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ODYSSEY ORACLE

IMAGES OF SECOND SEMESTER



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Emily Auerbach, Project Director; Oracle Editor
Kevin Mullen, Writing Instructor; Oracle Editor
Beth McMahon, Oracle Designer

eauerbach@dcs.wisc.edu
kmullen@dcs.wisc.edu

262-3733 or 712-6321
572-6730

www.odyssey.wisc.edu



MAKING A CASE FOR SEMESTER TWO



I want to participate in this program to better the quality of life for myself and for my children. I want to become more of a role model for my children. I want to grow and learn. I want to continue in the Odyssey Project for second

semester because it's my escape from everything else in my life. It's my one chance to be around positive people and do something positive for my future. **(Tenishia Bland)**



I look at myself as a work in progress; a project I'm excited and dedicated to working on. I am a woman, child of God, mother, and friend on an odyssey to find herself.

I have gotten much more out of this class than I expected. I am thrilled to be here every Wednesday to learn new information and be around loving and supportive people. Here I am writing again, improving my grammar, increasing my vocabulary, and just loving to learn new material.

I have contributed my parts in the Oracles from class writings and homework. Now I'm working on adding my voice more in class and getting over the fear of what others will think.

I would love to be a part of the journey for second semester because I have a thirst for knowledge. I have yet to prove myself as a writer, and I'm enjoying the ride. **(Lakoyé Buford)**

"I am thrilled to be here every Wednesday to learn new information and be around loving and supportive people."



I should continue to be in the Odyssey class because I have learned a lot from it. After graduating high school, I had not read or written as much as now. I can read more to my kids. I feel more confident reading to them, and it is a

great bonding time. I'm sure that by the end of second semester, I won't feel as nervous when Emily asks me to read out loud. It will be a great feeling to know that I don't have to be scared or ashamed because I know how to pronounce the words. **(Margarita Cid Luna)**



When I first applied for the Odyssey Project, my goals were to complete my class, stay active in projects, and apply myself to the best of my abilities. I have been coming to class, participating in every class. Despite several deaths [of loved ones] I've had, I still

managed to come to class and complete my work. I have fallen behind, but I have finished those past due assignments.

I'm very proud of myself. So far I have learned to balance work, school, and life. I know now that I should always open my mouth and ask for help whenever I need it. So no matter what I'm dealing with, there is no need to be overwhelmed; I can take a step back, create a plan, and conquer it. By the way, I have spent time with my classmates outside of class learning to take a new approach on life and learning new things.

The reason I feel I should be a part of the next part of this journey is because I'm vital to this class. ☺ I notice that during our discussions, my opinions do matter.

Also, I have completed the first half of my journey, and I see it fit (that it's a must) that I complete the other half. My vocabulary has expanded, and my writing skills have improved tremendously. I've even talked to my family along this journey. The fact that the Odyssey program makes you want to better yourself and encourages you along every step of the way has my siblings applying for the Class of 2016. Thank you because now I know even after the storm, the sun must shine again. **(Michelle Conley)**

"During our discussions, my opinions do matter."



I've learned you should be yourself and not let people pressure you into doing or being someone you are not. Take some changes to learn different things. Communicate, listen, and ask for help. I've made the first semester, so why wouldn't I complete the

final semester? It only makes sense to finish something you started. **(Derek Dodd)**

The work has been hard for me, but I appreciate the fact that this will help me in the long run. I hope to continue doing well so that I can walk across the stage and say, "I did it!" Even if no one else believed that I could, I believed in myself, and that's all that matters. I am happy and proud that I have been able to stick it out and not give up because giving up is not an option right now.



When I first started the Odyssey Project, I was a little excited and a little skeptical because #1 I was excited to start something new, a new beginning, a new chapter in my life, and #2 I was skeptical because I wasn't sure what to expect and even if I was going

to like it. The more I came to class and the more work I got, the more I realized that I was missing out on a lot by not finishing school. I like it when my kids see me doing homework. It inspires them to see that Mom is doing what she needs to do to better herself. I hope that they see me wanting better and doing better for them and will want to do the same. I've really learned a lot these past weeks, especially when we were reading Douglass. I learned a lot about myself and realized how much better we have it now compared to back in those days.

I thank everyone that has been a part of this learning experience. I'm glad to know that these special people took the time out of their busy schedules to help me—to help us try and reach our GOALS! **(Melissa Dominguez)**



I've learned a lot this semester, from punctuation to some of the best writers in history. I was skeptical at the beginning, asking myself why class was important. I started to think it was just for leisure, but now it has helped me with my vocabulary, writing, history,

and morals. My mind is beginning to tick in numerous ways. I wasn't confident in my work before, but now I see improvements in everything I do. The Odyssey staff has been so supportive to me and my situations. I'm very thankful that we have such a great staff and alumni.

I just wish there weren't so many obstacles this semester. I yearn for a better understanding of everything, and I'm craving for more knowledge than ever before. This class has awakened the school girl in me again, and I love it. I'm ready for more. Through all of my emotional struggles in the first semester, I'm burying the ignorant me and becoming more of the intelligent woman I've had stored inside of me. **(Myisha Ellis)**



When Mrs. Emily called me and said that I was accepted into the Odyssey Project, I couldn't believe it. I asked myself what she saw in me and what made her pick me out of all the other applicants. But I couldn't imagine the depth of this program. First semester was so

hard and scary for me. I had to get back into the hang of being in school, since it had been so long. Then life and all my problems got me down and got in my way. My son's father beat me up, and I had to go back and forth to court for that. Then I lost my house and moved in with my sister, but that didn't work out.

But I look forward to second semester. It is a fresh start and a chance to give 100% of myself. I would like to become more involved in the class and give back to the community. Odyssey is much more than a class that meets once a week; it is a journey. I've been living in a cave, and Odyssey is the light. As I sit here writing, I'm wondering what the next book is that we're going to read next semester. What else do Mrs. Emily, Mr. Kevin, and Coach have in store for us? Their expectations are high, but it's only because they know we can do it. **(Kelly Hayes)**

"Odyssey is much more than a class that meets once a week; it is a journey."

Why should I continue into the second semester? There aren't any dumb questions, so I won't say that, but to me it's obvious. ☺ For one, this is round two in the Odyssey Project for me. I went to prison and was unable to complete year one [2003



-2004]. I believe I came back with a vengeance, and I am committed to completion. The entire first semester I completed all assigned homework and projects. I did make-up work for my one missed class [illness] and came early to our last three classes to complete study group hours. So, yeah, I'm in it to win it. ☺ **(Jessi Hodges)**



Even though it has been hard for me to complete homework at times, I'm still trying. Some of the reading has been difficult, but I never give up. **(DeAngelo Hood)**



Throughout semester one I thought about dropping out of the class because of me working so many hours and not having enough time for my son. With the help of my teachers and really understanding myself, I noticed I was making the same mistakes as before when I dropped out of school. I had the wrong energy to give me the strength to push through and move forward with my decisions and not regret any option given to myself. I doubted my intelligence and questioned my relevance in this Odyssey class. I then asked myself, if I was not here where would I be? What help would I have to get back in school? Who all is in my support corner? How many people do I really have who have helped influence and inspire me to do more?

Here at Odyssey, the first semester gave me the opportunity to dig deep within myself, remind myself of my goals in life, take small steps to completing them, and keep in mind the big picture.

