

ODYSSEY SENIOR ORACLE



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SENTENCES ABOUT US



I have a learning disability. I like trying things. I get along well with others.

I struggled growing up poor. My mother was a respiratory therapist, and my dad was a Cook County sheriff. Married in a home with five kids. I stole to feed my family when I was younger.

When I was in school it was segregated. By my adult life, I had four kids and two bonus kids. I moved to Madison, WI in 1993 to give my kids a better life. **(Robert Rodgers)**



I am a very passionate person who loves and respects others. I love helping others. I have always wanted to get my college degree because education has always been very important to me. **(Kimberly Rodgers)**



I'm a Christian studying to be a missionary.

I'm a mother of four children and five grandchildren.

I want to go back to school to be a paralegal. I started at MATC in 1994 to become a certified public accountant. **(Jacqueline Tibbs)**



I am from El Salvador/adopted in 1978.

I am in limbo about returning to school (post BS).

I am a wife, mother, and a veteran, medically retired from a highly stressful job as a probation officer for the Department of Corrections 10 years later. **(Marlene Toledo)**



Well, for me, I am very curious. I love to laugh.

I love all holiday, romance, and comedy movies.

I love avocados. **(Tanya Money)**



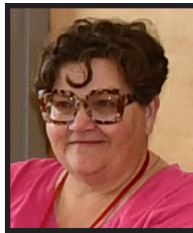
I am a mother of four children and they are all grown now.

I am a workaholic.

I don't have much going on in my daily life but work. **(Remell Booker)**



I love to travel. It reenergizes me.
I am shorter than my boyfriend by a foot.
I'm a forever learner/student.
(Socorro Lopez)



I am a twin and I love it.
I am a mother of nine children and I have enjoyed every minute with them.
I am a historian and I have been teaching for 31 years. **(Christine Cina)**



I lived in New York City for 15 years. I left in 2001 shortly after 9-11 and moved to Madison. I wanted to be an actress and/or singer or an artist.
I love to paint and color.
I am pretty funny with a good sense of humor, although I seem quiet. **(Cecile Brown)**



I like making people laugh, but I recently read that psychologists have discovered that people who use humor are avoiding connection with others. I think it's going to take another study to realize there are different types of humor. So I like making people laugh, but I may over analyze at times.
I'm the person that stands in the grocery aisles and reads food labels.



My mother was a single mother with no financial support from my father. One thing she did that shaped me was buying an Encyclopedia Britannica, which opened my world tremendously, it was the first time I could feel the excitement of learning in my body. I was in Catholic elementary school, and my mother told me we may need to move to Thailand. I looked it up in the Encyclopedia, and I could feel my neurons connecting as I read about gods and goddesses with multiple arms and legs. I was nine, and I'm still trying to understand this planet. That was the day that I started to think about the power of people's beliefs and how they shape their world. **(Ivonne Ramos)**



I am a full-time mom/grandmother, not really sure now I am feeling about it. I guess I didn't see this as being my life, but God always has a different plan.
I am 59 years old and life is showing its true colors.
I appreciate and love my brothers, especially the two that live in Wisconsin. Even though our parents are gone, they have stepped in and up to be supportive of my family. Family is everything to me. **(RJ Knight)**



I am often reflective on politics and social justice issues.

I adore nature and wildlife with my whole being.

Most importantly, I am a proud father of five amazing, kind, brilliant children. **(Brian Benford)**



I love to collect rocks—small, big, ugly, beautiful.

I am bound and determined to finish high school. It's very important to me.

(Jane Ngwudo)



I enjoy crafts but can't seem to complete a lot of them that I do.

I love giving back to my community.

My family is very important to me.

(Pam Bracey)



I was born in Chicago.

I am a very caring person.

I have been in Madison for about 30 years. **(Allen Bell)**



Since I am retired, I really enjoy quietness at home.

Back in the day, I really loved having people over, playing music, dancing, and just having fun.

(Beatrice Chatman)



I was a librarian at the Goodman South Madison Library for 22 years.

I take piano lessons.

I wrote something for the Odyssey Senior Oracle last year about really wanting a small raised garden to grow yellow tomatoes like my grandpa used to grow, and this summer,

with the help of some friends, I did it! **(Chris Wagner)**



There are historians in my family dating back 277 years in Madison, WI.

I have three grandchildren in Madison who are business owners.

Odyssey changed my life through finding my passion for writing my family history.

(Edith Hilliard)

SPECIAL OBJECTS

In class, Professor Erin Celeslo shared Gary Soto’s poem “Oranges” and Alice Walker’s essay “My Mother’s Blue Bowl.” Then students wrote about an object in their own life with significance.

*The first time I walked
With a girl, I was twelve
Cold, and weighted down
With two oranges in my jacket. . . . –Gary Soto*



*. . . The blue bowl stood there, seemingly full forever,
no matter how deeply or rapaciously we dipped, as if
it had no bottom. And she dipped up soup. Dipped up
lima beans. Dipped up stew. Forked out potatoes. Spooned out rice and peas and corn. And in
the light and warmth that was HER we dined. Thank you, Mama. –Alice Walker*

I hold a treasure that I received from my favorite grandmother in my world, my mother’s mom. It is a smooth heart necklace. Its color is a nice green hue that seems to relax me when I wear it, and it reminds me of my “grandma.” I don’t know who decided to give this to me; she had three daughters and some sisters and other grandchildren.



I collect hearts and this means so much to me. It still touches my heart with wonder... Did she want me to have that necklace? I hope so. Grandma, I am loving it, like I loved you. **(Pam Bracey)**



My dad had a sky-blue car with dark blue leather seats. We called it Big Blue. What I loved most about it was I thought it was the fastest car on the block. Riding with my dad is one of my best memories. Growing up with five siblings, you either got in first or you got in last, but everyone wanted to sit next to the window.

To this day, Cadillac is one of my favorite cars and, if I could, to this day I would have an old-school Cadillac just like Big Blue. **(Robert Rodgers)**

My mother's first car, a tan Buick LeSabre, was a used four-door sedan. The car she named Myrtle had a mind of her own and often disappointed my mother.



My mother loved Myrtle, who was sometimes as slow as a turtle. She wasn't really that reliable and often not drivable. Myrtle was a liability on the streets and not that friendly to everyone she met. She was in

bad condition and loved a lot of attention. My mother was often nervous when driving and wouldn't allow the car radio on, nor could you talk because, after all, Myrtle was the boss. Mother would never go too fast and often under the speed limit and never on the expressway and certainly not in rush-hour traffic because of the unpredictability of Myrtle, who often seemed to have temper tantrums. Yes, she was very temperamental. Sometimes, Mother would have to call a taxi because Myrtle refused to budge even when you showed her lots of love.

I remember when I was with my mother, Myrtle stalled at a red light and then decided to push her own pedal and drive herself through the light. At first, I thought my mother was running the light, but she was just as surprised as I was and puzzled to actually know that Myrtle took off on her own. Myrtle made my mother run over the sidewalk and into a grassy area, and we just missed a tree. Oooh-wee, we thank God for thee.

