

MAY 2023

ONWARD ODYSSEY

ORACLE

CREATIVE WRITING



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Dear Readers,

Welcome! This Oracle is a publication of work by students in the 2023 Introduction to Creative Writing course.

Some students came to this course as writers. Some were apprehensive about what it meant to write creatively. But all came together, dedicated themselves to the craft of writing, and cheered one another on throughout the semester. This publication includes work by most but not all students, and it is a labor of love.

On the following pages, you will find poetry, personal essays, flash writing, and additional works students crafted that address topics such as love, death, self-identity, family, betrayal, finding a place in the world, hope, and resilience.

The writing in this Oracle represents an unbelievable amount of dedication and perseverance. In addition to all the outside obligations and challenges students faced this semester – from switching jobs to finding housing, from medical issues to personal loss – the students in English 207 kept coming back each week, putting their unique thoughts and feelings to paper, and encouraging their peers to do the same. Most of these pieces are not first drafts. Students came early to class and stayed late to work on them. They revised their writing on work breaks, on the bus, and late at night when their children slept. They worked tirelessly to hone what they wanted to say, finding just the right word or phrase that would take an idea and give it a voice. Their voice.

Thus, each piece in this Oracle reflects the particular intention of each writer. Those commas, capitalized words, ellipses, emojis, periods (or lack thereof) are meant to be a guide to help you hear – no, listen – to each piece in the way it was meant to be in the world...the way each writer intended it to be.

One thing I often tell students is that someone taking the time to read and reflect on your writing is a gift – of time, of attention, of thought. But so, too, is the opportunity to hold someone else's writing in your hands. Those words are a piece of them. An offering. An opportunity to step into the life of another and see the world – their world – in a new way.

We hope you enjoy this gift.

Sincerely,

Erin Celello and the students of English 207: Introduction to Creative Writing, 202

POEMS AFTER LUCILLE CLIFTON

We read Lucille Clifton's poem "The 38th Year," celebrating the author's bond with her mother, her own aging body, and her heritage. In response, students wrote their own poems, either as an ode to their current age or a formative age from their past.

Here is Clifton's poem, followed by Odyssey students' poems inspired by it.

THE THIRTY EIGHTH YEAR BY LUCILLE CLIFTON

the thirty eighth year
of my life,
plain as bread
round as a cake
an ordinary woman
an ordinary woman

i had expected to be
smaller than this,
more beautiful,
wiser in Afrikan ways,
more confident,
i had expected
more than this.

i will be forty soon
my mother once was forty

my mother died at forty four,
a woman of sad countenance
leaving behind a girl
awkward as a stork.
my mother was thick,
her hair was a jungle and
she was very wise
and beautiful
and sad.

i have dreamed dreams
for you mama
more than once.
i have wrapped me
in your skin
and made you live again



more than once.
I have taken the bones you hardened
and built daughters
and they blossom and promise fruit
like Afrikan trees.
i am a woman now,
an ordinary woman.

in the thirty eighth
year of my life,
surrounded by life,
a perfect picture of
blackness blessed,
i had not expected this
loneliness.

if it is western,
if it is the final
Europe in my mind,
if in the middle of my life
I am turning the final turn
into the shining dark
let me come to it whole
and holy
not afraid
not lonely
out of my mother's life
into my own.
into my own.

i had expected more than this.
i had not expected to be
an ordinary woman

THE FORTY-SECOND YEAR
BY JESSICA JACOBS

The 42nd year
 Of my life.
 Scars on my body.
 Stretch marks and tattoos
 that tell a story of a very un-ordinary woman
 who is an ordinary woman at the young and old age
 of 42.

The unordinary woman...
 Wished I was more worldly,
 Untainted and
 Naïve.
 I wanted more than this...
 These reminders that are burnt into my skin.
 Forever.

My mother has the same
 beautifully tragic story.
 Her skin too, tattles on her.
 So do her eyes...those,
 big piercing Sicilian eyes.
 I have my mother's eyes.
 And her demeanor.
 Endurance...
 Perseverance...



Resilience...
 I had bigger dreams for the both of us...
 My mother and I.
 We were softer and easier to understand.
 Untainted,
 and naïve.

I am in the 42nd year of my life,
 and still the epitome of my mother.
 We were both unordinary women.
 Now just very ordinary.
 We still have the scars
 that tell the stories on our skin.
 And a few more tattoos.
 Yet, we are softened by love.
 But still...
 Hardened by our endurances.
 We are...
 understood by few.
 Never naïve... and still a lil tainted.

I had never expected this...
 This becoming of my mother.
 I had not expected that I could ever be an
 unordinary... ordinary woman.

IN MY 44TH YEAR
BY NATIVITY TOWNSEL

It's my 44th year; all is coming full circle.
 You are so brave.
 You are my hero.
 You raised us with ease.
 You made parenting look like a breeze.

I am a wonder woman.

It's my 44th year; I had never realized,
 Oh my gosh, you really do cry!
 I just want to cradle and rock you,
 Comfort and console you,
 and of course affirm you,
 Just like the way you used to do!

I am a wonder woman.

It's my 44th year; as I'm learning to be free.
 I'm realizing despite all I've done to be different
 You are the best part of me!

I am a wonder woman.

It's my 44th year; I'm just as full of wonder as I
 once was when I was younger.
 It's all coming full circle as my life ages
 I rotate through all the stages
 just to end up back at the beginning
 This time round I'm bringing wisdom, I show up
 courageous, I'm full of hope
 I share the mindset of winning

I am a wonder woman.

It's my 44th year; I'm still learning.
 I'm amazed at the desire for knowledge
 inside is still burning.
 Thank you, Momma, for all you've done!
 For this is part of life's miracles.
 Also, how we stay young!
 Never lose your wonder for;

I am a wonder woman!