If I had not joined Odyssey, would I have met such smart, different, outspoken, and driven individuals, whom I have built healthy relationships with? Would I have made some decisions differently that I have made in the past six months? Would I not have had the chance to take my son to a Family Science night and watch his eyes light up at the sight of me dropping a space ship in the air? Would my son have not come home that night throwing toys in the air, as if the object he was throwing was a spaceship of his own?

I believe I deserve to have the option of completing a second semester. I have come so far in my mental process to not give up. I know I still have some weaknesses to get past in order to successfully complete school in the near future, but this is what it is about. This class has helped me explore myself beyond measures.

In the second semester I am hoping this class will teach me new things about myself and how to dig deeper and train my mind to do some things differently to make better decisions for myself. I want to not let my outside world close me into a cave of images rather than teaching reality! Thank you to all of the teachers in this class, as well as all of the students. As I have tried to critique their work, it resulted in me critiquing my own, and for that I love and will cherish each individual in this class. I look forward to the new readings we will embark upon and the new accomplishments we all are here to reach! (**Prodajae Huntley**)



I want to continue in the Odyssey Project because I don't want to miss out. I don't want to miss out on graduating, and I don't want to miss out on this opportunity for a stepping stone. Even though I got behind on my homework, I didn't miss class. It's hard to work and pick up my baby from daycare and then not be

too tired to do homework in the evening. I liked writing about my daughter Journee for the Oracle. I shared personal things with the class, and it got me to open up a bit. I felt I gave people a piece of me. Reading the Oracle shows me that everyone has a story. It lets me know I'm not the only one struggling. (**Latesha Jackson**)



I should be continuing to the second semester of Odyssey, and that's a fact. The reason I say this is because I see a growth in myself that was not present when I first began this class. I never imagined going back to school in the first place, so for me to not only be back

but exceeding expectations has given me a newfound sense of confidence. I am so happy and overjoyed. To be honest, I really feel blessed because things haven't always been so good. This time last year I was always complaining and really regretted the move to Madison, but for some reason something seemed to have a hold on me, preventing me from moving back home. Then behold I learned about Odyssey, got accepted, and ended up making progress. The complaints slowed down tremendously, and I am finally dealing with way less stress.

Some people may feel where I'm coming from when I say becoming an adult and dealing with the



real world and responsibilities we never knew about when we were kids, you kind of lose touch with who you were and become accustomed to the new, wounded person you are now. You lose those expressions like the drawings in the notebook, the poems you used to write, and the tablet full of songs you created. Since I've been in Odyssey, I have done nothing but read and write. I was forced, in a way, to come back to grips with my old self. The expressive, creative, vivid, and concrete work that I used to create is slowly coming back to me. I need to continue with Odyssey so I can go further and further beyond belief and thrive. I know I have something to offer/show the world. I just don't know what that is yet, but Odyssey is the beginning of me digging it from within. **(Nitia Johnson)**



The reason why I should continue into second semester is because I've learned so much about African American history and art from past years, more about my rights, and how to not make fragments and run-ons. If I had not been accepted, I would have never known this.

It changed me a lot and helped me think more about my future. I would love to be a part of the second semester because I want to know more new things from other places. I also love being a part of the team. I've learned so much from my classmates and it helps me a lot to know I'm not the only one who struggles. **(Brenda Juarez Cruz)**



I need to stay in this class because of my one and only daughter, CHARLIE. I've noticed that I have nothing else going for me but the stability that is my daughter. I've also recognized that life is not the fairytale that I was promised but the hardcore lessons that

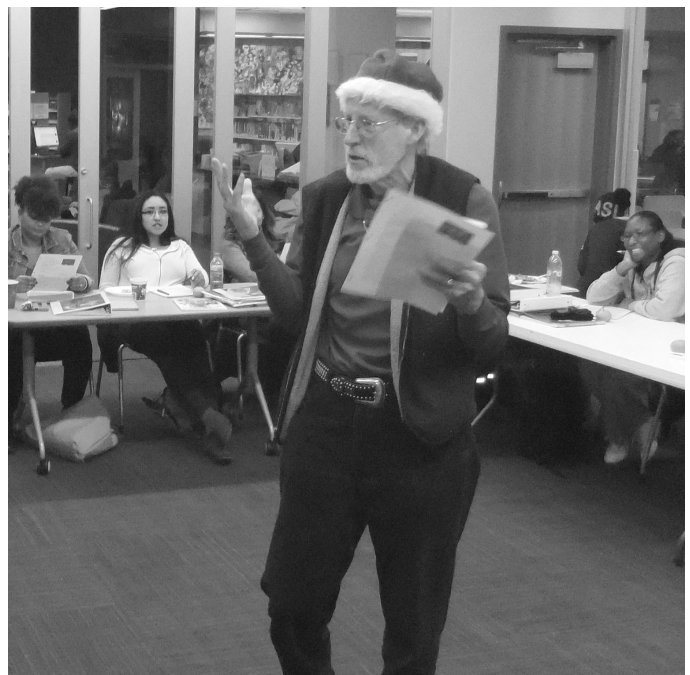
I've been dealing with. I cannot lie when I say

that I don't like what's been happening to me, but I have to let the promises go and be an adult. I'm scared all the time of what's to come, and I work hard to make it as though it's not much of a deal. But the help I've had with this class has been adequate thus far. I'm too grateful but clearly have not shown it. In the end, all I want for everyone to know is that all I needed is the odyssey and the great trail that comes from being on it. **(Dorothy Katana)**



My reason for wanting to stay in Odyssey is because this program has made a dramatic change in my life. Finally I feel I can accomplish my goals, thanks to my classmates and my wonderful teachers. I feel like I have joined a great and talented family, and together

we can conquer the world. It brings tears to my eyes knowing that we all came from a rough lifestyle and now we are not looking back. It's to the top of the mountain for all of us. We are Odyssey, and nothing and no one can tell us anything different. **(Joseph Lentz)**





In the past when I would run into problems or couldn't find the answers to questions or was not able to solve a problem, I would quit. I had very serious medical problems with my legs and wanted many times to quit, but I didn't. I

struggled to catch up, and I did.

In the past, my pride prevented me from asking for the help I needed to complete the work assigned to me. I tried, and I am pleased at what I have accomplished. . . . I have read material I would never have considered reading had I not been in the program. Next semester I will try even harder to maintain my standing and grades in the class. **(Patricia McKnight)**



I would like to continue because I want to finish what I started. I believe that I am a bit more open now during class. During our group meeting with Kevin, I was friendlier. I was also able [at the Why Vote event] to stand up in front of a public audience and speak,

which I have never done before. I can say that now I am a bit more open. I would like to be part of next semester because I still have more room for improvement and growth. I want to continue my education even when it's hard to keep going. I

try to participate during class and try to help after class. I try to give back as much as I can. **(Heydy Pichardo Reyes)**



I feel like I accomplished so much this semester. School-wise and at home, the Odyssey Program helped me be a better learner and mom. It helped me with my fear of going back to school. It was a tough semester. It was really hard studying with three kids while

also maintaining two jobs, but it showed me you can do anything you put your mind to. I feel like this journey was a success. It taught me it may not be easy, but it pays off at the end. I really enjoyed working with my teachers and classmates on Wednesday. Sometimes when I seemed stressed, they comforted me. Other times, just reading some of Emily's stories encouraged me. I think I will be more focused and determined second semester because without education, life only gets harder. **(Mikiea Price)**

"The Odyssey Project has given me the support, help, and strength that I need to keep walking on my path to the Promised Land."