I think Myrtle got such a kick out of this potential disaster that she was laughing. Myrtle reminded me of a cartoon where a car talked, drove itself, cried, laughed, and sometimes was just plain ornery and bad. Myrtle gave my mother so many problems and that's a fact. She got rid of her just like that. We were so glad to put Myrtle to rest because she was just downright mean and a total mess. We realized that Myrtle had a vindictive personality, probably due to her previous owner or owners. Good riddance, Myrtle, may you rest in peace. **(Cecile Brown)**



Game of Spades. Every weekend, people would gather at our home when I was younger. When my stepfather came into town, everyone would get together and start piling up at our house. He would go and get a 12-pack of Miller beer at the liquor store. When the word got around, everyone came on over and the party started. **(Jackie Tibbs)**

Eight years ago, a violent storm swept through Madison and uprooted a giant silver maple tree in our neighbor's yard. That tree toppled the apple tree in our yard, and the apple tree then crushed a sapling that I had just received from the Urban Tree Alliance. It was like tree dominoes.

Not long after those precious trees were cut up and taken away, I contacted Jeremy of the Urban Tree Alliance and told them of the sapling's fate. He offered to replace it with a redbud.



My mother was very excited to be getting the redbud, but when I saw the scrawny little bush that Jeremy so proudly offered, I couldn't conceal my disappointment.

"I was hoping for a tree that might eventually provide shade for my mother when she goes outside," I said, trying not to sound too whiney and ungrateful.

"Oh, it will," Jeremy assured me.

But I thought, not in time for my mother to sit under. Nevertheless, I tenderly cared for the little sapling that year, and in the early spring, it rewarded us with the most beautiful magenta-pink flowers we had ever seen. Pink was my mother's favorite color, so she was thrilled to watch it bloom outside her bedroom window.

Summer, however, brought a threat to the little tree – invasive beetles seemed to love it and threatened to chomp it out of existence. I looked it up and found that the best way to combat these raiders was to individually pick them off the leaves and drown them in soapy water, a task which I performed two or three times a day. This happened every summer for three years in a row. Then the leaves lost their tenderness and attractiveness to the beetles, and the tree really began to thrive.

My mother and I marveled at how quickly the tree grew each year, its pink blossoms greeting us in mid-May as a harbinger of summer.

My mother died a few years after it was planted, but it had already started to provide much-needed shade in our year, although its branches were too low to technically sit "under." Now it is well over 10 feet tall. Whenever I look at it, whether its branches are covered in snow, blossoms, or green heart-shaped leaves, I think lovingly of my mother and her excitement about that tree. My mother's presence lives on in the lives she touched and, yes, in the life of that tree. **(Chris Wagner)**



The first time my big sister and mother taught me to clean the bathroom was one of the first times I knew my family was passing on a big responsibility in their eyes. I was honored because in public, clean bathrooms were considered important when choosing a family activity. My mother told everyone in the family that we had to use the restroom before leaving the house, even if we didn't need to use the restroom before leaving the house. Even if your bladder is not full, use the restroom before leaving the house. Avoid germs at all cost. There are germs you cannot see, there are germs that will make you sick, and there are germs that will cause infection. My first fears were born.

Nonetheless, I still took this as a badge of honor. The excitement of this new task wore off as I found my little body scrubbing with very large yellow rubber gloves. These gloves were five times the size of my hands. I worked at keeping them on. Sometimes I would put on rubber bands to hold the rubber gloves from slipping off my hands.



My mother taught me the fear of chemicals. These chemicals are toxic, but we need to use them to clean these germs. So don't get these chemicals on your hands because it's not healthy for you. And when you use this dry powder to scrub the tub, do not inhale the dust from the cleaner. More fears were born; nonetheless, I still continued to take this as a badge of honor.



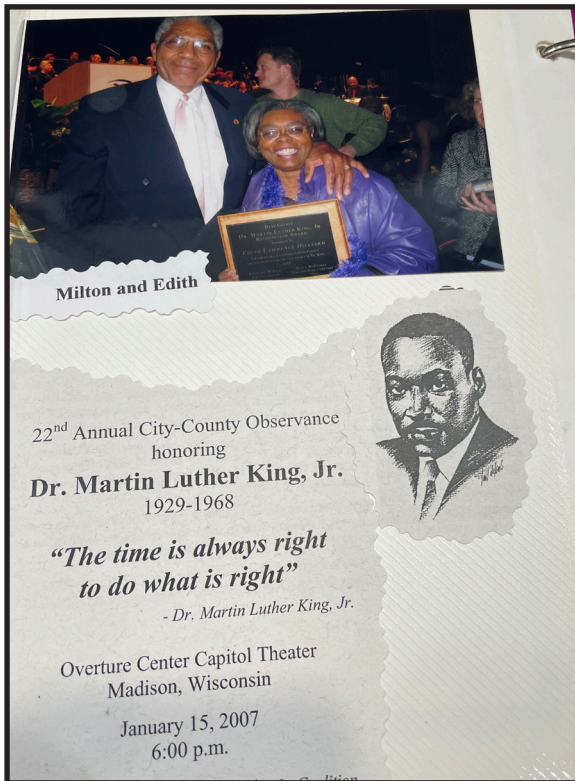
While scrubbing the floor, I started to imagine myself as Cinderella. Just when I started to decide if my mother and my sister were really the evil stepsisters, I looked up and saw the antique bath boy plaque decoration. This plaque had been there for as long as I could remember; however, this time I saw this plaque of a bath boy as a character.

This antique bath boy plaque was of a chubby boy entering a bathtub. As I cleaned the bathroom, he was my silent witness. As I watched the bath boy, I started to imagine his life as I scrubbed the floor. I began to create a life for him. This bathroom boy had both parents and enjoyed playing outside before his bath. Bath boy was from a family that gave allowances, had both parents, enjoyed summer vacations, camping trips, and had hobbies of his own. For

over 10 years, I looked at bath boy as I grew up around him. He stayed the same little boy frozen in time with bits of chipped paint with his perfect childhood.

But I still see myself as the lucky one—living, breathing, and enjoying my imperfect life with all my imperfections with bath boy as my witness. **(Ivonne Ramos)**

As I walk through the front door of my condo, the first thing I see is my Martin Luther King Jr. award for efforts as a leader in Dane County and for exemplifying the true legacy of Dr. King, awarded in 2007. It was signed by Kathleen Falk, Dane County Executive, and Scott McDonald, Dane County Board Supervisor.



It brings back a flood of intangible memories of Milt McPike, the Principal of East High School at the time and the second MLK Jr. award winner. Milt was monumental as a phenomenal principal and played a firsthand role in shaping the lives of thousands of students he called by name, including my son. I reflect on those positive memories.

The third person was Bob Goodman of the Goodman's Jewelry store on State St. Bob was a generous, kind, considerate, caring gentleman who loved Madison, and his legacy was ingrained all over our city.

Sharing the award with these two gentlemen will forever be a significant memory every time I walk in my front door. (Edith Hilliard)

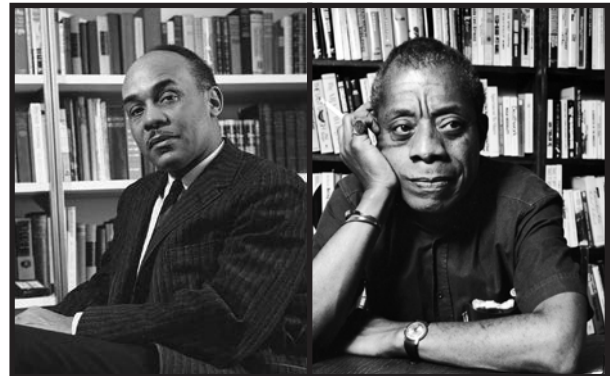


FINGERING THE BLUES

After Professor Craig Werner discussed James Baldwin's "The Uses of the Blues," students contemplated the blues in their own lives as well as their ideas about the elusive American Dream.

