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ODYSSEY SENIOR ORACLE



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SENTENCES ABOUT US

As a way to introduce themselves to the class, Odyssey Senior students and staff were asked to write three sentences about themselves.



My mother took my sister and me to a lot of fun events in Madison, i.e., carnivals, parades, and rodeos.

We went to church on Sundays and attended other church events, i.e., ice cream socials, picnics, and cake walks.

My son was drafted into the Denver Broncos. I was overwhelmed and excited, and it was hard to believe. He was with the NFL for 14 years.

(Ms. Beatrice Chatman, mother of Char Braxton '06)



I am a great-grandmother of seven.

I graduated with the Odyssey Class of 2015.

I love learning. **(Lenora Rodin '15)**



The water pipes broke in the section of town where we lived when I was around 12 years old. We were the only family who had a working well. Lots of neighbors lined up with their buckets asking for water.



My brother had to leave home because he was threatened with lynching. A late-night knock on the door from our neighbor changed my brother Jim's life--for the next three years. He had to leave town with a small pack of clothing and food wrapped in a sheet. The neighbor told mother that he heard talk around town that my brother was going to be lynched soon. Jim's girlfriend was white. Interracial dating was illegal and, at the time, lynching was common in my hometown of Salem, Ohio. My brother was gone for three years.

I am one of 13 children. At 91 years old. I am now the last living amongst my siblings.

(Ms. Sarah Wells, mother of Mary Wells '07)





I was and still am a little skeptical of Facebook, but because I don't have an iPhone, it's good for using it to FaceTime my two sons.

I'll be 64 next year; never thought I would make it.

I lost my job mid-November; instead of being stressed, I chose to use this time to heal.

(René Robinson '08)



My interest has always been working and connecting with families/people, which I love.

I'm a mother of three (two living) and a grandmother of eight with four great-grandchildren, a HANDFUL! This includes a set of female triplets and a set of twin boys.

I am trying to eat healthier and take care of myself first, then others. **(Darnetta Carter '06)**



I love to go whitewater rafting.

I am the great-grandmother to five-year-old Riley and one-year-old Zariya.

My favorite pastime is traveling. I have traveled with my mom for the last 32 years. **(Mary Wells '07)**





I am the eldest in my family because Mom and Pop have passed on.

I am the first in my family to gain continued education and certificates in life. God uses me as an example. My family since 2007 has gone on to continue to seek education and growth. My daughter was the first to graduate college, and my son followed his little sister. My nieces have gone on to excel.



I have two kids (son 48, daughter 41), five grandkids, and two great-grandkids. I am the family matriarch. I'm fondly known as "Mama Bear." **(Roslyn Phillips '07)**



I love to write and journal. I wrote my first children's book when my daughter was two. It's still not finished—it needs illustrations.

When I was in the third grade, my youngest brother and my father's lady friend's son burned down my bedroom and other parts of our home. I was walking home and saw all the fire trucks. I kept saying, "That is not my house." The closer I got . . . I saw it was my house.

My life changed drastically when my husband was killed by police in 2006. My last conversation with him was, "Only thing I can do for you is prepare for your funeral." **(Pamela Bracey, mother of Maya Bracey '17)**



I met my husband, James, at UW-Madison. He was a UW-Madison football player in the 1980s.



My mother was very loving to us (my two sisters and me) after she was divorced and remarried.

My grandchildren are very smart and deep into the social media world of technology.
(Sherri Bester '08)



I was born on an island on the Caribbean Sea. Walking barefoot, I didn't see snow until I was eight. I didn't speak English until I was nine. I learned English by watching TV.

I was the first in my family to go to college.

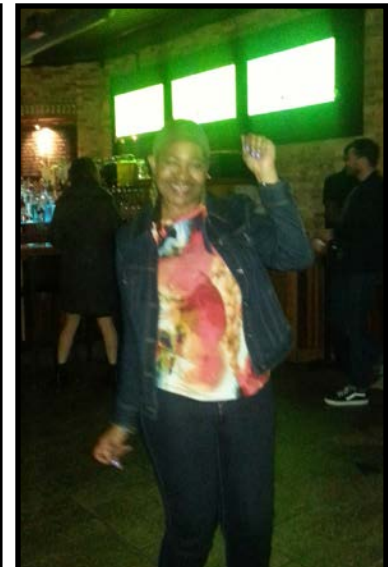
Thirteen is the numbers of grandkids that I have. My grandkids would die with a TV that doesn't have a remote and a phone on the wall. **(Socorro Lopez '06)**



I am the second oldest of six children born to my father, Lawrence Brown, and Margaret Brown.