SHARED SPACE
BY ERICKA BOOEY

Personal milestone of our lives,
 50 years of shared existence on this earth.
 He entered a little later,
 only four minutes of life without him

same eyes, same heart
 same lips, same soul
 same nose, same thought patterns
 but DIFFERENT eggs

Any newcomers are roommates
 he never leaves my heart or my side
 50-year traveling companion
 He must take the next 50 years' journey with me

It's a shared space,
 same as the shared space for 9 months,
 same as the shared birthdays and graduations,
 same as the shared joy and pain.

We draw energy,
 we draw strength,
 and we draw courage from each other.
 I'm thankful for the sharing of his space.



MY FIFTEENTH YEAR
BY KIMARI ROGERS

The joy that came to me, stepping
 foot outside of my mother's door
 on a weekend summer day

That first step entering into
 the light my whole body
 submerging under the sun

My 15-year-old visual perception
 of my neighborhood's wide streets-
 unlike how I vision the streets today-
 narrow and lifeless-
 made me feel like I had land to conquer
 of nothing but freedom and joy

The streets were not paved with gold
 but it seemed as though they were
 because I walked them, I explored them,
 and they belonged to me

Looking up at the colorful trees...I owned them,
 this was my sanctuary,
 as though a bride walking down the aisle
 surrounded by nothing but decorations
 up above and around
 flower petals falling
 from the decorations camouflaged
 as each leaf falling from each tree

There was no limit of what could possibly happen
 in the summer's day in the neighborhood because
 I wasn't free from harm but
 I was free to be courageous
 as a young teenager not afraid of anything

Childhood friends that I've known for years
 were right there in the neighborhood
 waiting to make memories of treasure

Having the enlightenment
 of ringing my friend's doorbell
 and having them come out to
 conquer the land and the niche we dwelled in
 and what we already owned
 made me feel like the fun would last forever



Other doorbells we were ringing
 would be in a simple game of Ding-Dong-Ditch
 followed up by countless hours of ball tag
 or tackle football or playing basketball
 at any court in the neighborhood

Roaming the neighborhood
 as a free spirited 15 year old
 it seemed as though I could never get lost,
 like I knew it
 geographically like the back of my hand
 Because this precious land belonged to me
 I knew my way after each step I took.

This was the 15th year—
 a year before it all ends
 and something I will never get back again in my life

TO BE 32**BY MICHELLE MACK**

It's crazy to think that I've been on earth for 32 years.
 I've lived a life of what I thought was utter fulfillment,
 Lacking love for my innermost parts.
 My identity, defined from the things that brought me temporary gratification,
 Sex, money, and fame were my aspirations.
 I acclaimed my ego and fell gradually back to the surface.
 Then a light came and shone through the dark tunnel, I walked towards it holding the wall.
 The darkness began to fade as I climbed out.

It's crazy to think that I've been on the earth for 32 years.
 I see my shadow as I glance past the mirror.
 Sometimes, it reminds me of what I fear the most, going backwards.
 My hopes, my dreams of what's ahead.
 Will my son see the fruit that has been spread?
 Courage, strength, prayers, and connections are what got me here.
 It's crazy to think that I've been on the earth for 32 years.

Blood, sweat, tears.
 Many cheers to those years and the lessons that it taught me.
 What a blessing.
 Sometimes I lose balance as I surf the waves,
 Distractions of the world, some would call it a phase.
 I know that deep down I'm designed with purpose.
 If I quiet the noise and listen, I can hear where the whisper of God's voice takes me.
 This life is temporary and shall not cease after me,
 Allowing change to happen, I won't let myself be the roadblock.

**EYE'M GOING ON 38**
BY LATREASE HIBBLER

At 38 years of age, I am the embodiment of strength and resilience in the unpredictable and ever-changing landscape of life. Just like the watchful eye of a tiger in the jungle, I am always alert and ready to tackle whatever challenges come my way.

As I look back on my younger self, I realize that my expectations have evolved over time. I no longer see myself as a static and rigid individual, but instead as a fluid and adaptable being, like a honey bee that reflects the brilliant colors of the sweet clover it encounters. My eyes act as a camouflage, changing hues to blend in with my surroundings and reflect the beauty that surrounds me.

At my core, I am a tree firmly rooted in one place, steadfast and unyielding. However, I am not meant to remain still and stagnant, but rather to grow and flourish like a plant reaching towards the sun. I am a woman who is constantly striving for growth and success, embracing the journey and savoring each and every moment.

MY 32ND YEAR
BY TAI'KIAH PHILLIPS

The thirty-second year
 bright as the sun
 happy as a kid on Christmas morning

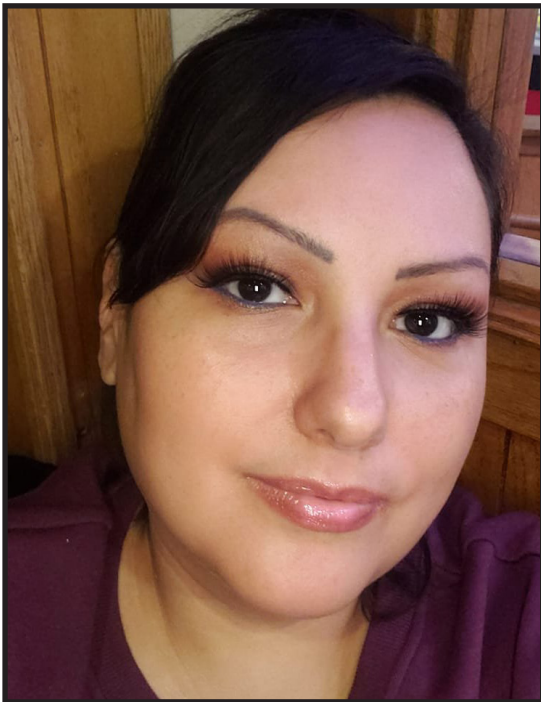
A complete woman.