*"The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically."—
Ralph Ellison*

*"The acceptance of the anguish one finds in the blues, and the expression of it, creates also, however odd this may sound, a kind of joy."—
James Baldwin*



Growing up in the city of Gary, Indiana in the 1960s, 70s, 80s, it was difficult trying to achieve The American (my American) Dream. 1975 I chose to be a fireman, and I knew some of the roadblocks facing my dream. So I enrolled into a state college named Ivy Tech, and they had a course called Fire Science where they taught the basics of safety and technical maneuvers. I worked hard to achieve my goal, to become this fireman, my childhood dream. But I was the only Black individual in the class.

(Parris Jones)



There are fewer than 6% Black folks living in Madison or Dane County. Hence, there is not the "numbers" to force the vast majority white policy makers to enact real policies to ensure that all living in Madison can reach their full potential. This has allowed Madison to stay the course for being a city with horrendous racial disparities. This leaves me with the perpetual blues and little joy. **(Brian Benford)**

My blues experience has been limited because I never really chose to understand the blues. It was always so sad to me, these "other" life experiences and the pain these experiences usually cost people. Only until recently I have avoided "the worst of times" because I was always trying to see "Hopeful things," "Positive things," blocking out the reality of things. Now I take and process everything, whether there is pain or hurt or disgust with it. I now see what the Blues means in my lifetime, and I see that the Blues can carry good news. Process it individually as you choose.

(Pam Bracey)

When you are in a big city like Chicago and people are segregated and then you come to a small town like Madison and see that the world is not segregated, it opens your mind up to your American dream. In Chicago, I never saw black and white kids going to school together. I had heard Martin Luther King say that about how black and white kids should go to school together, but I didn't see it until I came to Madison. **(Robert Rodgers)**



When I was growing up in Marion, IN, it was different than when I came to Madison, WI. In IN, it was like a country and Madison was more like a city. **(Jackie Tibbs)**

My blues began in 1966. I was eight years old and I was on my way to unhappiness, fear, and loneliness as I traveled across the ocean. As we got closer to New York I started to panic. All my life I was in a bubble of security and warmth, on the island [Puerto Rico]. What is waiting for me on this continent? I wore my despair well with my ratty sweater. Mr. Baldwin's writing takes the reader on a roller coaster of emotions. We all have experienced pain, loss, and loneliness. **(Socorro Lopez)**

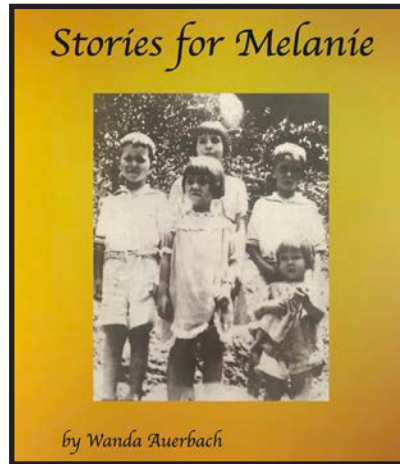


I really felt Baldwin's claim about our country being monstrous. I couldn't help but think of the practice of capital punishment. That our country can kill innocent people, heck even guilty people, is very troublesome to me. I am reminded of Bryan Stevenson's saying that every person is better than the worst thing they have done. How can killing someone because of a crime they committed make us a better people? In explaining capital punishment to my children, they see right through it, for what it is, murder by the state. Something monstrous indeed! **(Christine Cina)**

Baldwin is an example of when people do not actively take action towards therapy and healing. In his time, it was not available to him, so he writes these words sharing his anguish and provoking our thoughts. We must remember that we are more powerful through writing but we must not take these words to believe that our history of pain is forever. Earth school is happening for everyone, and we never know what is truly going on within someone's heart. We all have untapped sorrow. It's our job to confront it and make the most of life as we know it. **(Ivonne Ramos)**

LETTERS TO YOUNG LOVED ONES

This fall, Odyssey Senior students received copies of Wanda Auerbach's Stories for Melanie, tales of her life growing up poor in Appalachia that were written as a gift to one of her granddaughters but also as a treasure for the whole family. Some students chose to write letters to young loved ones in their lives.



Dear Phoenix,

My dear seven-year-old great-granddaughter Phoenix, I am so excited you are becoming a Girl Scout. I was a Brownie Scout for three years and flew up to a Girl Scout for seven years, from 6th to 12th grade.



Your grandmother, Monica, was the ultimate Girl Scout.

She earned every single patch in scouting. The Green Sash that hung across her chest was heavy with patches. It reflected camping, sewing, reading, craft, babysitting, first aid, health, and safety. She won a special award for selling the most Girl Scout cookies in the Badger Land Council. We had to borrow a vehicle to pick up the 196 boxes of assorted Girl Scout cookies. When we arrived home, the furniture in the living room had to be moved out to accommodate the boxes. Next, we had to sort the cookies into piles to deliver to all the neighbors and coworkers and collect the money.

Scouting taught your grandmother and great-grandmother many skills, and we hope you will enjoy it as much as we did. **(Edith Hilliard)**





Dear Marcy Tibbs,

I'm glad to be your mom. You inspired me to become a better mom and grandmother. When you told me that you wanted to be a lawyer, it inspired me to go back to school to become a paralegal. With all the stuff you have been through in your life when you lost your brother in 2017, it took a toll on you, but you bounced back up. You became a foster mom to help those children in need and four years ago, you became a guardian

to your nephew, Nasir. That also inspired me to do better in my life.

You also became a CNA to help those in need to better their health. You are truly an inspiration to me and I want you to know that I love you. Keep up the good work.

Love, Your Mom
(Jacqueline Tibbs)



My dearest Raeina,

I wanted to share a bit of my story. As you know, I grew up the youngest of seven siblings. Life, as I remember, was somewhat sweet. Momma and Daddy were up in age a bit. Sometimes, but not often, my older siblings were over me, which was a task. They (my siblings) wanted to say I was spoiled rotten, but Daddy said I needed a little more love because as Daddy said, all of my siblings were much older and had been showered with love all of their lives.

I can remember a time when things weren't the best. My second oldest brother (Sanford) was home on leave from the military. As I shared earlier, all my siblings were older; my big sister was twenty years old when I was born. It was a hot, humid, and sunny day, and all the kids on the block were outside playing. On the opposite side of the street was the Manuel family: Peppy, Terry, Jerry, Rocky, Rufus, Lisa, and Michael. Two doors down on the same side of the street was the Henry family. They had two daughters, one my age, Vanessa, and Sonia, a wee little one. Next door to the Henrys were the Harrisons, who had two older sons and a daughter a year older than me (Michelle). The entire block attended Holy Angels Catholic School. On the other corner, near 11th Avenue, was the Williams sisters. This was a middle-class neighborhood, mostly blue-collar workers, all but the Williamson



family, who owned several liquor stores in the area so they were considered well off. They had two daughters, one a year older (Kastia) and one two years younger (Chico). The Manuels had the Kool-Aid house, where all the kids hung out probably because they had the most kids.