When I started my odyssey in the Odyssey Project, I felt like my dreams were all scattered, and I didn't really know where to start.

Now, one semester later, I feel as though I'm taking serious steps towards my future and purpose in life. I no longer feel as though I am swimming in a bottomless pit. I can now feel the ground beneath my feet.

During these past few months, I have gained a tremendous sense of purpose. I've met a handful



of people that are making me feel stronger and supported—people that reassured me that my dreams are valid.

When I first applied to Odyssey, I was thinking mostly about taking action about my life. In second semester, I want to be a part of the blossoming of all of my classmates and to witness the rewarding and proud feelings of my teachers and tutors when they see us walking on our graduation day thinking how they did it, one more time, with their class of new Odyssey 'children.'

The Odyssey has given me such a strong sense of self. I feel empowered, loved, and encouraged to go farther than I thought possible. I've seen how I matter, how I hold a special spot in the class. I feel proud when I recall myself reading my "Why Vote" essay and all of my pieces for the Oracle. I can't wait for next semester, yet I'm already saddened by the thought that it'll be over soon.

However, I feel confident that the Odyssey Project has given me the support, help, and strength that I need to keep walking on my path to the Promised Land. **(Sahira Rocillo Ramírez)**



I consider myself to be an intelligent, open-minded, and to some extent creative person who is very giving almost to a fault, but also a person who is most definitely used to doing things her own way—which, by the way, is messed up.

What I have gotten out of this class thus far is tolerance for others—well, at least more than I had before I came to Odyssey. I am still a little judgmental, and this judgmental attitude comes from my own failures in life. I expect more from



others. I have the attitude that I did it and now I am telling you about it so that you do not have to repeat the same stupid things that I did.

I have contributed to this class by

bringing wisdom, knowledge, and age. I have also contributed to this class by not being ashamed to share my experiences, whether good or bad.

"The Odyssey Project is helping me hammer and forge myself into the person that I want to be."

Henry David Thoreau said, "You cannot dream yourself into a character; you must hammer and forge yourself one." This is what the Odyssey Project is helping me do: hammer and forge myself into the person that I want to be.

I would like to continue on in this second semester because I have learned from the mistakes that I made in the first semester. It is not about fitting it in. It is about being a part of something bigger than yourself. How blessed I am that God allowed me to experience this Odyssey. **(Lenora Rodin)**



I am very grateful to the Odyssey professors. They have given me lots of help and teaching this semester.

Odyssey has taught me not to be afraid to take risks, to dare to do something challenging and to be ready to give my best. If I fail, I will stand up and keep trying.

First semester has been wonderful. I learned about great writers, philosophers, and people who had to

fight to defend people's rights and stand up and out against crime and injustice. It's been an amazing journey full of satisfaction.

The Odyssey Project has made me discover how important education is. Also, reading has opened many new doors in search of knowledge. Reading not only benefits me but also helps motivate my daughter to keep learning and discovering new worlds.

I do contribute to Odyssey by attending every Wednesday night, having homework done on time, and also showing respect and not judging my classmates because of their opinions or preferences.

I would like to continue second semester. My commitment will be bigger than it was for first semester. I want to keep learning every week from my teachers and from my classmates' experiences. **(Natalia Rodríguez Miramontes)**



The thought of school and passing pumps fear in me, but not as much as it has in the past. In the beginning, I had no expectations of myself or this class, and now I do. I'm actually seeing that every time I try to

focus on this class,

all types of distractions pop up, attempting to lure me away from the process. That shows me that there's more to this class that's beneficial to my personal life, and that makes me want to try harder.

This past semester, I just wanted to pass my class and finish my homework. Because I'm used to failing, that [passing the class] became my only

"Odyssey has taught me not to be afraid to take risks."

mission, but as time passes I want to put more of me into my work. I want to spend more time

with all my school work. I want to face my fears by putting all of me into this opportunity and taking from it all it has to offer, instead of just pacifying my fear. For example, I became content with showing up to class every week and finishing work, but I didn't push myself to show up with a goal and a plan. I didn't dig that deeply within me to answer questions on homework.

Although I feel myself growing a lot, this coming semester I want to make some goals for myself and push myself to accomplish that. One goal is to read all my Oracles and get to really know my classmates. Although most times I want to give up (especially this week), I'm tired of feeling like a quitter or a failure. I won't be so negative, though, because I do participate in class, I show up to community events, and I'm expanding my mind frame (thought process) by doing most of my homework at least. Although sometimes I'm too frustrated to do homework or study, I make sure on Wednesdays that I'm where I need to be. I want to spend 2015 pushing myself to the limit for greatness, starting today . . . starting with this class.

(Shaneika Sanders)





The Odyssey Program has been one of my favorite programs that I have been in. I have learned so much from it, including history, vocabulary, and literature. I have improved my writing, reading, spelling,

and punctuation. The teachers and tutors are great. They really care about the students, and they try their best so we can learn. I have made a lot of new friends and got to know all of them.

I would like to be part of next semester as well because I love everything I learn each Wednesday. I enjoy being there with all of the other students, getting to know them more. It is a great opportunity to keep going.

(Veronica Tinajero)



discover who I am and more importantly who I want to be. Gene and Craig have opened my eyes to the beauty and truths I never knew. With their guidance I have been able to grow in confidence and strength.



When I first met Emily, I was a frazzled single mother in search of hope and answers to my future. I had lost all confidence and belief in myself and here was a perfect stranger that wanted to give me a chance—a chance to find my own Odyssey.

I have taken this opportunity to expand my knowledge and follow through with all the extra experiences offered. I've worked hard this semester, studying and making sure all my homework was done and turned in on time. I've taken advantage of the study groups and my appointments with Kevin. I've attended as many extra events as possible, not limited to the Madison Symphony Orchestra, Community Dinners, and Why Vote.

This class changed my life so much in this first semester. I am nowhere close to being the person that walked into here last September. Through Kevin, I've found my writing voice and am starting to feel comfortable with my grammar and punctuation. Coach has impacted me with a passion to discover vocabulary. Jean Feraca has helped me discover Socrates, and my amazing tutors Mike and Jarrett helped me understand Plato's writings. They helped me

There is nothing I would love more than to continue on to the next semester. This semester I have found my voice and myself. I have also taken my beginning steps towards my own odyssey and am looking forward to discovering where this odyssey will take me.

(Nissa Uriostegui)

"I have found my voice and myself."



I should continue on because I believe that I showed my dedication to this program in all that I've done. I know there are areas where I can improve, but that's why I need to continue on in this program. I've learned so much on how important it is to

read literature that comes from so long ago. These before would be absolutely nothing to me, but now that I understand, I have come to see how important all this is. There's no other thing or school that I would want to be a part of. The amount of work that Emily, Kevin, and the rest of the staff do is beyond amazing. In my eyes, I am so grateful to be working with such amazing and caring people. I feel blessed to have them in my life. With all they do, I try and do me—to hold my own and do the most so that I am not a problem but of some help to them and the rest of the class. I WILL BE ONE OF THE SUCCESS STORIES AT ODYSSEY! **(Christopher Villalpando)**



Since I have gotten into the Odyssey program, I have had to gain more control of my time management. I have to set time aside to complete my homework. This means less time doing non-productive activities such as Facebook and television.