Expected to have a degree by now.
 Be married.
 Have life figured out.

All of my friends have it all together.
 College degrees. Husbands. Families
 My mother never had a college degree.
 She was married once, but it didn't last.
 Perceptions of school have changed.
 Impressions of marriage have changed.

I have not wanted to give up on my own life.
 Dreams of having what others have. Deserving of it all.

Being a complete woman.



MY TWENTY-SECOND YEAR
BY MARIA GARCIA

My twenty-second year of my life was the best year of my life.

Young, wild, free, fun & full of hopes & dreams

Innocently naive for what life's ups & downs would be.

It was just me & only me. Not a worry in the world for what
 the future would bring.

I was just living recklessly & doing whatever came to me.

Living spontaneously without fear or cares all the way up to
 age twenty-three.

Parties, clubs, dances & raves. Traveling & passing through
 different neighborhoods & states.

Visiting different family & friends just long enough to say
 "hey" & be on my way.

Restaurants, bonfires, carnivals, festivals, waterparks, lakes, beaches, pools & stores. Exploring, shopping
 & spending galore. Making money & not worrying about needing more.

On the rollercoaster of fun until sundown & even until sunrise sometimes & all over again.
 The fun & excitement never seemed to end...

The end of my twenty-second year was near & who knew that I'd get pregnant in my twenty-third year...

**THE FORTY-SIX YEARS OF MY LIFE
BY BRANDI WHITLOCK**

the forty-six years of my life,
shy as the moon behind the sun
thick as potato soup

A caring woman

I knew I was caring all my life. I wanted to be more
outspoken say what's on my mind
instead I was shy, quiet, and never wanted to hurt
anyone's feelings

I love too much and too hard

I wanted to make everyone happy

But what about my happiness? When I was younger

I remember always worrying and wanted everything to be perfect

I wanted to be the one with the loud mouth having debates

and wasn't too shy to get up and talk in front of everyone

Instead I'm too shy to stand in front of people and speak

In my twenties I had two kids that changed my life forever. They taught me responsibilities and love

But love couldn't stop my depression

Somehow I made it through

In my thirties I was still lost and overwhelmed about life

I was trying to figure me out along the way

Deaths snapped me out of it but made me numb, distant, and stuck, life kept moving

I realize all the trauma I been through, I learned to love myself to be proud of what I accomplish in my life

My forties have been some of the best years of my life

Focused on me loving me and living the best life I can live



**38TH YEAR RENDITION
BY MAI NENG THAO**

On my eleven thousand eight hundred and fifty fifth sunrise,
I woke from the strangeness of a dream.

Peculiar as can be, I puked blood and held traffic tickets in this faraway
realm.

Perhaps an indication of the loss of vitality and the need to slow down.

How odd that after so many moon phases, I found myself unsure of
who I am more than ever.

That I don't know who I sleep with at night.

Are my ancestors upset?

They must have sent the clouds of this unusual dream to wake me.
To shake me from a self-invented unfulfilling haze.

I didn't exist within them all those mothers ago just for me to not
make use of their blessings.

That the waste of their sacrifices will come with consequences.



TO ME
BY CRYSTAL JOHNSON

The twenty-eight year old me
Had a heart of gold.
The most kind, loving, and genuine young lady she could be.

TO ME
She wore her heart on her sleeve.
Would give anyone her last that was in need.
He was the regular tall dark and fine-like-wine type.
Caught my eye. He had to be mine. He was so cute to me.

TO ME
He had my attention. I thought I had his.
I flirted, he flirted back. Love connection, huh.
Did he have me on a wild goose chase or did I have him on one?
The chemistry was like building castles in the sky. What was this?
I was lost in the stars, or better yet, skating on thin ice.

TO ME
Our interest peaked, time flowed, days changed, and poof
He was gone.
No more Cinderella and Prince Charming.

MY 39TH YEAR
BY FEATHER LLOYD

Woman, Wombman, I am
Just a woman. Does that even make sense?
To use a “just” like that when we pay so much rent.
The use of a wombman’s body is not for the weak.
The things her body can bear
No other beings dare speak
Ill of her ability.

I am woman.

I cannot believe
In actuality that this is my
Wombman’s 39th year in physicality.

The wisdom in this womb
The images in these eyes
The memories of the heart
The strength of her thighs
The curve of her waist
The smile on her face



The wrinkles in her forehead from
Nurturing that can’t be erased.
Her life-giving lotus of bliss.
Only wombman does this. The world
Longs for her caress and kiss.
Existence only comes
From a mother.
There is no other.

**THE THIRTY-EIGHTH YEAR
BY VICTOR ROJAS-MENA**

The thirty eighth year of my life ,
Grateful as should be
Beautiful as can be,

I never imagined to be here,
Different path as my dad
But same idea as his,
He left his home to pursue his dream
He left his home to go to school,

I left my country a little scared,
Scared to know then that day
Was the last hug from him,
That day it was the last day I would see him,

Sometimes I still hear him
Sometimes I still see him
When I see and hear myself

He left too soon
I hope I do have more time
With my sons than he had with me,

I will always be proud of him
And wanting my sons
To have a proud dad,
As me with my dad,

I do remember him,
A strong man,
An intelligent man,
very kind,
As a kid when I was with him
I felt invincible because everybody respected him,

The thirty-eighth year of my life,
living my life far from
the land where I was born,
Heartbroken, not knowing
if I want to unpack
But knowing that I can't go back.



**MY 48TH YEAR
BY SONIA SPENCER**

My 48th year is already a
Whirlwind.
A new job

Two kids graduating college and one
A freshman in college.

A car accident.

A car accident in my 48th year
Changed my course of action.

My 48th year I transitioned to a new job.
A job I don't like.

My 48th year – almost 48 in June
I'm struggling with anxiety and pain.
I fear driving. I fear
The elements.