I love reading and writing. I got my first library card at age six. I wrote my first poem at eight years of age.

I love to dance. My friends and family call me "The Turn Up Queen" because I am the one to get the party started. I love to dance so much that I incorporate dance in my daily exercise. **(Marcia D. Brown '12)**





I am currently a Liberal Arts transfer student at Madison College working on transferring to UW-Madison.

My favorite food is pizza, but not with all the phony ingredients.

Walking among the trees releases new beginnings for me. **(Char Braxton '06, Classroom Assistant)**

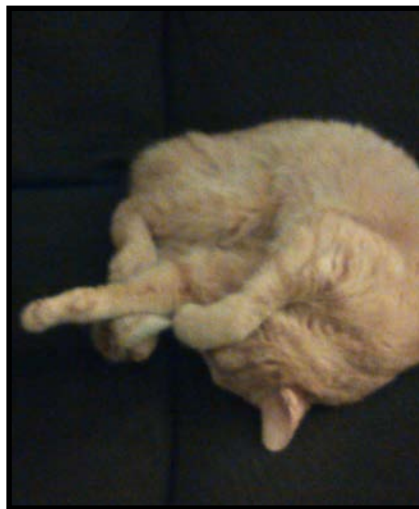


I was an only child for the first six weeks of my life, until my half-sister was miraculously located 400 miles away in a foster home in Nebraska.

My current soulmate is a blind, skinny, cranky 18-year-old orange cat.

I had to be dragged kicking and screaming into the digital age, and as of today, I confess I still do not know how to use a QR code.

(Christina Wagner, retired librarian and classroom volunteer)



My husband is 18 inches taller than I am so we look comical on any dance floor.

My late mother became the first in her family to go to college, journeying out of dire poverty in Appalachia by attending Berea College in Kentucky, a free school for the poor.



My three grandchildren (ages 6, 10, 15) have no clue what the world was like before we had cell phones, Siri, and Amazon deliveries. **(Emily Auerbach, Odyssey Senior Instructor)**

STARTING ODYSSEY SENIOR

Odyssey Senior participants were asked why they signed up for Odyssey Senior and if they had any fears.

I want to learn more, and I have no fears. **(Ms. Sarah Wells)**

Odyssey Senior: I signed up knowing I needed a connection in life as I age. This senior program will help me continue to grow with knowledge and information as the eldest of my family. Odyssey Senior will help me lead my family as I was led in life. All my elders (parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc.) are all gone. My family leans and depends on me, from my husband to my kids, siblings, nieces, nephews, grandkids, great-grandkids, friends, and neighbors. I'm always sharing life's knowledge. I've come a mighty long way in life and am still growing. **(Roslyn Phillips)**

I want to hang out with people my age. I don't get out much. It used to be work, church, and home, but now it's just church and home.



I'm single, by myself for the past 24 years, and over this period of time, my list of things to do has dramatically decreased.

So, an opportunity to hang out with grown-ups—I just couldn't pass it up. I'm looking forward to discussions, hearing the stories from Ms. Wells and Ms. Chatman, from Pam Bracey, and from all of the other grown-up alumni. **(René Robinson)**





I'm in Odyssey Senior because I get a chance to experience the Odyssey adventure again and gain knowledge. **(Lenora Rodin)**

When I got the message from Emily, I thought this is what I need in my life right now—an educational

journey with people my age who can share experiences, wisdom, and have a great time every Monday. I am trying to get back to reading the books assigned to this class. **(Socorro Lopez)**

I signed up because I have always wanted to join



Odyssey. I never had or took the time. Now as I have pondered over my last few years of giving my time to everyone else, I wanted to give my time to myself. I have no fears, but I need to be encouraged. **(Pamela Bracey)**

I was chosen to join Odyssey Senior. **(Ms. Beatrice Chatman)**

Emily asked me if I would like to help out in Odyssey Senior. I suspect I will end up learning far more than I help! **(Christina Wagner)**