Most of the time, I played alone in my large front yard, per my momma's instructions. I never really felt comfortable at the Kool Aid house. At the time, I wasn't really sure why. As the years progressed, I fully understood. I played with girl H, from the corner house on the other end of the street. We had the same birthday, and to me we had the same minds, but boy, was I wrong. Back to the hot, humid, sunny day, all the kids were outside playing, and we were having fun, fun until Mrs. Williams howled out each of the kids' names: "Rocky, Rufus, Lola, Michelle, Von, Kastia, and Chico. Y'all come on in, it's too hot out for y'all. Come in and cool off." My name was nowhere to be found in the list of children's names she'd called. Thank God for Momma: Momma taught me that you came into this world alone, and you will surely leave the same way (alone). Momma taught me how to play by myself and be okay. Momma didn't realize what a monster she was making. Anyway, Mrs. Williams again beckoned all the children to her home, but still no invitation for me.

Sanford is my big brother who was home on leave from the Army. He came out of the house on his way to God knows where. He noticed me playing quietly alone in the front yard, with tears rolling down my cheeks. He stopped and asked, "What's up girl? You, okay?"

I responded, "Yes" with my head hung low.

"What's going on? I thought you were out here playing with the other kids."

I replied, "Mrs. Williams invited them all to her house."

He said, "Why didn't you go?"

Again, I replied, "I wasn't invited."

He told me to get up and go. I wiped my face, jumped up, and asked where we were going. Well, he marched me to the corner house, the Williams'. He knocked on the breezeway door and she answered with a surprised look on her face asking, "Can I help you?"

He replied, "My name is Sanford Jones, and this is my little sister. I just wanted to know why you invited all the kids on the block but found it easy to leave my little sister out?"

She looked stunned and before she could respond, he lit into her like a bolt of lightning. When he was done with Mrs. Williams, she had tears in her eyes and throat, and then came the apology. He said that he didn't need an apology, but she needed to give one to me. Mrs. Williams apologized profusely and then invited me to join the other children.

My response was, "No, thank you" with a half-smile. All I wanted to do at that moment was to walk away with my head held high, hand in hand with my hero, Sanford Jones. **(RJ Jones)**





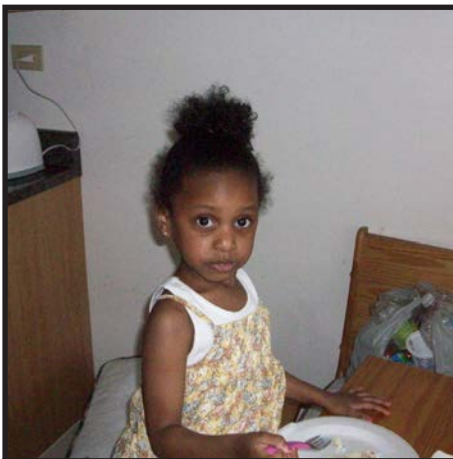
My Dearest Makyah,

I can't believe you just started college this year! As you grow and learn, you will have to make some decisions as to what your future will be. Also, where you may want to live and work, and how you want to start your journey.



Looking back on my younger self as a young child, as a teenager, or even as a young adult, I wanted so much out of life! I was also motivated and knew that I had to work towards whatever it was I was trying to achieve. So, I set a goal to do well in school, learn all I could, graduate from college, and then possibly go on to graduate school.

After I graduated from college, it was difficult to find a job in my field, so I worked at the Post Office and delivered mail (since I wanted to make and save a lot of money in the shortest time possible). One of my dreams was to move to California or New York City (NYC). So, after six years as a mail lady, I resigned. I was ready to make that move to start my journey elsewhere. I told myself, 'Don't be afraid to try new things and take risks.' Family and friends were 'scared' for me and concerned for me. It seems that no one wanted me to strike out on my own in another city so far away.



I took that chance and moved from Chicago to NYC alone when I was alone in my 20s. However, it was the effort and dedication that inspired me to take that journey, and the love and support from my mother telling me to go for it! Once in NYC, I invested in my future by furthering my education and honing my professional and artistic skills along the way.



Makyah, you're a lot like me in many ways: adventurous and full of determination. I know you will not settle for anything less than who you are, and you will strive to be anything you want to be. So, Makyah, don't be afraid to try new things and take risks. Make the effort and it can be worth it! So, go for it, my dear! I wish you much success on your journey.
Love, Auntie **(Cecile Brown)**



Dear Nicholas Nick Knack,

Before you were born, I used to joke, or not, that I was going to adopt a tow-headed, little Russian baby girl. I had become enamored at the thought of “this” older Black man, raising an alabaster child that could speak Slavic languages and dance to Hip Hop music. I knew that I still had ample love in my heart for more children, although I could never fathom that I would have another biological kid or be with someone willing to spend their life supporting my unorthodox nurturing ways. With your oldest brother being twenty-five years older, your other brother, seventeen years older, a sister twenty-three and another twenty years your age, I had believed that the ship (USS Fatherhood) had set sail for good.

And here we are! So now that I am sixty-five, I want to make sure that I convey my most important pearls of wisdom on to you outside of wearing clean underwear every day, mean what you say, don’t be a follower, look a person in the eyes (unless it’s culturally not cool), offer a firm handshake-not too hard-, and live in New York City at least once in your life. You see, just as with all your ancestors, relatives, and siblings, you too will have to grapple with this seemingly innocuous question. A question that should never define who you are.

What are you? What race are you? Are you Puerto Rican, Hawaiian, Moroccan, Inuit? Where are you from? Like many before you, we simply say “our mothers.” Besides the confused looks and awkward pauses by inquiring minds, this simple reply can allow you to go about your day. After years of grappling with this question and concluding that all humans, regardless of backgrounds, seek to place “others” in a box, I guess that people are trying to make sense of an ever-changing world, or to maintain a sense of control, power—or fear. We humans, including you, I, and everyone, need to replace this urge to label each other so that we can cherish and celebrate our collective beauty.

What makes me most proud of you and your sibs is that you all live authentic lives. Lives that others who carry our blood could only dream of. I am inspired, and I think that your grandparents² (squared) might feel as if all the pain, challenges, and trauma that they endured, had been worth it in the form of you.

Looking at old census records immediately after enslavement, our kin were recorded as not being able to read or write. You gloriously pile the house full of books, on every table top, every counter, the living room floor; these ancestors through my eyes see you reading in between squeezed time from video games—like the ones designed by your brother. Dragged through slavery, sweat, and blood, their mule-plowed fields of crowder peas and melons nourished our bloodline, through racism, its tears, and centuries of heartbreak. All the while, they could never have dreamed of us, especially you.

Son, in these key strokes, I hope to give you a tiny glimpse of how much I love you. In your twelve years of life, you have no doubt figured out by now that I have over twenty years on your friends’ parents. So, while most people my age celebrate and talk insistently about their grandchildren, I cherish you and the unique gift that you are. In my love for you, I know where you come from. **(Brian Benford)**





Dear Malcolm (my middle child),

I may have shared this story a little with you before, but this may be more in depth. Starting in January 1991 I experienced my first pregnancy by your dad. This was a happy time because, One, I had not been pregnant in six years. I thought I was done. Your older brother Corey was six. I lost that baby in April, got married a week later, got pregnant again in June, and lost the baby in July. I was in so much pain, but I gave myself a week to get it together, then back to work. My male co-worker asked me, "Why do you keep getting pregnant?" I ignored his ignorance.