My mom reminded me that on the
Year of my anticipated birth,
She was calm. She knew I
Was a fighter.

On my 48th year I think
Back to my birth and try to
Be strong and fight for my
Mental well-being.

THE THIRTY-EIGHTH YEAR
BY MARISOL GONZALEZ

The thirty-eighth year
Of my life,
Invisible as air
silent as a flower
an insignificant woman.

an insignificant woman.

i had expected to be
smaller than this
more intelligent
wiser in Mexican ways
smarter
i had expected more than this.

i will be forty soon.
my mother once was forty.

my mother went back to Mexico at forty-four
a woman full of fear and worries leaving
behind a girl awkward as a butterfly
my mother was robust
her face like an angel
she was very wise
and beautiful
and fearful.

i have dreamed dreams
for you mama
many of them
i have flown as a monarch butterfly
across the country, crossing that border
that keeps us apart
to hug and kiss you one more time.

i have taken the opportunities
with your sacrifices
and built children of immigrants
very strong and smart and resilient
dreamers that live their dreams.
they blossom and promise fruit like
Mexican trees.
i am a woman now.
an insignificant woman.

in the thirty-eighth
year of my life,
surrounded by fear
a perfect picture of brownness blessed,
i had not expected this feeling.

if it is north
if it is the end
Mexico in my heart
if in the middle of my life
i am turning the end turn into the
shining dark
let me come to it whole
and pray
not afraid
not worried
out of mother's life
into my own
into my own

i had expected more than this. i had not expected to be an insignificant woman.



WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF FROM THIS SEMESTER?



I am most proud of learning more about the difference between oral storytelling vs written storytelling. I was very fascinated by the feedback from my teacher and classmates because I see it as a gift that gives me space to grow.

As a writer, I am more knowledgeable about the different types of writing, and personally, I gained more knowledge about how to write personal essays effectively according to my topic and focus. Thank you, Professor Erin E. Celello, for giving me the tools I need to continue with my journey as a writer. I think your class helped me get the courage to keep trying to publish my poems and personal essays. I love your way of teaching. Thank you for being so kind always! **(Marisol Gonzalez)**



I'm most proud of my 42nd Year poem. **(Jessica Jacobs)**



The most proud thing that I am feeling that I was able to do this semester was bringing the skills of constructing my writing pieces correctly, revising my writing, and learning how to create different writings. I feel

I developed as a learner, a writer, and a person.

(Ericka Booe)

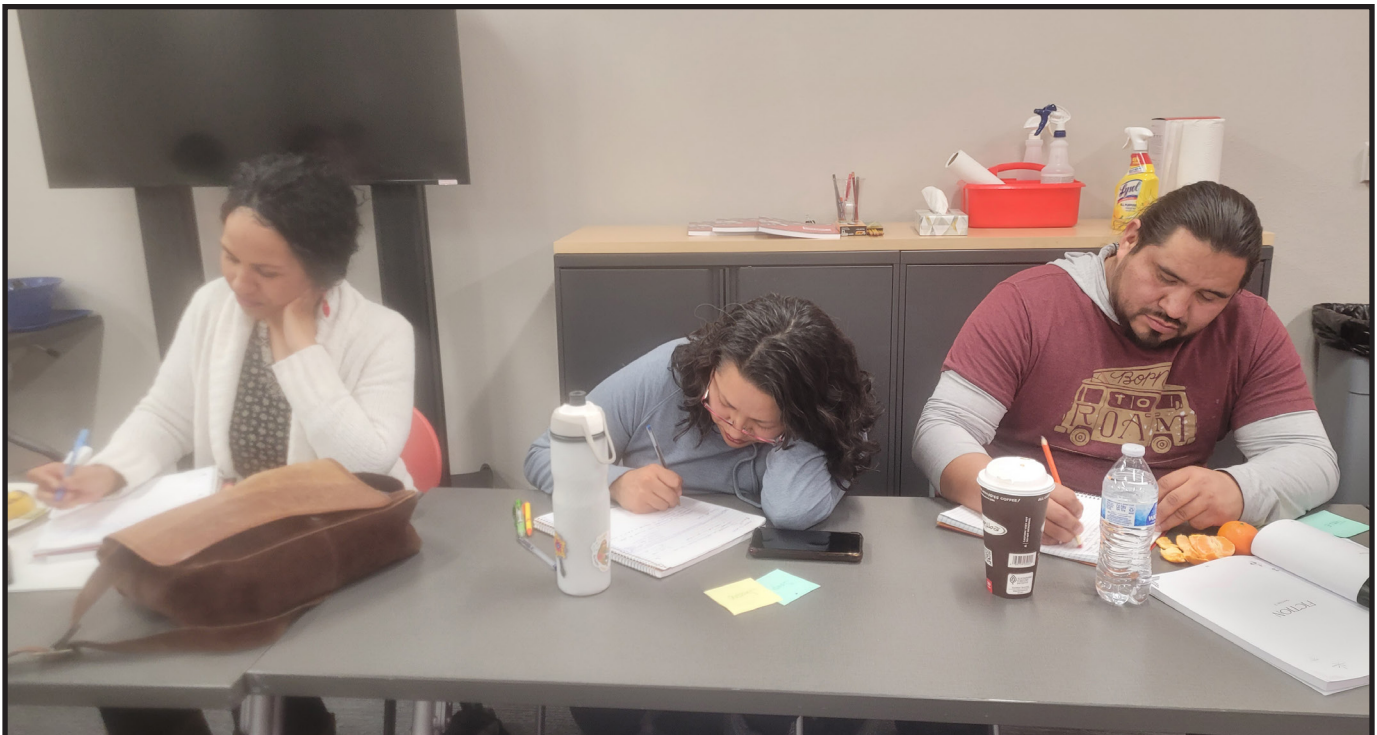


I'm proud of how I tried to come out of my rhythm. I learned I get stuck when my brain thinks something is supposed to sound the same way. **(Feather Lloyd)**



As a lover of spelling, I was able to dive into topics of my style and utilize my abstract imagination, and dig into an imagery-based approach. 'How abundant is a diamond that is a pebble, that is abundant!'