I signed up for Odyssey Senior to grow in my world of writing. I hope to grow from the class into a new and higher world of writing. **(Sherri Bester)**

I signed up for Odyssey Senior [as a classroom assistant] to support my mom. I want her to take action as she lives in a different society. I am on a new path and getting younger on my new journey! I broke out of a prison I had been for so long. **(Char Braxton)**



I have been talking about doing Odyssey Senior for over 10 years now, so I decided as part of our 20th anniversary year, "Let's just do it!" For the last two decades, I've witnessed the power of our

multigenerational Odyssey classrooms. When Juanita Wilson '07 (the oldest Odyssey graduate at 71) talked about going into labor in Evanston, Illinois, being turned away by the hospital there because she was Black, and barely making it to Cook County in time, I saw the jaws drop on our younger students. Suddenly racism and the need for the Civil Rights Movement became real. I am so honored to hear the eloquent stories of our first-ever Odyssey Senior class. **(Emily Auerbach)**

I signed up for Odyssey Senior because Emily asked me to. I hope to get a renewed journey into learning and keeping my mind sharp so I won't develop dementia. I have no fear in participating in this class. I look at this Odyssey journey as an adventure. **(Marcia Brown)**



CONCRETE MEMORIES

In class, Odyssey Senior students looked at abstract sentences such as these three: "I remember an interesting moment in my childhood." "One dish I ate in my childhood was unforgettable." "Kids today have different stuff and do different things compared to in my youth." Here are some concrete revisions of those sentences.

I hated the greens my mother loved to cook, but back in the day you ate what was given to you.

(Ms. Beatrice Chatman)

I remember not understanding my classmates who were speaking English.

(Socorro Lopez)

One unforgettable dish from my childhood was red and saucy spaghetti.

(Char Braxton)



My 13-year-old granddaughter was put on punishment. I asked my son and daughter-in-law if I could go in her room and talk. She was watching a 60-inch TV, had her computer running, Apple phone, queen-sized bedroom set. Punishment? Are you kidding?

(Roslyn Phillips)



At age five, I refused to go on my first school field trip to the zoo because I was convinced a bear would eat my arm.

(Christina Wagner)



On a trip to San Francisco as a child, I was upset because I thought the Golden Gate Bridge was gold but it was an orange/reddish color.

(René Robinson)

When I was a child, my cousin used to do my hair and didn't like it, so she would pull it very hard, sometimes hitting me with her comb or brush.

(Lenora Rodin)



At family gatherings we ate Spanish rice.
(Pam Bracey)

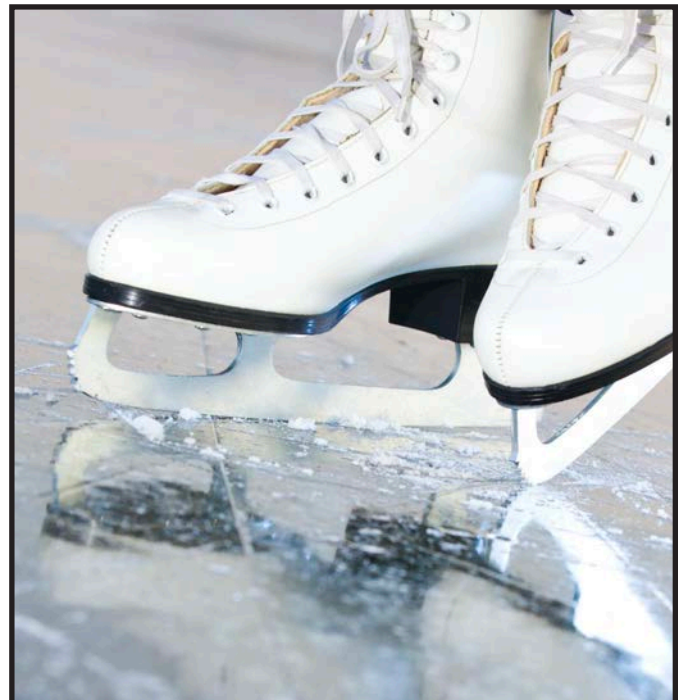
When my sister Mickey fell off a slide and was on the ground screaming in pain, I remember the blood splattered on my new shoes. **(Marcia Brown)**

My mother taught me to say "That's an interesting dish" if I didn't like the taste of someone's cooking, so let's just say the spicy, flaming hot eggs I was served in India that burned my tongue and brought tears to my young eyes were super "interesting."