As a person I feel like I have something to look forward to now. I feel important now that I am a part of this class. Also I have met some long term friends—people that I can relate to. It is amazing that on the first day I knew only one person and had little interest in getting to know others. Now I look forward to seeing certain people each week. I have been more responsible, and I know there is only more to come from this. As in the beginning, I want to complete something, and I still feel the same way.

Next semester in the class I will be more involved. I know that is easy to say, but I think I have a plan. Second semester I will focus more on being a part of the conversation, reading, and tutoring opportunities. When I did my interview to get in the class, Emily asked if I would have a problem with speaking out and being engaged. I answered, "No." I will live up to that this semester!! Thanks for the opportunity. **(Janina White)**



I think that I should be in the second semester because I have worked hard in the Odyssey Program. I turned in my homework on time. I have slacked on a few things, like not making it to the group studies. I have gotten a lot out of this class. I always have been a big

reader, but reading stuff I never really would have read before is great. I am breaking things down so I can understand them more and using the dictionary more, too. I just look at things differently now.

This class has opened me up to new things in life—different types of poems, what the meaning of them is, meeting new people in class, and trying new foods that we have every Wednesday night! I'm just grateful that I have this opportunity to get six credits from the UW Madison and continue getting my education. I think I've been more focused on school than in a long time. Since my kids are older now, I can really focus on school. **(Brandi Whitlock)**



TO MY CHILDREN

BY LAKOYÉ BUFORD

To Chance

Just yesterday I was holding you for the first time
Man, it's already been two years, how time flies
Was hesitant, but I knew it was real by your first smile
Never knew a love like this that takes me so high

I could wake up feeling so overwhelmed with the blues
Then turn my frown upside down with the sight of you
This love right here feels incredible, never dull
It's truly unconditional, impossible, immeasurable

Promise me you'll be OK when I'm not around
This world is crazy, keep both feet on the ground
Stay true to yourself, never out of fear back down
Keep God the closest, He'll be there when no one is around

Promise me never turn away when things don't go your way
Nothing comes easy, just the life of a human being
When the fight in you has weakened, just kneel and pray
Give it to God to fix, never go astray.

A Letter to My Daughter

Dear Fatimah,

I see a world of opportunities for you. Having you was one of the best decisions I ever made. I want your life to be filled with creativity, adventures, love, support, and most of all happiness.

I never laid eyes on a more beautiful girl than you, my little blessing. That smile and laughter helps fade away any feeling of sadness, and those eyes tell me I can become the mother you need. Your beauty alone will get you far, but thirst for knowledge to get you farther. Remember nothing comes easy, so you have to be willing to work to where you want to be. Never let someone's words have power over your thoughts, and stay true to yourself. Fight for what you believe in, and never back down due to fear. Remember you don't need to seek approval from anyone, but God. Love yourself, or nobody will. Have respect for yourself and expect it from anyone in your presence.

Go after what you want with passion; never lose sight of your dreams. When you fall, get back up, dust yourself off, and keep fighting. Search for yourself and never let anyone tell you who you are. Always keep your head up because cloudy days don't last forever. Stay beautiful.

Love, Mommy



OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES



Urban League of Greater Madison

Family Science Night

On Friday, December 5, 2014, I took my daughter and nephew to the Family Science Night. I raced home from work and raced over to the UW Space Place. When we arrived, we had only about 20 minutes to explore. The kids rushed downstairs, and the first place we stopped was the spiral galaxy. They were able to see what the galaxy looked like and what type of machines they use in outer space. Some of the equipment looked like robots, but that only excited the kids more. Some of the stations were very informative about what they offered in the community. They also had market baskets,

and the kids got to meet the farmer from Growing Power and his twin daughters. Let's just say we know that galaxies are star-making machines and have made plans to go to the Saturday workshops. **(Michelle Conley)**

We went to the Science Night on Friday. It was great. We got there at 5:30 and went straight to try all the experiments.

We had a lot of fun. When

it was time for dinner, my kids did not want to go because they did not want to miss anything. I told them that we needed to go eat and so we went. They hurried up and did not let me enjoy my food. I love when they have fun, especially if it is with something they can learn from. **(Veronica Tinajero)**



Urban League of Greater Madison

We had so much fun at the Family Science Night. I'm glad I was able to make it out! This has been the first outing my son and I were able to enjoy. This made me realize I need to spend more time with my son and enjoy more family outings like this. He really enjoyed himself as well, though he was shy. I got to learn some new things about my son's personality. I know he can be shy, but as we took our time seeing other faces and participating in the science labs, eventually he opened up and pointed to a lot of cool things. He even said "Fishy" as we passed others looking at fishes. Hahaha! He noticed a lot of cool things, even though he could not do much. This showed me how fun it can be being a parent, even though it may get rough sometimes. I'm glad I was able to get him out of the house. Seeing new people and new things will get him ready for the world!

(Prodajaé Huntley)

Community Service and Activism

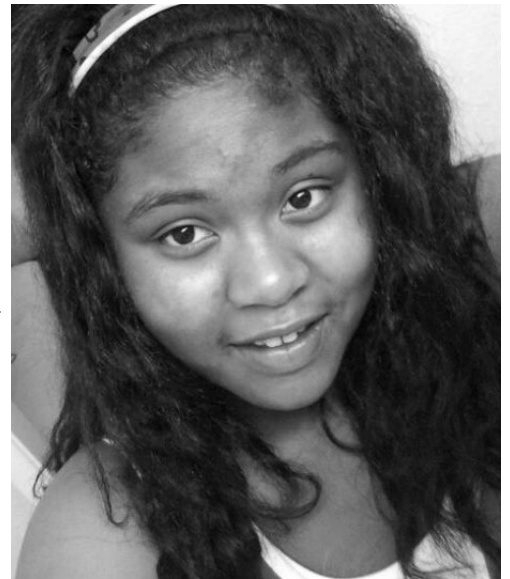
I have volunteered with the South Side Raiders Youth Football organization. I spent every Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday afternoon as well as every Saturday with the Raiders in September and October 2014. The Raiders are a youth football team for fourth through eighth graders here on the Southside of Madison. I provided rides, meals, and leadership. It was an amazing experience. The heart and the motivation in these kids inspired me. No matter their personal hardships, they left them behind when they hit the field. They had the best record in the league despite the fact that they had the least funding. I'm proud to say I was a part of it!