(LaTrease Hibbler)





I'm proud of the way my creativity has been stretched within myself and my writing. I have come out of my shell a bit more, and this class has pushed me to see different things. Writing is so revealing and healing. **(Michelle Mack)**



I am proud of the way I opened up in my writing and became more comfortable with doing that. **(Tai'Kiah Phillips)**



I'm proud to be learning new things. Rain, sleet, or snow, the learning didn't go. We came, we achieved many things. Erin and Odyssey showed up and showed out. **(Burnett Reed)**



What I'm proud of this semester is one, that I was chosen again, and two, opening up my mind to different forms of writing. **(Kimari Rogers)**



I like to come and hear different stories, how one thing can impact different people in different ways, all depending on the story or the theme. This class pushed me to write and think differently, more deeply. **(Victor Rojas)**



I pushed through. Writing is difficult for me. This class allowed me to be comfortable and vulnerable while here. Understanding that creative writing comes in so many different forms, you still find a way to connect your words to tell a story that deeply speaks to me and the reader. **(Sonia Spencer)**



The energy of the class was incredibly positive. I was able to incorporate real life experiences into each writing unit because of how safe I felt. **(Mai Neng Thao)**



I am most proud of opening up in my writing and being more vulnerable. **(Nativity Townsel)**

Students in Introduction to Creative Writing wrote on the themes of the body, ghosts and memory, and a sense of place. Here is a selection of the pieces that they are most proud of from this semester.

**BUSINESS FORUM SCHOLARSHIP PERSONAL STATEMENT
BY ERICKA BOOEY**

Coming from being a client to becoming a provider of human services has been my biggest motivator to further my education. In the past, I've needed so much help from organizations, agencies, and other people that I was also able to see how those programs and services could be improved.

Being a program coordinator at Operation Fresh Start is such a rewarding experience for me. My program gives assistance to young adults in completing high school, gaining their diploma, mentoring, and driver's education for driver's license attainment. This type of work means more than making money for myself. Inside and outside of work I've always been a helper to others. My work is easy for me because I have a passion for it and I've only wanted to craft the art of helping by furthering my education and implementing what I've learned in my work.

I volunteered as a tutor at Sherman Middle School. I was happy the school asked me to help, but it didn't become as important as it did to me until I saw the reading class I was tutoring. The reading

class was probably 95% black and 5% Hispanic students. It was important to me to help black and brown students because statistically, they struggle within the American educational system. I currently volunteer for Just Dane reentry simulations. We act out the situations people go through while reentering society and trying to get their lives back started outside of incarceration. We've performed these reentry simulations for colleges, churches, and government agencies. The idea behind the simulations is for people to see some of the challenges of reentering society and how these challenges can put a person back in the position of reoffending.

Through experience and accomplishing my goal of gaining a degree in social work, I plan to develop training. This training will equip other providers with the skills and knowledge to be able to meet their clients where they are in their life, gain trust, and provide the best services that they possibly can. I am also training in motivational interviewing. I plan to use this technique of interviewing to identify people's strengths and lead them to create change for themselves.

A challenge I face while working towards my goal of furthering my education is my age. I stay inspired through Odyssey, though. Another challenge I face in accomplishing my goals is money for education. I won the Judy Rose scholarship through the Business Forum last year. I was awarded \$3,500 to be used within two years. This scholarship is paying for some of the classes I need to take to enter the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Social Work. I have to be proactive in this journey of education that is not free by applying for scholarships, using financial aid, and loans. I am hoping through winning scholarships I won't become in debt through student loans.



THE HOSPITAL THROUGH MY EYES
BY KIMARI ROGERS

Your eyes can deceive you
 Your mind hovers up and down the
 creepy hallways of insanity
 What seems familiar isn't because your
 life is in someone else's hands
 Your intuition is alarming because you
 can't shake the feeling you're not
 supposed to be in this place
 As you look closer your eyes are put to
 the test

Do you believe what you see?
 As the nurses come in and out of your
 room with a creepy smile
 Do both the nurse and the doctor have
 your best interest at heart?
 The way you're perceiving things in
 your scared state of mind they all
 look like robots



What will you do to me if I don't comply?
 If you open your mouth they can take you out with a needle
 What you say can and will be used against you
 In the next corridor you can hear someone crying out for their life
 Are they crying just because or crying out for their human rights?

Of course, I can verbally state my needs but will my doctor consider them
 or determine what I need from his point of view?
 In contrast, neglect my needs because of his opinion
 I hate to say it but don't want to believe what I'm seeing
 and I don't think it's humanly possible for a human to perform misuse to this degree

This is isolation that I am picking up on, as I'm taking in the environment
 The smell of death, the site of washed out, colorless sheets, sterile and lifeless, unlike the outside world
 That same smile on the nurse's face as they touch your body with their cold, hard, firm, and fidgety hands

Should you dictate when I can call my family on the phone?
 I can ask the same question over and over again: "When will I be released?"
 The nurse is allowed to give the same response: "Let me talk to your doctor."
 Days of waiting, same question — same response
 I feel like I'm being held hostage, I feel like an experiment,
 they're keeping me here to charge my medical insurance
 Caring for someone's health should not be so inhumane
 and the place where it happens shouldn't be so unnaturally bewitched

FOREVER THAT I AM
BY JESSICA JACOBS

I am everything and everything is me
 Flowing through life freely
 Freeing
 Like water in its slow waves,
 Tranquil.
 Chill.
 It unfolds in front of me slow and
 Graceful
 Yet sometimes chaotic.
 Gracefully chaotic.
 Such a beautiful crazy thing.