One thing about the second pregnancy was I felt different. Things were going on with my body that I never experienced before, and I was very stressed. One day I was at work, and I had a conversation with my baby in my belly. I had to be straight in my speaking the way I felt. I said, if you can't come into this world healthy with no problems, then you should leave. In minutes it felt like a heart stopped beating, like time stopped for about 10 seconds. I went to the doctor and my baby's heartbeat was no more. They sent me home saying the baby will come out by itself. I waited a week. I didn't know what this would feel like. I was supposed to catch it in a bag and take it to the hospital. What a loud way to say in silence that they did not care.



So, I went home and waited; then something happened. I went into the bathroom and captured in a baggie something I knew nothing about, put it in the refrigerator, and took it to the hospital when I got a ride that day or the next. No one called about the specimen in the baggie and I never found out if I did it right or not. Didn't know how to even question it.

Months down the road in October I got pregnant with you, Malcolm. I was determined not to lose you. Times were hard and stressful. I had no appetite but had to eat. My mother, your grandmother, was visiting and made me go for walks in the winter snow. I was so afraid of falling and losing you. On my walks I would say, "We are not going out like this, we are going to make it." So, you arrived July 6, 1992.



When I first saw you, I said, "My, what big eyes you have" haha. But mainly I was glad that you made it. You were a calm and laid-back baby. In the womb I thought you were going to be a boxer. You punched and kicked me all the time. I know you just wanted out, maybe just like the last two.

It always seemed like you three passed each other along the way. And also, when you were being born, I woke up and I heard someone say she's awake. I looked at the door and saw my mother looking in, I believe, and I was out again. Your dad was in the operating room too, as he was with Maya. Caesarean birth, worth every minute every day. **(Pam Bracey)**



Dear Chiara,

As you know, your father and I have been adamant in making sure that you grow up with pets. We think it is very important that you experience the love of animals as well as the responsibility of taking care of them.

But I did want to let you know why I am so adamant. When I was growing up, your grandparents did not want pets in the house. Your grandfather grew up on a farm and firmly believed that animals should remain outside. Your grandmother wasn't allowed pets in the house because her mother grew up on a farm and believed that animals belong outside as well.

Early on, your aunt Carrie and I begged for pets. After a good while, Grandma relented and said that if we caught an animal, we could keep it as a pet. Well, that just unleashed my twin and me! We were constantly on the quest to catch a pet.

Our first pets were centipedes. We found them in our unfinished basement. The only thing is that when we would hold them and try and pet them, they would bite or pinch our skin, which would result in us slapping them, ultimately ending in the centipedes' death!



We then caught a wild rabbit in our backyard; the only thing is that because it was wild and not tame, it did not last long as its parasympathetic system couldn't handle our holding it and petting it. Sadly, it died.

Speaking of death, one spring we found a dead cat carcass and brought it to our mother with a request for her to resurrect the cat for us. Needless to say, Grandma was horrified by the sight and obviously could not fulfill our request!



We did leave out food for a squirrel that we named Charlie. We never got to pet him, but he came to our nut piles and religiously ate from our nut supply.

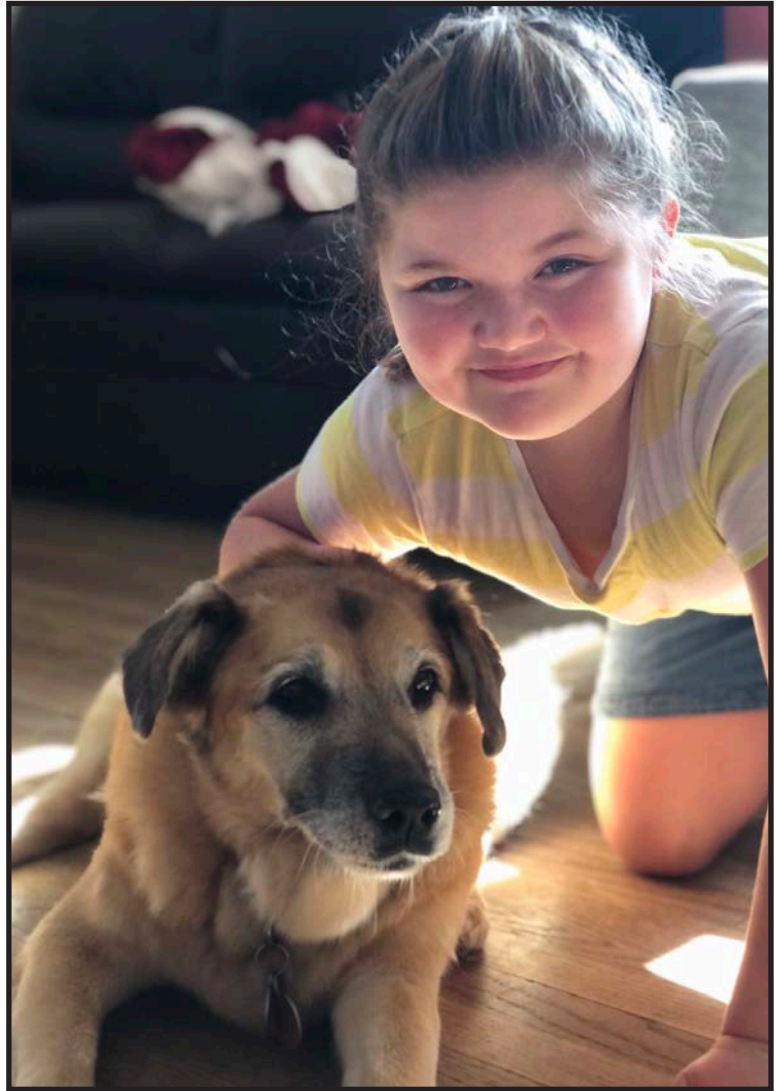
We would also terrorize the neighborhood dogs. Felix, the local wiener dog, would be captured by Carrie and me. We would then dress him up. He never bit us or became mad with us; however, his owner would eventually show up, albeit not very pleased! There was also Tuffy, the police dog, who was owned by the chief of police of our small town. He was rumored to be a ferocious dog; however, there would be

innumerable times where my mother would find my twin and me in Tuffy's coop with our feet hanging out and Tuffy running around the coop barking incessantly.

We also found a dog in our neighborhood who was bleeding. We proceeded to bring it into our house so that we could take care of it. My father was horrified and proceeded to inform us that the dog was in heat and that we could do nothing for it, other than return her to her owner.

We did bring home many fish from our annual fair; however, they did not last that long, plus we could not pet them or walk them.

Carrie and I did get to enjoy the animals on our grandparents' farm, but it just wasn't the same as having our own pet that lived with us. We did have some experiences with animals on the farm that were noteworthy. We had a favorite cat, Slicky, that was blind and got along well with the family dog. She was a cool cat and had a great spirit. Her life ended very sadly as we found out about her death when my grandmother called to inform us that my mother ran her over at our last visit. The only solace was that my grandfather buried Slicky in her own grave, rather than putting her on the manure pile where all other deceased animals went.



We also tried to befriend the barn cats. This was a foolish adventure as they were pretty skittish. They would jump off the barn rafters on us and scratch our skin with their claws and draw blood! We also befriended the family dog, Ginger, but she didn't live with us so we would try to make the most of our time with her when we stayed overnight with our grandparents. Ginger loved us and any cookies or sweets that we would go outside with. When she died of old age, she died in her coop and Grandpa buried Ginger in her own grave as well.