(Jessi Hodges)



For the past several weeks, I have been volunteering to help an out-of-control teen turn her life around. I have noticed that being in Odyssey, everyone has a story, and they all want to overcome their struggles. The

teen has been bullied for several years and is now in jeopardy of being expelled from school. My sister-in-law no longer wants her in the home, and she has no place to go. I decided to take her in my home and push



her to do better. I have been describing my accomplishments in Odyssey, and she is very interested. I have partnered up with the school staff and created a plan for her. We spend quality time with her, talk about things she can do to better herself, and what we can do to help her achieve those goals. Now she is staying out of trouble, and she may be attending Odyssey Jr. on Wednesdays! She has done a 180 degree change and is on the road to success. **(Michelle Conley)**

I participated in community service at my gym giving out free personal training sessions in return for small donations that I wanted to give to the Foundation for Kyle Morgan, a local 25-year-old man [son of Carrie Morgan, Odyssey '12] who came down with a very rare cancer that his insurance wouldn't cover. **(Christopher Villalpando)**



Thursday, December 4, 2014, I was invited to help set up the posters and give my input on the December 5th rally/protest for the "Black Lives Matter: Ferguson to Madison" movement. An old friend picked me up, and we made our way to the community center off Park St. We organized how the bodies would look under the sheets during the die-in. The younger kids were creating more posters, and the leaders were organizing where the march would begin and end and other things of that nature.



One thing I loved about working with this group was the fact this group is made up of the Black and Asian communities. Now that's not something you see every day, but the Asian members of the group are truly hands-on and are very, very supportive of what the Black community is doing. Even after the community center closed, we kept working. Some of us left the center and went to one leader's house to finish paper work and posters. We didn't finish until 1 AM that Friday morning.

I wasn't just a part of something major: I was a part of the process that led up to something major and positive. That's new for me, and it was beautiful. **(Shaneika Sanders)**

Library Events

I took my kids to "Read to a Dog." Since they love pets, they wanted to go again every month. So far it has been twice. My son goes to a bilingual school and now is only learning Spanish. One time he was reading to the dog and the owner said to him, "My dog doesn't understand Spanish. Can you translate what you just read to him?" My son did, and from then on, he started to learn how to read in English. His motivation is the dogs. By the second time we went, he was doing really well. My daughter also loves reading. She loves me to read to her, but when it is time to read to the dog she makes up the story. They both enjoy it a lot. **(Veronica Tinajero)**



Community Dinner

At the beginning of November 2014, I attended a Community Dinner [through a partnership between Odyssey, Growing Power, UHS, and Slow Food UW] and took along my son, sisters, and my parents. As we came in, my teacher Emily had



us write our names on stickers to wear and had me fill a form to enter a raffle for a veggie and fruit basket giveaway.

I was the first winner and came home with a basket of food! At the Community Dinner, they served us a great meal and



dessert, and they delighted us with a talk about growing our own food. I benefited so much from the talk that I'm seriously thinking about growing small things such as cilantro and chilies next spring.

It was a very fun experience, and it made me remember about my grandma's garden and trees. I could almost taste the fruit! I want to attend another community dinner. **(Sahira Rocillo Ramírez)**

I went to a community dinner in October. I came with Tara and her family. I love the

healthy dinner that we ate. My children liked it as well. I met with Dorothy, and we got to know each other better. Ever since then, that's been my girl! A man [Robert Pierce, Growing Power] gave a speech about the food from Louisiana, and it made me hungrier!! Dorothy and I won the food basket drawing. My children decorated pumpkins and enjoyed it. I enjoyed myself! **(Janina White)**



PROFILES IN COURAGE

Juana Garcia, Big Fighter By Natalia Rodríguez Miramontes

Born in extreme poverty, Juana Garcia learned at a very early age how to work hard to sustain her family. Juana got married when she was only 16 years old. She dedicated many years to the care of her ill daughter, while suffering abuse and infidelity from her husband. For more than 13 years, Juana dreamed and wished to reunite with her kids, who had migrated to the US. Juana deserves my admiration for her big fight to overcome obstacles and keep her family together.

Juana Garcia was born in Mexico on August 4, 1950. She came from a humble and hard-working family in a rural community. When she was only six years old, her mother passed away. Her father took charge of his nine kids, and as soon they were eight years old, Juana and her siblings needed to work to help bring money home. Juana used to bake empanadas (turnovers) with the help of an improvised oven made of metal and heated up by charcoal. Also, Juana usually made some extra money by raising and keeping hens. There was no time for school, so Juana didn't learn to write and read until she was 13 years old.

At age 16 Juana got married to a man much older than her. She fell in love and had nine kids. For many years she suffered in silence because of her



her, and one of them is Juana's cousin. Juana describes that men at that time were totally chauvinistic— the more kids and women they had, the bigger their manliness was. Unbelievably, Juana has been married to him for almost 50 years. She explains this by saying, "He is the father of my kids and I love him."

When Juana was pregnant with twin girls, her sister died giving birth because of hemorrhaging.

Juana believes that such a sad event influenced the health of her twins. When the babies were born, everything seemed to be normal, but at 15 days old one baby got very sick and died. To Juana the death of her little girl was the most terrible, sad situation that any mother could stand. At age five, the other baby girl's health deteriorated. After she suffered high temperatures for days, doctors diagnosed what Juana did not want to hear—cerebral palsy. Juana dedicated all the coming years to the care of her ill daughter. Five of her kids migrated to the US looking for a better future. Thirteen years passed and Juana did not go to see them because she was committed to the care of her daughter who was lying prostrate in bed. Every day she prayed to God asking for their protection and dreaming about the day the whole family could be reunited again. Juana's ill daughter unfortunately died at age 41 because of a cerebral hemorrhage. After that, Juana planned to come to the US to reunite with her kids. Finally in January 2014, she got a visa and passport, and she traveled to the US to meet with her kids.



husband's infidelities and abuses. Juana's husband had kids with four other women while being married to

There are no more tears in Juana's eyes. Now is the time to enjoy her kids and get to know each grandchild—grandchildren who Juana had never met. She is grateful to God for allowing her to see them before it is too late. Now after six months

visiting her kids, Juana is ready to go back to Mexico to reunite with her husband, who has stayed in Mexico because of his multiple jobs. For me, Juana is a great example of love and sacrifice. She has taught me how big a mother's love can be.

My Strong Mother/Father

By Brenda Juarez Cruz

"It's okay. I am your Mother and Father, and everything will be okay." These are the words that my mom told me when my dad no longer lived with us. I had asked her why my friends had a dad and I didn't. That was one of the first examples where my mother showed courage. She also had the courage to move on and leave part of her life and childhood behind, just to give us a better and safer life. She had to be really strong to work hard to support her three children without having anyone to help her at the time.

My father left us when my brother and I were still little kids (eight and nine years old), and my sister was a baby at the time. We didn't really understand what was going on between them, but all we wanted was for things to get better like how we were before. When my father left, my mother was all we had. My mother knew she had to make a way to support us, to give us a roof, and to let us have the things we needed. How was my mom going to know how if part of the years she was with my dad she was a housewife? But she knew that she couldn't just stand there sitting or doing nothing and letting that problem drag her down.

A new life began for us and especially for her. She was now going to have to do the job that my father had to do for the family. It's not an easy move for a single mother with three kids, but she had the strength to do it. My mother made a lot of sacrifices for us just to give us a better life. It wasn't easy for her to move on to leave the person that she was married to for years and had a family with, all because that person who she trusted betrayed her. After all that, she was strong enough to walk with us through life and to catch us when we fell, to show us a different way to see life in a positive way

without my father being around. Mother showed me how not having a father isn't really that bad because it all goes with life. Things happen, and we always have to be ready for what life puts us through. Even though I didn't really care about that, I would still sometimes ask my mom for my father, like, "Where is he? Who's he with? Why did he leave us? Why do my friends still have their father but not me?" — questions a kid would ask. All those questions would make her really sad and angry because she knew that we sometimes felt weird, sad, or uncomfortable for not having our father around. But she never gave up. She kept fighting to show us better ways to see life and to always feel sure about ourselves that we are worth it and can be independent.