(Emily Auerbach)

I remember in my childhood skating over the icy waters of Lake Michigan in a dance of grace and beauty as the sunrise made a glowing light.

(Sherri Bester)



ALUMNI CORNER

We revisit writing from Marcia Brown during the Class of 2012 and Lenora Rodin during the Class of 2015.



MARCIA BROWN

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Marcia, pronounced mar-SEE-ah, is Latin. It means "Roman Goddess." It is also pronounced marSHUH, but I prefer marSEE-ah, because it sounds exotic. When I was in the 6th grade, my teacher, Mrs. Johnson, refused to pronounce my name correctly. She thought that my name should be accompanied by an accent over the letter "C." When she called on me to participate in class discussions, I would not respond if she mispronounced my name. Eventually, my mother was called to school for a conference. My mother told Mrs. Johnson that if she continued to mispronounce my name, she would be reported to her supervisor. From then on, Mrs. Johnson pronounced my name correctly. I love my name. It is different and unusual, just like me.

Music

When I was growing up in the Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago, I remember jazz music playing on Friday and Saturday nights. When my father would barbeque on the front porch, he would play his record player. I remember him tapping his foot to Duke Ellington, Wes Montgomery, and Lonny Liston Smith. Sometimes my mother would dance with my father to the sounds of Ella Fitzgerald and Etta James.



Now that I am grown, I listen to R&B. I like Maze and Frankie Beverly, The Emotions, Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes, The Temptations, and Marvin Gaye. I love music tremendously. Music makes me feel good. I am upbeat and happy when I listen to music.

PREJUDICE

When I was in grade school, I was fortunate to attend many White Sox baseball games. One day while attending a game, I experienced my first encounter with prejudice. On the way back from using the restroom, my friend and I came upon five white boys and girls. They began to surround us, blocking our path. They started shouting racial comments and pushing us. I pushed them back, then began to run. The boys and girls surrounded me and blocked my path. They called us Nigger and black monkeys. I did not know what to do. I began to cry and yell, "Somebody help us!" A man and woman stopped and said, "What are you guys doing?" The five girls and boys dropped their fists and scattered. The man and woman escorted us back to our seats and apologized for the actions of the boys and girls who attacked us. After this incident, whenever someone had to go to the restroom, an adult would escort him or her.



White Sox Park is located in the Bridgeport Neighborhood in Chicago, Illinois. There is an invisible line separating the Black from the White people. I later learned that Blacks are not to cross Wentworth Street, where White Sox Park was located, and 41st Street, the length of the Stadium. If you do, you could be jumped on and beaten to a pulp by White people. As of today, Blacks make up only 1.4% of the population in Bridgeport. Mayor Daley resides in Bridgeport. The incident at White Sox Park opened my eyes to how violent people can be to others of different ethnicity and skin color.

CHICAGO SUBWAY

Subway Rush Hour
Mingled
breath and smell
so close
mingled
black and white
so near
no room for fear.

When I was in Chicago, I used to ride the subway train to and from work. The train was crowded with both black and white commuters. We were packed together like sardines in a can. Everyone was so close to each other that it was hard to breathe. You could smell their breath, perfume, or cologne. Blacks and whites intertwined as one, too close to escape, too far to run.





THE ODYSSEY SHIP

This Odyssey ship is sailing along the ocean shore.
 Me, as the captain, who could ask for more?
 I will keep this ship afloat, sailing the seven seas.
 I will sail all around the world, guiding the way for you and me.
 I will stop and pick up only a few
 who aspire to learn as I do.
 If you want to take this journey of education,
 Jump aboard without hesitation.

HALLELUJAH ANY WAY

When you can't make the rent
 'Cause all your money's spent
 Hallelujah Any Way!

When you're standing in a very long line
 and you're really pressed for time
 Hallelujah Any Way!

When you're on your way to the other side of town
 and your car or the bus has broken down
 Hallelujah Any Way!

When you're tired and your feet hurt
 and you don't feel like going to work
 Hallelujah Any Way!

When your heart is in despair
 and you think life is just not fair
 Hallelujah Any Way!