As you can see, we had a lot of experiences, good, bad, and otherwise, with various wild and domesticated pets. I wanted to share the various pets that Carrie and I encountered. I wanted you to have better experiences with animals that I did.

I will close by stating how proud I am of you and all the care that you provide our two dogs, our cat, your rabbits, Dad's chickens, and our fish. You are a very loving and great pet owner. It will be interesting to see if you continue to have pets in your life. **(Christine Cina)**



Dear Khloe & Kandas,

Some Family History to Share with you—

There are many things and lessons in life that I would love to share with you, but one of the most shocking realities that came to me was when I was about 10 years old. My mother, your great grandmother Rosa, was a very protective woman. The reason for her protection only became clear to me after a conversation with your mother in 2023.

All my life I knew that my mother was very protective and very strict with us, but I never understood why. I thought it was because she was a single mother who worked third shift and was hoping that no one would find out so that we would not be taken away from her. There were a few things that your grandmother did to make sure that we were safe even though she had to work third shift in order to make ends meet with no outside assistance. Over 20 years later, I finally found out why.

In 2023 while visiting your mother during the holidays, I found out that your mother was kidnapped by a school bus driver. She as a little girl was trapped on a school bus that was supposed to drop her off, and she suffered from a very traumatic experience that shaped her whole life. I hope that you will be able to discuss the details with her. I will share with you my experience as a child, which also almost made me a missing or dead child at a very early age in life.



Here is where my story begins.

Dear loved ones, our family made an effort to make you good, beautiful people that will contribute to society. One of the downfalls of having great parents is that it requires the parents to over-protect their children from the truth of society's monsters.

When I was in fourth grade, I was given the right to start to walk home from school. I was very excited about this privilege since at one point I did have this privilege, but it was taken away from me briefly. It was the 1980s in a very safe neighborhood.

I was very happy walking home. Even one of the nuns noticed that I was walking home, and she questioned me about that. She asked me the exact route of how I walked home and I shared that information with her. Soon after that conversation while I was walking home, I noticed a vehicle following me. Luckily, your grandmother was very protective to the point of teaching us observation skills at a very early age. I noticed this vehicle continued following me. I decided to take a different way home in the process of trying to elude this vehicle. I walked into a small gift shop. This gift shop was in the middle of a residential block and sold Hallmark cards, candy, and small gifts. I looked around with no true purpose but to flee and hide from this vehicle that was pursuing me. When the female clerk asked what I was looking for, I just told her that I was looking at the candies. Luckily I had a few cents in my pocket.

This became part of my protective routine. One of the times that I was walking home the car was pursuing me again. This time I was in a different section of town, and I was forced to walk into a hair salon. When I walked into the hair salon, I pretended to be an adult. I don't know why I thought I could get away with this idea that I would fit in at this hair salon. Luckily the woman asked me if I needed any help, and I told her that I was just looking around. I repeated everything I remembered other adults

saying when they walked into stores. I was looking outside of the window as this vehicle was waiting for me outside. She asked me what was really happening and if she could help me. I told her exactly what was going on: that this vehicle was following me for several blocks. She could see the fear in my eyes.



The woman stepped outside to confront the vehicle. The vehicle took off in fear of disclosure.

The next day I went to school like I normally would, and the same nun asked me about my walk home. I told her exactly the same route that I had originally told her. My Inner Voice knew that I could not trust this nun. She had started to habitually ask me this question.

This time I had no doubt that she was behind whoever was following me in the vehicle.

I was very concerned about telling my mother what was happening and losing my privileges of walking home. I also witnessed my mother having so much stress while I was growing up. I didn't want to burden her with worry.

Every day I left school with a new pattern of getting to my home. I did this for many years, and I would stop by the same Hallmark store and chat with the same clerk until she left that job position. I developed a friendship with a woman who never knew that she was keeping me safe. Eventually, the man in the vehicle stopped trying to kidnap me. I knew something was happening behind the scenes. I could never share the secret with anyone because as a child you don't know who to trust and you don't know where to turn for safety when your own religious teacher is putting you in harm's way.

This nun was normally known for her meanness to the children. When she approached me, at an early age I learned not to trust what people put in front of you. You have to watch their actions. If you see someone that is normally cruel become kind, ask yourself why.

I remember her asking me which way I went home and an inner voice inside my mind asking why was she suddenly interested in my life after all these years of being in this school. The following day when she asked me if I really took the same route home that I had told her, again my inner voice clearly said lie to her.

This is how I discovered that gut instincts will save my life. Having this experience made me trust my gut instincts more than is logical for people around me. I have noticed in my life whenever I have not listened to that inner voice, I have put myself in a precarious situation. It is so important to be in tune with your inner voice. Always remember that if you are ever in danger, pray the 'our Father.'

Unfortunately, it was not the last time that I would be in danger. But it was the most vulnerable time that I was in danger because of my age and size. Please make sure that you keep in mind, in life how important it is to have mental and physical skills to progress in life and to protect yourself. Believe your children if they tell you they are in harm's way. Teach your children to be observers of their surroundings and to think critically. Always ask, "Why?" **(Ivonne Ramos)**

STORYTELLERS AND STORIES

After Professor Kevin Mullen played samples of stories Odyssey students created in storytelling workshops in his composition classes, he invited Odyssey Senior students to reflect on someone in their life who could tell stories well—and also to share stories of their own.

My mother came to Madison from Greenville, Mississippi, to find employment. She would talk about her life in Mississippi. She had nine or ten brothers and sisters, and they worked hard in the cotton field on the farm. Sometimes, they didn't have much food to eat. My mother's mother was a housewife and homemaker, and my mother's father was a preacher. Thinking back when she was telling her story, the family was loving, kind, and blessed even though they didn't have much. Mother always thanked the Lord Jesus for her blessings. **(Bea Chatman)**



We already loved my Uncle Rhoadia. So when he told a story or a joke, even in a crowded, loud room, he spoke and got all our attention. He was serious when he needed to be, laughed at some things that made us laugh, and brought out the truth in the person or things we would talk about. His voice captured us because we truly loved him and believed in him. He told stories and jokes that we knew would spark our attention, about family, his friends, and his life experiences. **(Pam Bracey)**



My son, Cyntrelle, before he passed away, was a good storyteller. He would always tell stories and he could keep people laughing. He was the life of the party. He would lie about you and have you mad, but you couldn't stay mad at him too long because he had you laughing at him for no reason at all. He would always tell this story about me when I was praying in my closet one day. I was speaking in tongues and when he knocked on the closet door. I opened it up and asked him, "Boy, what do you want?" The story went on from there. . . **(Jacqueline Tibbs)**

I had a brother whose name was Quintin who had lots of stories to tell, but he could never come to find the right story to tell because he'd been through so much in his life. He decided he wanted to write a book about his life. He started writing a book, but I don't know if he ever wrote it before he passed. Maybe I can write about him. He was a drug addict and was sexually abused by his teacher. He had HIV and lived in California. **(Remell Booker)**

My good friend Gene Camarata was an amazing storyteller. Gene and I worked together at MPI International as Purchasing Agents 8-10 hours a day in Deerfield, WI. We also went to Evangel Life Center Church on Femrite Dr. every Wednesday night and Sunday morning. He had the power of recall and retention when he told a story.

We all enjoyed his memory for detail about transforming his hippie lifestyle. Gene went from smoking marijuana, living in a commune, and rejecting the mainstream American lifestyle, to living and loving Jesus. We called him the Bible head. He could quote scripture and then in phenomenal detail relate it to his life and yours.