I can tell you that being a single mother isn't an easy job for my mother, yet she has the courage to keep fighting and to still be here with us. She has truly shown me that no matter what, you always have to get yourself up. Everything is possible with or without a man in the family, with or without a struggle. She's my role model and my pride. Because of the strong woman I have as a mother, I'm more than ready for life. Now she still is working even though her health is not 100% good. She doesn't want to stop showing us that nothing can stop her.

I'm proud to have her as my mother because she's the perfect role model to prepare me for life and to help me make right decisions in life. My mother has a lot of courage because we were her motivation. Her life wasn't easy, but she's smart, strong, and courageous to fight against the struggles that come to her life. This is my courage story about my strong mother/father.

A Courageous Friend with a Heart of Gold

By Heydy Pichardo Reyes

My friend Yolanda is courageous. She had the ability to make a decision that was selfless, just to make someone else happy. Courage is the ability to do something that frightens one. After reading the definition of courage in the dictionary, I realized that, if not put into action, it is just a word that sits in the dictionary. It is like the finish line at the end of the track field, but you have to make the decision to start running to be able to make it there. Not everyone can make that decision to take courage and start that run. In my lifetime I have met people who I consider to be courageous, but none like my friend and old roommate Yolanda.



Being nice does not mean that you are a pushover. My friend Yolanda has a heart of gold. She is the type of person that will give up what she has to give to someone else to make them happy, but, no, she is not a pushover. She is a person with a lot of kindness. Yolanda has four kids but had to leave one of them behind in Mexico, where she is from, to give him a better future. Trust me when I tell you there is not one day that she does not go to bed regretting that decision. She knew that she had to make that decision to be able to provide for her son. That is one example for me of what courage is.

Great stories come from the ability to listen to others. Yolanda and I were roommates for a year, and that was one of the best experiences I had. As soon as I moved in, Yolanda and her family made me feel like I was part of the family and treated me like I was one of her kids. During this time, I got to know her better. We knew each other from church, but we got to know each other better on a different level when we became roommates. She is such a mom and always has advice during decision-making times. She also has a shoulder for me to cry on when times are hard. During this time is when I got to hear the most courageous story I ever heard.

Making decisions that affect another's future takes courage. About five years ago, Yolanda's mom was diagnosed with cancer. Her mom lived in Mexico. As we can imagine, poverty was a big barrier to get the treatment she needed to have a better life until death caught up to her. From the time she got diagnosed, her mom was suffering with pain. It just got worse to the point where she could not eat, walk, or do any of her daily activities. Yolanda describes that as one of the hardest times of her life. Growing up, she saw her mom being abused by her husband. She saw her mom working hard to be able to support her kids, one of them being Yolanda. After finding out

that her mom was dying and suffering from this illness, Yolanda asked God why this was happening to her mom since she has suffered a lot already. Yolanda came to the conclusion that her mom had suffered enough, and she made the most courageous decision that anyone can make. As the definition said, courage is the ability to do something that frightens one. I cannot imagine how much courage it took to do what she did. She told me that she started to pray to God and tell him that if He was not going to heal her mom, He should just take her with Him. As a daughter I cannot even imagine coming to make this decision.

I believe it took a lot of courage to make this decision—and not only that, but also to be able to confront the decision when it came. Her mother finally passed away. It was hard for Yolanda, but she is at peace with herself and that courageous decision she made because her mom is not suffering anymore. Yolanda impacted my life in a great way. Sometimes we hesitate to make decisions because we are afraid, but it should not be that way. Sometimes it is not the outcome we want, but it leads to a better future.

COURAGEOUS SERGEANT MAJOR VELMA LENTZ

By Joseph Lentz

"An army of sheep, led by a lion, is better than an army of lions, led by a sheep." I feel this quote represents my auntie to the fullest for the fact she was always a leader. Velma Lentz is a very courageous individual because she has come a long way, starting from the bottom and making it all the way to the top. Velma made some bad decisions in her life, but she overcame her obstacles by making a brave decision which made her very successful to this day. Velma represents the lion because she took charge and overcame the hard times. After all, the lion always takes down twice his size.

Velma Lentz was born November 8, 1955. She's older than my mother and my other auntie, Betty Lentz. There were a lot of rough patches through her life because her father was in the Army and was an E9 First Sergeant. They constantly moved to different states where my grandpa was stationed. Her mother stayed at home, taking care of what was needed around the house, including getting food ready and taking care of her children. When Velma turned 16, she fell victim to hard drugs. Back in her day, it was easy to fall victim to hard drugs because a lot of people were doing it. Introduced to the man-made drug, she did this for about two years before she came to realize she needed to better herself. She got help through family and friends.

Velma went on to high school and graduated at the age of 17. The year of graduation, 1973, she joined the Army. She was one of the first women to join the WAC (Women's Army Corps). A few months later, they did away with the WAC and it was Army. She did very intense training. She was top of her class and received First Class Sergeant Major (E9), which was the most important rank, especially for a woman. Men and women had to address

her as Sir, not Ma'am, for calling her Ma'am was disrespectful and punishable.

The war began. Velma went off to war as a medical platoon sergeant in charge of the ward, operations, X-rays and the whole clearing section. She also maintained medical aid for the POW camp they set up. The war was called Desert Storm. This was a very intense war, and she was stationed in the combat zone. It took a lot of courage because they could have been attacked at any time. It was mandatory for her to carry a M16 AZ rifle at all times, even during operations. Their station was never attacked because they were protected by the Geneva Convention. This meant her platoon could not attack the enemy, but if under attack they had the right to protect themselves and their patients.

The war was won, and Velma Lentz received a gold medal from the President of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for bravery and ambition. Velma retired in 1994 with 22 years in the Army. She went off to establish her career as a First Sergeant Major in charge of her own company, and she was the boss of every job she had. Velma now works for a nursing home as a nursing assistant. You ask why. Well, she was tired of always being in charge at every job she had after 22 years in the Army being a First Class Sergeant. I guess she just wanted to relax and be her own boss at the nursing home.

In conclusion, Velma Lentz is a very courageous woman because she had the courage to stand up to hard drugs, graduate from high school, and join the



Army. I believe that was very courageous because there were a lot of wars going on at that time. She was in the combat zone taking care of the fallen soldiers and even our enemies. Death could have happened at any time. That's why I believe my auntie is a great representative of courage.

My Grandmother with the Courage to Overcome Hard Times

By Veronica Tinajero

Carmen Bello is my grandmother, and she is from a small town in Mexico named Tlalpujahua. Her father died when she was four months old. Her mother remarried when Carmen was six years old and had seven more children. When my grandma was fifteen years old, she got married to my grandfather, Bernardino Perez. They had seven children, except two of them died when they were born. She is an example of courage because without knowing how to read and write she raised five children, figured out a way to make money after her husband had a stroke, and cared for her husband through his illness.

