was all working out for her. Everything was going well until we got this devastating news about her health.

Of all the struggles my mom faced, one of the biggest was this battling of lupus. This disease beats down at your body with aches and pains all over, pins and needles stabbing at your body, and skin changing. She has good days and bad days; summers are the worst. She's always in pain, but she's very strong and still manages to be a grandmother, a mother, and a wife, no matter what. I love her so much for that. She has a heart of gold, and she is my courage

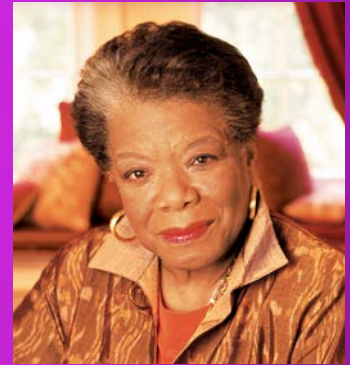


FAMOUS WOMEN WITH THE COURAGE TO WRITE



"There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others. My courage always rises at every attempt to intimidate me." — Jane Austen

"Courage is the most important of all the virtues because without courage you can't practice any other virtue consistently. . . . I believe that the most important single thing, beyond discipline and creativity, is daring to dare."
—Maya Angelou



"It takes a lot of courage to show your dreams to someone else."
—Erma Bombeck



"I took my Power in my Hand
And went against the World."
—Emily Dickinson



"I remembered that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had the courage to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils." — Charlotte Brontë



"You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, 'I have lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along. ' You must do the thing you think you cannot do."
—Eleanor Roosevelt



"I told myself, Malala, you have already faced death. This is your second life. Don't be afraid—if you are afraid, you can't move forward." —Malala Yousafzai, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*

"I know what I want, I have a goal, an opinion, I have a religion and love. Let me be myself and then I am satisfied. I know that I'm a woman, a woman with inward strength and plenty of courage."
—Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl*



"You get in life what you have the courage to ask for." —Oprah Winfrey



"I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It's when you know you're licked before you begin, but you begin anyway and see it through no matter what." —Harper Lee



"Above all, be the heroine of your life, not the victim."
—Nora Ephron



"When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid." —Audre Lorde



"Risk anything! Care no more for the opinion of others . . . Do the hardest thing on earth for you. Act for yourself. Face the truth."
—Katherine Mansfield