So then I remember when I need to see myself
 There, waves breaking softly across my feet.
 I understand mysticism and the Tao and the
 Buddha and the Heavens.
 I understand suffering while I sit on the sand,
 Everything so vast in front of me.
 Even the warmth of the sand
 has a different meaning.
 The sky connects to the water,
 Water to the sand,
 Sand to me...grounding me completely.
 And then I see the sun in all its glory,
 Rays beating down upon everything
 This is where I gain my strength.
 The sun straightens me with its fire
 The water's flow calms my insecurities,
 The sand grounds me and makes me feel safe,
 And all of it is me.
 I understand this more because I feel lit.
 This thing that tells me that
 I am everything and everything is me.



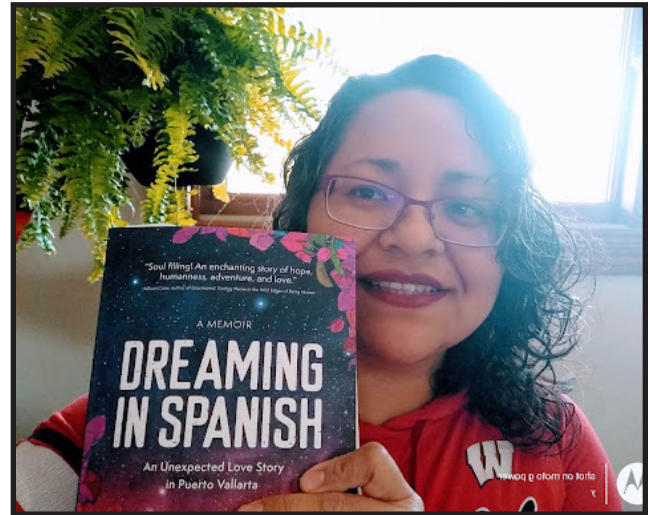
I
BY LATREASE HIBBLER

In the fullness of time,
 the temple of the soul lights the eye's shadow,
 sacred, like geometry.
 i had arms-they weren't
 mine.
 i used to squint to see.
 Is seeing believing or is believing
 seeing?
 Like a noseum, the eyes are small yet mighty,
 able to perceive the world's tiniest details.
 Just as a noseum's bite can leave
 a lasting mark,
 the eyes have power to shape our perception
 of reality.
 The eye nose this story so well...
 two strangers find each other,
 looking out together, but seeing separate.
 Cyclops of memories, haunting my mind.
 Magic wand, smoke, mirrors
 Eye believed we were stronger than this,
 more carotene than this.
 i'll be leaving this site soon, to tunnel with vision.
 Exiting old sight,
 tunneling towards vision.
 A teardrop on an ember.
 i have shape shifted this reality, both in sight and
 sound.
 Truth, but an abstract notion
 and reality, subjective commotion
 With truth, nothing is real
 the eyes are
 classified.

THE POWER OF STORYTELLING BY MARISOL GONZALEZ

In the Fall, Sara contacted me and asked me to read her manuscript (book review). I happily agreed. Life got busy for me, I got sick with COVID for the first time, and the deadline she gave me was fast approaching. I was full of internal, external, and work conflicts.

Shortly before my meeting with Sara, she contacted me and asked me, "How are you doing?" I honestly told her, "Beautiful, I'm going to need more time." I think she already knew and she gave me a much longer dateline than I needed.



I set myself a goal of 20 pages per day. In 15 days I would be able to finish her book.

Honestly, reaching my goal of 20 pages a day was not difficult at all. Once you start reading this story and get into the life of this beautiful woman, it is hard to put the book down and stop reading it. There is a lot of magic, love, and resilience in this book. I could tell you about many experiences throughout the book that had a long-lasting effect on me, but today I am going to talk about one in particular.

Because something wonderful happened when I got to page 70.

My daughter was going through a very difficult time in third grade because of the pandemic and online classes was a lost school year. In 4th grade, she had a substitute teacher for half a year and a first-time teacher without help for the rest of the school year. The teacher ended the day crying without knowing what to do. For 5th grade she would not have a teacher, she would start the year without a teacher. Like a good Tiger Mother, I moved heaven, sea, and earth so that my daughter would have a teacher. And one day before starting classes, I received a call from the superintendent assuring me that my daughter would have a teacher.

The nights before I got to page 70 of Sara's book, I couldn't sleep because I wanted to keep reading and my daughter couldn't sleep either. She would be crying because she didn't want to go to school the next day. In the mornings outside of school, she would hold my hand tie, hug my arm, and say "Please, Mom! Please, do not leave me here!" I didn't know what to do with her. I wiped her tears and told her, "You have to go in," with a lump in my throat. "Hijita (sweetie) focus on your strengths, don't feel like that, not all of us are good in everything! Your strengths, maybe it's not math, but you are a bilingual girl who is good at reading in 2 languages." I would make her let go of my arm and push her into the school building and go home crying, but I would make sure that my daughter would not notice.

And the problem was that my daughter was very behind in math and the teacher gave daily math tests. Later in the day the teacher gave back the test already graded so most of the students will ask each other, "What did you get? What did you get?" So when they asked my daughter, they would make comments, looks, and noises showing they knew that my daughter didn't have any good answers and that's why she didn't want to go to school.

At home when we tried to help her, she cried and yelled, "I'm stupid! I don't understand! I can't! it's impossible! I'm bad at math!" But something wonderful happened when I got to page 70. A beautiful

feeling ran through my body and I knew it was the answer to my prayers. God was speaking to me through Sara's book through Mrs. Deborah, Sara's mother.

I read and tears rolled down my cheeks.

The next day on the way to school, I told my daughter what I had read the night before. She listened carefully with her usual morning tears running down her cheeks, but this time I looked at her and didn't wipe her tears or wait for her to get inside the school so she wouldn't see me cry in front of her.