Gene was a memorist (a person who has exceptional memory skills to recall and retain detail). When I would travel with Gene and Pam, his wife, he would remember specific landmarks, street names, and even events that had happened.

Listening to Gene tell stories was like being in the center of a good book. He passed away on February 2, 2016. I miss him, but I am blessed to have called him my dear friend. **(Edith Hilliard)**

I am amazed by my brother Robert Rodgers. It's so incredible how he's so kind always, I mean always sharing and spreading his great heart around to help others. My brother Robert is the best. He can tell the funniest jokes. He reminds me so much of our dad. He looks like Dad, and he acts like Dad. How



astonishing! It's like Dad is still here on earth. My brother Robert is remarkable. If you ever heard him tell the stories of the Bible, boy, how he remembers the Scriptures. Unbelievable!

I wish that I had his brain. Robert keeps family and friends caught up on everything from the Bible and throughout our childhood past when we are enjoying one another while having family functions and reminiscing.

I depended on Robert if I couldn't go outside for whatever reason. It's like I never missed anything because listening to my brother Robert, I always imagined and felt like I was there. His stories were superb.

Brother, I can't thank you enough for your wisdom from being in the streets and having the knowledge of the ways drugs affected our asthma. I can't thank you enough for your knowledge, wisdom, and the love that you have for me to have shared information to me about how you realized that drugs were affecting my asthma. The drugs were shutting off my breathing. You saved my life. Brother, I love you. **(Kimberly Rodgers)**



My name is Jacqueline Tibbs. I was born July 2, 1967 in Chicago, IL. I want to tell you a story about my childhood pet racoon named Spa Joe.

It was the year of 1981 and the months were filled with moisture and heat as my siblings and I played in the grass near where my mother worked. We noticed an abandoned baby racoon, who would later become our pet. Mother wasn't home, but we convinced her to let us keep it. She thought it was a cat or some other type of animal. We gathered up all our toys and blankets as we picked up Spa Joe (our baby racoon) and, yes, we named him Spa Joe. He was so cute and innocent with eyes of a bank robber, and he stole me and my siblings' hearts.

Mother met us at home with dinner on the table and, before we could even say anything, she knew that her children were up to no good, but she loved us and that was all that mattered. As we sat around in a circle, the cover where we had hidden Spa Joe began to move and Mother began to scream, "What the heck is going on here?" My siblings and I got up from the table and ran over to the blanket. Out of nowhere appeared the cutest little face any racoon mother could love. Mother came over to see what all the fuss was about. As her eyes pierced his little face, I could see a spark of fear and love all at the same time. She yelled, "Where



the heck did ya'll get this from?"

Immediately you could hear a pin drop, and my talkative sister burst out to my mom, "We found him all alone wandering. Well wait, he found us."

"Can we keep him?" we all asked.

At first, Mother was not happy with the idea of keeping a racoon, but it soon appeared to her that it would give us a little responsibility, so she said yes. Spa Joe grew really fast from bottle feeding to playing ball and jump rope with my siblings and me. As he continued to grow, he started to open up the refrigerator, and he drank up the beer my mom put in there. He also drank our milk that we had to pour on our cereal on Saturdays to watch cartoons with. He became the baby of the family.

One day when we returned from school, we noticed that he was no longer there. We thought that he ran away. We quickly went to our mom's job, where she was sitting on a bench eating her lunch. We were yelling, "Mom, Spa Joe isn't at home!" She didn't seem too concerned as she paced the grass figuring in her mind what she would tell us. I'm guessing as soon as my brother was about to yell, she said she had to sell Spa Joe because she said that she was low on change and we were low on groceries and we needed some new clothes and shoes and some groceries. She told us that he was getting a bit wild. She told us that she sold him to a neighbor and that we can go and visit him. But when we got to the neighbor's house, Spa Joe had become someone's stew to eat. **(Jacqueline Tibbs)**

I woke up into darkness, no sign of light. I looked to my left and looked to my right. Captured into darkness, I felt nothing but fright. Not even aid could touch me. No human touch in sight. Did I die in my sleep on a long winter's night? Paralyzed in my thoughts with no choices to choose. I finally got some hope when I hit the clock to snooze. Still dark outside with a pinch of light, I was coming out of the darkness of these dreaded winter's nights. **(Pam Bracey)**

My grandmother is 93. She tells me stories about picking cotton while pregnant in the hot sun plus having two small kids, my mom and uncle. She told me her own in-laws were enslaving her, her husband's parents. When my grandfather came back from the Armed Forces Service, he whisked his family off to Chicago for a better life. They purchased a home. She still resides there today, but my grandfather has passed. **(Tanya Money)**

The Summer I Almost Drowned While Learning to Swim

When I was 14 years old, I joined a summer program and was learning how to swim. There were lots of teenagers there, and almost everyone wanted to learn how to swim. They teach you how to swim in the shallow water until you are strong enough to swim in the deep waters. They also teach you how to breathe, use your arms and legs, and float on your back. Over time, I was swimming from the shallow to the middle of the pool and doing just great.

The coach said, "Now try starting in the middle of the pool and swim towards the deep end." So, I walked into the middle of the pool. Luckily, I'm tall so the water only came up to the upper part of my body. Although I was a bit afraid, I was going to do it and I did!

The next class when my turn came to try to swim the entire length of the pool, I felt really confident that I could do it. As I was swimming, I could hear them cheering for me as I raced one of the other teens toward the deep. He stopped, but I kept going. Then all of a sudden, I got really tired and couldn't get my breath. I started to try to turn over on my back because I felt I could just float and then try to turn back towards the shallow water the way I was taught. However, I swallowed some water and began coughing as I thrashed around swinging my arms in a desperate attempt to save myself. I couldn't scream or anything. I was drowning and no one was paying attention!

I then heard someone say, "Get Cecile, get Cecile!" The next thing I knew I was being pulled out of the water after going under at least twice. They laid me

on my stomach and the coach straddled my back so the water could come out. Then he turned me onto my back where I continued coughing. As I was surrounded by others, they looked on curiously to see if I was indeed breathing or even still alive! I just couldn't seem to breathe! The coach kept telling me to calm down and try to relax. How could I? I almost drowned! I was so scared that I could have drowned, and after that, I felt so discombobulated.

After recovering, I sat there for a while wrapped in towels shivering with my teeth clapping together as others tried to warm me with more towels. The coach asked if I wanted to try again. Well, I looked at him as if he was crazy and said no. He said I should keep trying and not give up and to get right back in so that I wouldn't be afraid of the water. I really wanted to keep learning to swim, so I decided to give it another try. Most of them became discouraged and stated that they were not going to swim in the deep and seemed in awe of my bravery. I began to make steps towards the pool and decided that I would go for it. I got in, not jumped in, just walked in and began swimming. I made it from one end to the other, the length of the pool. However, I didn't feel that I would be able to swim back and wasn't even sure if I wanted to. The cheers, the laughter, and even the tears and teasing, and the "Go Cecile!" made it worth it. It felt good. I did feel brave and felt that I had accomplished something I wanted to do. Although it could have been a tragedy, it turned out to be a good thing that I didn't give up.