When your child is acting up in school
 and you're just about to lose your cool
 Hallelujah Any Way!

As I stand before you on this day
 All that I'm really trying to say is.....
 When you're having a not so good day
 You should still shout Hallelujah Any Way!





LENORA RODIN

FOOD MEMORY

Sitting on the enclosed wooden front porch of our house located at 2044 Dodge Ave. in Evanston, Illinois, I remember the large bags of greens sitting in front of us and the smell of fresh dirt entering our nose along with the dew that sat upon them. It was a Saturday, and it was our responsibility to pick the greens off their stems to get them ready to be cleaned for Sunday dinner.

I remember the smell of them cooking—a pungent smell that was distinctive in taste and texture with its earthiness, which has a musty undertone. Oh, how I love the smell of collard greens, and I also love the taste. My grandmother never cooked enough because everyone in the house loved them. Of course, the adults grabbed giant bowls of them, which left the two of us children with little or none.



Oh, how I love collard greens with their pungent smell and distinctive earthy taste with a musty undertone.

STOP ELDER ABUSE

It is a fact that each and every one of us will get old. The question that is set before us this day is: when the time comes, who will care for you? According to the US General Accounting Office, “In recent years the percentage of nursing homes (30% of the nation’s 17,000 nursing homes) cited for deficiencies involving actual harm to residents or placing them at risk of death or serious injury remained unacceptably high.” What this is saying is that the people who are entrusted to care for our elderly are in fact abusing them. This must come to an end because our elderly deserve better care.

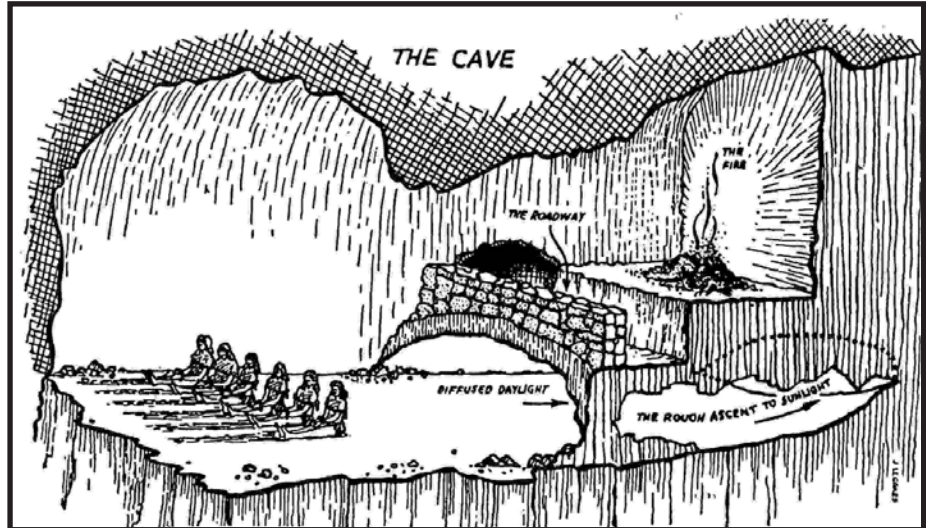


Here are two suggested solutions: 1. Increase the wages for the C.N.As / caregivers because the work is very hard. People are not willing to do all that is required on the salary that they are being paid. 2. Limit the number of clients given to each caregiver so that they can give quality care to the ones that they are assigned to.

The elderly have worked hard, paid their dues, and have earned the right to retain their dignity during this vulnerable stage of life. So the question that is set before us this day is: when the time comes, who will care for you?

WHY NOT TELL YOU?

Why not tell you that the truth you perceive to be true may not be accurate, or that maybe we need to take another look through new lenses or another pair of eyes? Are we in reality afraid of the truth? Is it because, like Socrates, “we are comfortable in our ignorance,” or are we afraid that once we have been made aware of the truth that we will come out of the dark never to enter it again, only to be present in the light? Then what? Why not tell you that you are smarter way beyond your most vivid dreams or your wildest imaginations? Or are you like one of the people in the Allegory of the Cave who were physically and mentally bound and refused to let another free them because they were convinced that their interpretation of what they saw was absolute?