This time we hugged and cried together. I held her hand and told her to repeat after me, "I'm good at math, I'm smart, and I'm good at math." The same words that Mrs. Debora told Sara's friend to repeat in front of the mirror. That day was the last time my daughter cried to go to school.

That week she arrived with an exam without any good answer but with a message written in her handwriting in the corner of the paper that said: "I know I can, and I will"! "I know I can, and I will"! "I know I can and I will"!

I was very happy to see that Mrs. Débora's magic and love had spread to my daughter. And I felt very proud of her for changing the way she sees and talks about herself. My daughter and I gained a life lesson and a tool that would serve us well for the rest of our lives. A few weeks later, she moved to another classroom with a bilingual teacher who speaks Spanish and it's more understanding since my daughter was diagnosed with dyscalculia: she cannot see the numbers in the correct order and she sees them backward.

But today she is at her grade level, she doesn't cry to go to school and even helps her classmates with math problems. I remember that when this happened I sent a message to Sara saying, "Beautiful!! With your book, you have made me fall in love with your mommy!! Thanks for sharing her with the readers." And I indeed feel a lot of love and respect for Sara's mother, Mrs. Debora, for being so knowledgeable, for her love for people, for fighting for her marriage despite everything, and for being an exemplary mother. And also because today she still does not give up and in the midst of her illness she still has the gift of touching people's souls with a look, or a smile.



Mrs. Debora was diagnosed with Alzheimer's several years ago and she is in hospice now. I believe this is the power of storytelling. Thanks to reading a story I was able to get the help I needed for my daughter and me.

My book review appears on the first page of Sara's books.

Dreaming in Spanish

Is the bitter, sweet, and sour of the complexity of life. A true story that is written with love, honesty, and grace. The story of a woman who embarks on an adventure to heal her soul and save her life. As she faces big challenges, uncertainty, romance, and love, but more than anything a learning experience. With ugly truths but in the end, always truths! Because the writer's honesty is the best tool to create awareness of the problems we face as a society.

PICNIC POINT
BY MARISOL GONZALEZ

I see the gravel path (camino de tierra) surrounded by trees and water, a sign of pure life. At my left an infinite forest full of trees without leaves, it seems like they are dead but they're not, they are just waiting as always waiting patiently for the earth to get closer to the sun in the right angle to get the golden light that will turn everything alive. Tall trees that have lived many years before me. These trees have witnessed the tragedy and the pain this sacred land went through. The land born free as well as the trees until someone decides to put a price on it.

On my right, there is water, an extraordinary source of life, a lake named Mendota but before its name was "Wonkshekhomikla" (Where the Man Lies) this name is in the native language of the people that were born here.



As I walked along the path I heard the birds singing or chatting or screaming loudly giving thanks for the signs of spring after a long winter in Wisconsin.

As I keep walking and try hard to not be distracted by people passing by, running, couples walking holding hands and classmates' conversation, I see the empty nests in the branches and I wonder. When will I be back to my nest? My home country Mexico because every time I am in nature I go back in my mind to Veracruz, a place like this with caminos de tierra, y agua de manantial (spring water) sweet and fresh. With steamy hot days, standing under a tree is the best AC you can get, especially if it is a mango tree. With their sweet aroma of the exotic fruit that rip perfectly and delight all who pass by. Yes, believe it or not, when I was young I used to eat many fruits for free, like mangos, guavas, oranges, nanches, tamarindos, bananos, guanabanas, and many more.

Back in Wisconsin these trees don't have any fruit. They are naked trees without any leaves but with something special in them. Some of them have branches that seem to be reaching other trees. Others are so close to each other that it seems like they are hugging. These trees soon will be filled with green leaves that will turn into yellow, orange, and red, and it's when I will be delighted to be here in Wisconsin.

I have walked a good distance since the entrance and I see the metal pulls and chains that surrender an area of a little mountain underneath the rest of the people that were exterminated indigenous people. Their spirits are still here making this place enjoyable because at the end of the path you will find the majestic lake with sounds of waves and a gentle breeze that make you feel at peace.

THE SHIRT

BY BURNETT REED

Down deep in the back of my closet, tucked away in a trash bag to keep the dirt away. Hanging up on an old rigged hanger was the shirt with a burnt hole in it, to keep the value tucked away.

This material has the same softness as the day it was made. I'm going to assume it was from the early 90's. Why is this piece so significant? Why should I continue to hold on to this? Because it's the thought of not having: Not having a father who could provide something more than a shirt for his cubs. Not having anything to remember you by but the sad memory of you getting killed. The thought of not being able to pick up the phone and call home and say, Pops, I love you.

But this story is not to outline what I didn't have, it's to outline how far I've come in 30 years, and this shirt is the exact same age as me. How does this hold tight intention in my life? I'm a father, I'm a provider, I'm Big DADDY!

I was introduced to this shirt one day while digging in my Granny's closet. I wasn't supposed to be there digging but I dug anyway. I stumbled upon hangers – some yellow, some white – some clothes packed on one stacked together tight. Why Granny got all this stuff? I wondered, but then I saw one hanger that was isolated and wrapped in a trash bag.

I hurried up and my mind started to wonder, so I did what any kid would do. I busted the bag open as if it was a Christmas gift. I saw the burnt hole as if a stanking ass cigarette was put out on it.



I was thrown off immediately. I continued to unwrap this object in frustration because I was intrigued to see the unknown. Obviously, I knew my dad was gone, but I didn't really know the back story. I had never even seen his face or had any recollection of him. So, I started to see this picture and it looked nothing like me but I assumed it was a random family member so I didn't think much of it.

I must have spoken to my Granny weeks or months later. I asked her what that shirt was all tied up in the closet, and she assured me I should know and someday it would be mine. She proceeded to educate me on the whos, whats, wheres about the shirt. It came out that it was my father's and he was a man of many words. Since I've never physically seen or touched or remember him, I would assume most of his story is based on faded memories.