When the Great Depression hit Mexico, my grandmother had her first child. She did not have very much to eat and therefore could not breastfeed her baby, so he died. She raised five other ones— two girls older than my mom, two boys younger, and my mother. My grandfather had different types of jobs, and my grandmother also worked hard in the house and fixed meals every day. They lived in two different places. When their kids were little, they lived in Mexico City, but when the big one was fifteen years old, they decided to move to a small town in Michoacán named El Jigante, which was my grandfather's home town. He wanted their kids to marry someone from there rather than from the city. He believed that men from small towns were more gentlemanly than ones from the city.

In El Jigante, they had a small house and they lived happily. After several years of living there, my grandfather had a stroke. He still could do a little bit of work, but he could not move one leg and one arm. My grandma had to start working out of the house. She began to sell blankets, clothes for dresses, sheets, skirts, and many other things. She did not know how to read or write. To be able to be successful in her job, she memorized the prices of everything and she knew all the people from the



small town and also from a neighboring town. She walked to the neighboring town every day, a one and a half hour round trip. She would go house by house selling her merchandise. Once she was back, she would tell her husband who gave her which money, and he would keep track of the math for her. It was really funny because sometimes there were two different Marias, or even three, and she would call them each by a nickname.

She cared for her husband through his illness. She would cook for him and she would do all the housekeeping. She gave him a bath when needed. She loved him a lot. When he died, she did not want to stay in her house, so she lived for one year at a time with her daughters and sons. When she was in my house, I remember she was about eighty years old and she still wanted to do chores. She would always remember her husband and told us stories about him. She passed away about one year after her husband died.

In conclusion, Carmen Bello was very courageous because she worked hard to provide necessities and care for five children, worked to make money to provide for them, and attended her husband's needs. I learned so much from her. Now when I am in any situation, I remember her. She gives me the courage to overcome hard times. Also my mother is a lot like her, which I really appreciate, because for her now I have my lovely mother.

The Mind of One Autistic Girl

By Shaneika Sanders

At my job I work with children who have different types of disabilities and handicaps, yet most of them respond to life in a courageous way. "No Excuses" are mottos for these kids. One girl I drove during summer school really opened my eyes to how I see autistic people because of her hopes and dreams for life. Our daily conversations were about global warming and Mother Nature mostly. She told me about how rough her home life could get from her father's hot temper to her diminishing relationships between her and her siblings due to her autism. It gave me insight into her world and how she views life through her eyes.



America from his native country. He became a big time bootlegger for a well-known Italian mobster. We discussed this struggle that brought him to America and only a little of what life here was like in those days. She went on to tell me even about how their last name was changed from Meyeritz to just Meyer. But I'm telling about her family because it to me shows the courage of what she's cut from, as in what type of blood is floating through her veins. Her great-great grandfather left his home in search of a life where he could take care of

Since she comes from a wealthier side of the tracks, I "assumed" her story would be of paradise, but she showed me how money doesn't make inner personal issues go away. Funny how even though she is autistic, she has what I call "black problems" yet still searches for the light as she travels through the dark tunnel. I became intrigued with her life and how she thinks the day I decided to open up about one of my creative secrets. I shared with her one of my many gifts as a writer, and she began to open my limited thinking with all the avenues I could take as a writer. One thing that stuck out was her saying, "What if you write about the mind of an autistic kid?" Her name is Abigail Banks, and this story is about her, from her courageous foundation of ancestors, to her personal relationships, on to her expectations and goals/ dreams in life.

I remember asking Abigail about her family and not only how they respond to her disability but also how they live their personal lives because I craved insight on what she's cut from and what they're like. I loved one story she told me about her great-great grandfather and how he came to

his family. Though he found a life of crime in America, it took courage to come to the unknown and become something illegal working for one of the most dangerous people in the world just to feed his family.

We also spoke of her home life and how she and her sister used to be close, but as she got older they grew separate even under one roof. Abigail's Asperger's Disease makes her annoyed and impatient with things like small children or animals. It's only so long she can deal with stressful situations before she shuts down. Her syndrome also affects her family life because at times it makes her a little too honest. I recall a moment when she told me her parents can rarely have guests over for dinner because she bluntly asks rude questions about how they chew or makes rude comments about how guests dress or how they talk. She can't help it, no matter how hard she tries, and this angers her parents and creates a distance with her family. She also gets irritated with me because sometimes when I'm talking I repeat myself too often. It wasn't until that moment that I became aware of that about myself, and it also made me admire how aware

she is of it—not only her ups but also her downs. Being aware of who you are and then accepting who you are, the good, the bad, and the ugly, first starts with the courage to be yourself. It takes courage to acknowledge where you fall short. It takes courage to be positive and dream big even after recognizing how being who you are or how what you are can affect your dreams. Abigail still pushes through. I love her for that.

Abigail's father used to be a professor of science at a college. She idolizes him for that major and has a passion for evolution and natural disasters. Watching how tsunamis build up in the middle of the ocean and how a tornado forms from the middle of the sky (wind forming a powerful circle) destroying anything in its path, or hurricanes flooding our walkways and lifting up homes from their foundations are all things to tickle her fancy and build her curiosity. Learning how they come to be, what makes them what they are, and learning if there are preventions for them is the life she one day hopes to live out.

I never cared to learn how the mind works in autistic people because I believed they lived in a cartoonish fairy tale world, but boy was I wrong! She wants a career in a field my friends and I never even talk about, let alone understand, and we are considered "normal." The only time we talk about natural disasters is when we see something major happen on television, and even then we relate it to either GOD being angry or the illuminati targeting certain areas on some racism s**t. But Abigail sees "Mother Nature"



at its best, worst, and strongest. She sees power in an uncontrollable place and desires to see what makes it tick and spiral out of control and then what calms and brings it peace. As she talks to me, I can see the joy in her heart. I hear the excitement that this job brings in her voice. It makes me think how "normal" people don't even dream this big or how we don't even expand our thinking enough to care about careers or things in life like the unraveling of Mother Nature. Yet this autistic girl only speaks with confidence from the knowledge that this is what she will be doing with her life. Although she recognizes not only her disability but also how the world views people like her, she never allows those things to interfere with her plans for life.

This young beautiful spirit really opened my mind and my eyes to the unknown and the unrealized. I talk about wealthy whites putting all blacks into a box, yet I put all autistic or mentally challenged people in a box. Meeting her showed me I'm neither wrong nor right about my view on autistic people; I'm merely unwise to it. For example, some whites believe blacks are criminals. They are neither wrong nor right in that judgment because some blacks are but some aren't. They would only be wrong to put all blacks in a criminal box and I wrong for putting all autistic people in a box. Abigail opened my eyes to how we view something, judge it, and then reteach it as if it's the only truth. I admire a girl who can come out that box the world put her in and show her true self. It reminds me of a story I read about a guy named Socrates, who was considered wise because he realized he wasn't that wise and was willing to die for his truth of how unwise we all are. We will never know everything but it takes courage to admit that, and Abigail does. One day I was blessed to understand the mind of one autistic girl. Her name is Abigail Banks, and this is her story.

A Mother Who Carried On

By Kelly Hayes

Courage comes in all different shapes and forms, so how would one measure it? When I think about courage, I think about my mom. I'm amazed by how she was able to go through all the things and hardships in life and still carry on.