I am so glad that I took that chance to keep going because today, I swim in oceans when I go on vacations. I have been a member of health clubs and enjoy swimming very much. **(Cecile Brown)**



CONFRONTING OUR AGE

I absolutely love my age of 76. I worked full-time for 50 years and was blessed to have pensions from three different companies I worked for. I feel blessed when I was younger. My husband and I, raising three children, really didn't have the knowledge or time we needed to share with each other. **(Edith Hilliard)**

I am 67 years and proud of it! I can still "see" my "younger self" and I am glad that I have grown and have fulfilled most of what I have tried to accomplish in my life. Although my personality is basically still the same as in my youth, I have traveled a lot and have been fortunate to meet people I like on my journey. I am different but not a different person as in my youth. I just know more and have expanded my knowledge as I continue to grow and learn. **(Cecile Brown)**

My journey in life has a 65-year marker. I lived many experiences, tragic ones, painful ones, and happy ones. I was less vocal in my youth. As I got older, my inner liberal personality emerged. I wonder why she was hidden. I could have used her more in the past. **(Socorro Lopez)**



Well, I once could handle pain better but this pain differs from heartbreak. This physical pain that lasts more than a week or month into almost a year I believe came from stress and being in my 60s. I was able to let it go and move forward but not like when I was at a younger age. **(Pam Bracey)**

Besides not being able to dunk a basketball, I love being 65. No more fronting, tripping, or internal and external game playing. **(Brian Benford)**



I feel my age. I've been through so much medically, mentally, so close to death. I felt it, but I am "a force to be reckoned with." That was told to me by most all medical staff after my anniversary. In 2020 I had three strokes, had reconstruction of my head after it rotted away due to not being taken care of properly after my surgery. So through all the scars, I fought hard to get back to some sort of normalcy in life. I was not going to be in a wheelchair for the rest of my life.



2020 was a hard year. I was pretty much on my own—only one visit per day—so alone was something I had to get used to! I was told over and over that I shouldn't be here, not many survive what I went through. But I don't mind being old. Maybe a bit younger would be nice. My body has been through everything. God gave me a second chance—to educate others. **(Jane Ngwudo)**



First, I will start with, I am very grateful to God for these years. But, getting older is not for the faint of heart. My knees hurt, my back hurts, you name it, it hurts. I believe that I have a great amount of wisdom being the youngest of seven. These things are very, very different from my twenties. **(RJ Knight)**

I'm an adult: Just recently, I was pondering that major steppingstone. How I've changed from a very unhappy, insecure, alcoholic teenager to a very responsible adult. **(Marlene Toledo)**

I'm 57 and I feel like I'm getting old because I'm telling my daughter that in three years I'll be 60. It feels different from I was in my thirties. I felt like I had a lot of energy and spark and a lot of spunk and I had a lot of things to do. My kids being younger, they kept me going. **(Jacqueline Tibbs)**

I am very curious about my journey to old age at its finest, embracing challenges before me one breath at a time. **(Tanya Money)**

At my age, I am grateful to be independent. I see so many people much younger than me that are in need of assistance. I was raised in a religious home, where I was always told to pray for my blessings. **(Beatrice Chatman)**



Well, my name is Parris and I'm 69 years old. Even though I am old, I feel like there is nothing that I can't do until I can't do it...



Every day is different on how I feel about my age. Is my body achy? Maybe, but my mind is wise. The beauty of aging for me is to recognize that just like the mind has a fixed mindset and growth mindset, the body has fixed aches and healing opportunities. Believe me, healing can happen and is happening at any time and any place in the body. It's just like forming a recipe for healing. Does my recipe need more water, stretching, electrolytes, earthing mats?

I was born in the year of 1955 in a small town named Gary, Indiana in a Project called Delany. I went to school at Garnet Elementary School

with the Jacksons of the Jackson 5! My mother was a school crossing guard, and she knew everybody, good kids and bad ones. She was really a truant officer keeping kids in line. **(Parris Jones)**

I am currently 71½ and I feel time is more precious than ever. For me, that means letting go of the many "shoulds" that governed my earlier years and focusing more on time with friends, what limited family is left that I still have contact with, and spending lots of time outdoors, especially in woodsy areas, hiking (slowly and carefully) among nature, sitting in nature.

I am reading a book right now called "The Inner Work of Age: Shifting from Role to Soul." This work includes reaching out to those whose forgiveness I seek. I have even reached out to those who have passed and asked for forgiveness in dreams. This is important to me. For those who are still living, it is a sometimes painful and frightening thing to do. But I am so glad when I can have that closure. **(Chris Wagner)**

I am 56 and I am very grateful to be so. I have lost some friends and classmates to illness and suicide, so I do not want to take my life for granted. I want to make the most of my senior years. I am looking forward to expanding my role as an advisor and continuing to teach until I die. Lastly, I am looking forward to seeing my children blossom and, of course, to grandchildren. **(Christine Cina)**

Sometimes the most powerful tool for healing is your mind. Your mind will give you the power to believe that you deserve and are worthy of healing. Aging—how do I feel about it? I guess I have to remember my mindset is the most important ingredient. Now I have a bigger library of knowledge with each passing day on how powerful that can be. **(Ivonne Ramos)**



SENIORS ON ODYSSEY SENIOR

I'm hoping to be able to get my "senior" moments and memories on paper for my children. I enjoy the reading materials/books from class. Listening to fellow classmates' stories takes me back to my own family stories. Bringing out suppressed memories gives me comfort. Getting out of the house on Tuesday. **(Socorro Lopez)**



I am hoping to better my writing skills, leave a legacy for my family and me with bios, with the hope that our family loves themselves and appreciates family and all the opportunities life offers in a positive manner. **(Kimberly Rodgers)**

I hope to gain the ability to further my education. I never had a chance to graduate from high school. Many obstacles prevented me from even having a chance to go to high school. I completed only up to the 9th grade. I hope to become more confident. **(Jane Ngwudo)**

I want to learn how to read and write. I would like to also work on my high school education. I would like to work on building my self-esteem. **(Robert Rodgers)**

Reconnection and self-empowerment. **(Ivonne Ramos)**

I want to learn how to write better and to help me in my English. **(Jacqueline Tibbs)**

Just mostly to write and read because it seems to be a forgotten art (if you will). Thank you for the opportunity to express any writing ability I might have. I pray that life purposes find me in the best shape possible. With all that being said, I love being in my Odyssey Senior class. We all want to make sure that reading and writing is not a lost art. **(Tanya Money)**



A new friend, book, life

Culture; reading books

Empathy towards others
(Marlene Toledo)

Mostly a positive environment to sometime positive things to get me out of the house and to become more engaged in opportunity. **(Parris Dean Jones)**

I hope to be able to continue to write my short stories, and I want to write a history book about my family. **(Edith Hilliard)**

I have not been writing as much as I should have so I am looking forward to getting back into the flow of writing again. **(Christine Cina)**

I am hoping to write my story, my journey. I have had some very interesting things happen in my life and want to share my experiences. **(Cecile Brown)**

Great writings. My family enjoyed all my writings. I never shared much of my writings or poetry writing with them and they love it. **(Pam Bracey)**

I am hoping to find more ways to access various businesses in order to support some of the youth of color. I am also interested in finishing and getting my degree and opening my business by Oct 2025. I would like to become more confident in my memory. **(RJ Knight)**

I rarely accomplish anything without a deadline, so I like having assignments that are due as motivation. Otherwise, I don't write. **(Chris Wagner)**



Getting my spelling better, reading, coping. **(Allen Bell)**

Hearing the stories of others. **(Brian Benford)**