Since that day, I can't let go of the shirt. I look at it every day to show myself I'm the provider, the father figure, and a role model. I'm a public servant and a child of God and I should shed light on the crazy happenings and how we stumble upon history in the weirdest ways.

This shirt was a homegoing shirt made in 1992 for the late, great Burnett D. Reed Sr. This is the only thing of my father's that I personally owned since he left this earth. I look forward to being able to explain the little details with my daughter on why I still own this shirt.

OUR OWN LANGUAGE **BY VICTOR ROJAS**

People think immigrants come to steal their jobs, but we do not. We are building this country in the same way as citizens from this country. Immigrant people want to grow and have a successful business, to provide for their families like anyone else. The immigrants come with more to give to this country than take away.

We own a construction company — mostly residential. We can help remodel any room of the house or build a new house. We always work with respectful people, and the stores where we buy the materials know that we Latinos are the major force in the business and we spend a lot of money in their businesses. I hear that some people were discriminated against but I have never had that experience. Maybe because I never paid attention, and also, I do not care.



But one time, many years ago, on the first day of the job we were starting, my crew and I were speaking Spanish between us as we prepped. The client told me that she does not want to listen to Spanish in her house. I was very surprised because she was from the Middle East, and I know she spoke another language with her son. I respectfully told her that I was sorry, but Spanish was our primary language and if she had a problem with that, it's better that we do not keep working together.

We took our tools and we left. After, my team told me that they did not want to leave. They were worried about the lost day of work, but I told them not to worry — that I would pay them for that day, but it was important to leave because I will never stand for those kinds of customers — those who like our prices but do not like our people.

WATER**BY NATIVITY TOWNSEL**

I think back to the times all I wanted was to fit in
 An inner-city mixed kid, oh where do I begin
 I'm not black, or peach, man I sure did love the beach

I'm too black for the white kids,
 according to the black kids I'm not black at all,
 huh I wonder, what was it that I did?
 I talk too black for the white kids
 and too proper for the black kids.
 I'm too dark for the light skins,
 too light for the brown skins,
 oh yeah, that's right, they say I'm Mexican!
 Ugh not true! I can't even speak Spanish,
 Now what do I do?
 So here I am invisible, no color, no sound.
 I just want to fit in and I'm feeling so bound.



In times like these
 I think of water flowing with ease
 From no smells to many, colors ranging from clear to dark to the prettiest of blues
 From no taste to any taste caused by the things or other life forms found inside of it too
 From puddles & streams
 to lakes & oceans as far as the eyes can see
 Sometimes it's shallow and in that same space it can be deep
 super peaceful, calming, and soothing
 to violent, ravishing, and downright abusing
 Giving life, supporting it, and also causing death,
 taking on different forms water does its own thing, all in the same breath It's not always
 bound by rules or logic, laws of science or physics
 It's mysterious and weird without rhythm or reason, never a statistic
 It's not tied up, it's able to pull itself from the ground as a vapor to the sky to fall as rain,
 from soft to hard
 not intending to cause pain
 It reminds me a lot of what I've been through,
 This inner-city mixed whose favorite color is also blue. It took me a long time to realize if
 I wanted to be free
 I needed to adopt the principles of water and just simply be

As life comes to change water's color, shape, or form;
 it still remains in its mysterious and curious norm
 I no longer have to fit in; it's okay to be me.
 As the things I birth, nourish, and face develop me,
 I get to choose the lessons and nuggets I want to keep.
 I am the norm, this quiet storm, finally free!

CASSETTE TAPE BY BRANDI WHITLOCK

I saw an 8 track tape before, my aunt had one in her car. It was so big, but when the smaller size came out it was just perfect for me. I remember back in the day in the 80s my brother was a music lover. His room was in the basement and he would play music all the time. His music was loud and it was my escape from life. He would play R&B songs and Hip-Hop songs. The music took my mind to another world and a safe place. Sometimes I would act like I was giving a concert. Eventually, he started to D.J. Every song I knew when I was younger came from the basement while I was upstairs washing dishes. My brother had lots of shiny vinyl records.



He was always up on the latest technology, so when I got my first cassette tape I was so excited! I can listen to music in my own ears privately. What really grabbed my attention was that you couldn't scratch the cassette tape like records. You couldn't skip over songs so quickly like records and the cassette tapes had a ribbon inside that played the music. If the ribbon got out or tangled, it could be ruined for good.

I had my own cassette player and I would record my voice, music off the radio, and I could erase everything and tape over again. One time I had an old tape and the ribbon got messed up when it came out of the player. I tried to pull out all the tape and fix it. I ran my fingers across the tape and tried to untwist it. I thought I had smeared all the words together. I thought it was ruined!

My life reminds me of the cassette tape that got ruined and the ribbon came out all tangled together like a ball of snakes where everyone saw how unperfect my perfect life was. I did what I would usually do. I rolled the tape back in the cassette. It was bumpy, wrinkled, just like my life, but it got put back together like everything was okay.

Thinking about this childhood moment reminds me when I was in my mid to late 30s that I was diagnosed with ADHD at the time I found out my life, marriage was spinning out of control. I remembered when I got my test results back I wasn't shocked, but it was just another thing added to my life. The cool thing about a cassette tape is that it can be fixed properly, but having ADHD can't be fixed.



Having adult ADHD made my life make sense. I look back at my life and how quirky, forgetful, hyper focused, and how I would procrastinate about things. How I would get bored with friendships and relationships, jumping from one thing to the next not finishing projects. My brain will always have a million things going on at once. It will always be a ball of unraveled cassette tape. You don't know where the beginning starts or where it ends. It can be very frustrating, fun, and people think you're just lazy. ADHD is a part of me, it will never be smooth sailing because those waves will eventually start to ripple.