Why not tell you that you are beautiful and deserving of all that is good? Is it because you are so used to believing and living by the negative adjectives used to describe your very existence? Why not tell you that you are great? Is it because you are afraid that you might end up on a predestined date with greatness, a date that you do not believe you are worthy of or even deserve? Why not tell you that after this UW Odyssey there awaits a greater one that will last a lifetime?



Should I not tell you this because you would quit this journey that you are on right now in hope that life's challenges will not find you? Why not tell you all of these wonderful things about yourself? Are you afraid that if you let go of who you think you are, you might become the person that you were really meant to be? Why not tell you?

THE ODYSSEY DREAM

Odyssey was a dream to me.

I found out I can be whatever I want to be.

Odyssey is a dream come true

And it is there waiting for you.

WORDS

WORDS “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” Words. Oh, them indelible words sharper than any two-edged sword. Once spoken it is impossible for them to be rubbed out, washed out, or altered. They become unforgettable and remain sketched in the mind and memory forevermore. Words take on a life of their own. They can be used as adjectives to describe one’s being, whether true or false, whether positive or negative, whether good, bad, or sad.

Words. Oh, them indelible words. Words. Oh, them beguiling words. That is why it is said that “The pen is mightier than the sword.” Yes! Words have many purposes. They can be used to deceive, lead astray, cheat, deprive, charm, and divert, and they can lift you up or tear you down. In other words, words have the power to make you or break you. Have you heard the phrase “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me”? Well, that is just not true because many people have been hurt by simple words.



Words. Oh, them beguiling words. Words. Oh, them perilous words with their many hidden dangers and traitorous ways waiting patiently to betray someone’s confidence in themselves or another. Words can be very dangerous unless used properly. The Bible says in Matthew 12:37, “For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Words. Oh, them perilous words. Words. Oh, them essential words. They are the prerequisite to our communication, and without them we would not be able to communicate with others. Words. Oh, them essential words. Words. Oh, them indelible words, sharper than any two-edged sword. Once spoken it is impossible for them to be rubbed out, washed out, or altered. They become unforgettable and remain sketched in the mind and memory forevermore.



MY LIFE IN TREE RINGS

Ralph Waldo Emerson: The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn. William Shakespeare: And this, our life, . . . finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything. Abraham Lincoln: Character is like a tree and reputation like a shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing. Kahlil Gibran: Trees are poems that the earth writes upon the sky. Walt Whitman: I troop forth replenished with supreme power. . . . The blossoms we wear in our hats the growth of thousands of years.

Every year the tree grows, it develops a ring in its trunk. That ring represents the tree’s age, and it also tells the story of what that tree has endured. I can identify with its rings because they develop on the inside; I myself have many rings that have grown within me from many seasons of rain and drought.

Some of the rings were inflicted upon me by myself, and I will call those rings the rainy and dry seasons, while the rest of the rings were obtained by others, and I will call them the first-year growth and the scars from the fire.

There were many fires in my life still raging within me wanting to be extinguished, and by God's grace, mercy, and kindness, I found Odyssey. Odyssey was the fire hose that I needed to help me build more confidence in myself and others. When I first applied for Odyssey, I remember Emily asking me about my tolerance and if I had any. Of course, I said yes, and to an extent I believed this to be true. After all, I was in a bi-racial marriage and I had grown up in a bi-racial culture all of my life so, yes, I was tolerant. But boy oh boy I understand now why Emily asked me that question (she is a wise owl), so thank you, Emily, for your wisdom. The Odyssey Project has helped me to explore skills that I did not know I possessed. The ones I was keenly aware of, Odyssey helped me develop even more. So no matter what season you find yourself in, whether it is the rainy seas0n or the drought season, never give up.

In Odyssey I experienced all four of the seasons in just two semesters. 1. First Year Growth = my getting into Odyssey and learning how to deal with the different age groups and cultural backgrounds and differences. 2. Rainy Season= dreary and dark and trying to move on no matter what, such as working, illness, winter coldness, and lots of homework. 3. Dry Season= depression and wanting to give up because I had stopped believing in myself. 4.Scars from the fire= by being with others that had been scarred and sharing with them the different effects that the scars have had on our development, my scars seemed to heal a little bit more.



So, in conclusion I would like to say thank you, Odyssey, for taking my battered life and helping me to rebuild myself from the inside out. Thank you for helping me to put some closure on the rings in my life.