At the age of 17, Vernal had to become a mother to her nine siblings when her mother died. She wasn't able to finish high school, but she had dreams of being a nurse. Vernal dropped out and got two jobs to support her younger siblings. The youngest sister had a disability, and my mom took care of her until she was in her thirties and married my father, Cornelious, an auto mechanic. Even after the marriage, they stayed on welfare and lived in the projects. By this time Vernal already had lost her brother, her daughter, and her middle child, who died of SIDS. Five years later, she had another daughter.

Tired of all the drugs and crime that was surrounding her and her kids in the projects, she wanted to move. My father made the choice to come to Madison, since he had family here already. Without knowing a soul or having a

house, they moved to Madison. Without having any family or friends of her own, she had a difficult time adapting to life in Madison. Vernal had to depend on my father, but she also had to get back on welfare and move back into the ghetto. Because my mother did not know how to drive, my father became the sole provider. He took advantage of the fact that she could not drive by staying out many nights drinking and being with different women. By the time I was in middle school, my mom had become tired of being a stay-at-home mom. She taught herself how to drive and was able to get a job as a home health aide. Later on, she enrolled in nursing school, but she dropped out due to the fact that her house almost burned down when Cornelious was drunk. By this time, he was an uncontrollable alcoholic.

She wanted to get off welfare since she had first got on it at 18. Having two kids and a husband that spent most of his money on liquor, she found money was tight, so she got another job as a housekeeper. With two jobs, she was making too much money and lost her Section 8. She found a two-bedroom house on the west side and paid all the rent—\$600. My dad did not come with us but got an apartment of his own. In 2005 Cornelious passed away from pancreatic cancer. Vernal never cried when he passed, just did what she had to do, but she was mad that she wasn't able to finish nursing school. My mom kind of reminds me of Mrs. Mallard in Kate Chopin's "Story of An Hour"—sad, but relieved [when told her husband died].

With all the things that my mom has gone through and endured, I've only seen her cry a couple of times. I asked her how she was able to carry on and she said, "I did what I had to for my kids, and you will do the same." I often compare myself to my mom and ask myself what she would do in my situation. One thing I know for sure is that I must rise.



A Cousin with Tremendous Courage**By Michelle Conley**

My woman of courage would be my older cousin Joanne Davis. Joanne showed tremendous courage despite being diagnosed with breast cancer. She continued returning to school and earning her GED while raising her child at the same time.

Four years ago, Joanne was diagnosed with breast cancer. She wasn't sad and still kept her faith in herself and in God. Everything that Joanne's doctors would tell her, she would make sure to do. While in chemo, Joanne worked three jobs and continued caring for others at the same time. While fighting the breast cancer, she continued being positive every day.

Joanne dropped out of high school at 16 years old and started working two jobs. While working these two jobs, her motivation was making money to provide for her family. Joanne had her CNA and CBRF certifications and, by the way, with no diploma. Between patients and studying for her GED, Joanne tested herself. She was never able to make time to get rest because she was always up and moving. In her cap and gown, she walked across the stage with a 67-year-old woman; Joanne stood on the stage crying, saying, "If she can do it, I can do it." Joanne then quit her current job for a better position at the hospital.

A couple years later, she became a single mother. With all the things going on in her life, this was just another struggle she had to overcome. The father of her child went back to his ex and eventually faded out of the picture. While her parents lived with her, they became the ones she could depend on the most. The father of her child was constantly in

and out of her child's life. When she closed the door, Joanne's father stepped in.

During chemo and other treatments, Joanne racked up a lot of expenses and hospital bills. She was cured of the cancer and received a \$50,000 donation from the Women's Cancer Foundation. Now Joanne has spent four years in remission and currently owns her own house. Joanne showed me that determination and hard work pays off! You can't control what life throws at you, but you just respond to it.



On a Roll: My Mother, LoLita Phillips (Odyssey '13) **By Prodajae Huntley**

Lolita Phillips is the most courageous and inspirational woman I know. She gives me the strength I need to push through hard times, the hope throughout my downfalls and struggles, and the knowledge I need to make healthy decisions to live my life and make the best of life. She teaches me what it means to be an independent woman of God who handles any obstacle, push, or shove that comes her way.

When my mother was young, she lived in a group as a resilient teenager. My grandmother was only 16 when she had her. My grandmother did the best she could raising my mother and her siblings. She had a job at the post office, where she currently worked. You could say she had three jobs—the second was being a mother to four, and the third was getting hit upside the head when time permitted. My mom left home at a young age to dodge the life many of my family members lived. My family is very different. Not only did they show that they love and care for each other by hugs and kisses but by other ways I don't feel comfortable thinking or speaking about.

My mom had my oldest brother at 18, when she had three jobs of her own. She worked at Santa's Village primarily. She was also a mother to her son and, third, she got hit upside the head when time permitted as well. She tried to make a different life for her son and soon-to-be family. When I was six, we finally made our journey to Wisconsin, where all of our lives changed.



Through the instability and lack of co-parenting, my mom was unable to graduate from high school. In her mid-30s, she went back to school for her GED, and she was able to cross off yet another goal from her list. She was the reason I never went away to college. We both began our journey at Madison College in 2011, and she successfully completed her Associate's Degree in Human Services and the Odyssey Project. She always used encouraging words to me and to herself. Her favorite line was,

"Call me jelly 'cause I'm on a roll." Despite her background and where her family came from, she never let that get in the way of her dreams and the woman she is today.

Through a lot of dark times, my mom never judged me. Funny thing is that she always blamed herself. She was 200% supportive when I had my child and made the decision to graduate through night school and work a lot during the day. She didn't approve of many of the decisions I made

along my way, nor did she let her insecurities get in the way of raising me and my brothers. Even though she did not agree with me, she gave me the greatest choice of words I need to make a bright idea reality. I find myself asking, "Why haven't I thought of it that way?"

My mother is always the one with the brightest smiles and the most positive advice. She has been through so many trials and tribulations, but she kept true to herself and what she believes in. She teaches me so many ways to prosper and have open arms with others, and she too gives great hugs! Through flaws and all, you can still see the beauty and strength through the bags under her eyes and the strands of her hair.

My Rock, LaPrice Black (Odyssey '14)**By Myisha Ellis**

The woman that is upbeat, classy, respectful, caring, and loving is the main source of courage in my life. She had a baby girl at a very young age and was just wanting to have more out of her childhood. She asked her mother if she could keep an eye on the baby girl while she went to the mall with her friends to have a little freedom. When she returned home, she found the lights off and was in search for her baby girl. She looked in the baby's crib, but found no baby girl there. Then she searched her mother's room and found no baby, but her mother was sleeping comfortably after having one too many. So she ran to the couch she had left her napping on and there she found her breathless and blue, cold to the touch. She screamed and called an ambulance. She woke her mother from her slumber to question her about why and how this happened. The mother replied, "I forgot she was asleep on the couch." Tears fell from her face while wailing out unfinished words and feelings.

The woman I am telling you about is my mother. After the tragic loss of her first daughter, Chaki Tonya Richardson, brought strength and knowledge on her path of life, she rebuilt her confidence and determination to have a better life. Going to Job Corps helped my mother gain her GED and get into college to earn her degree as an EKG Technician. Later she found God to help her



through her loss and to find the path of righteousness.

When my mother was 20 years old, she married a man named Lewis Black. She later found out that she was pregnant with her second child, Lewis Black Jr. She strived to make a living for her family, jumping over hurdles and defeating obstacles to raise him. One year later they divorced due to mental abuse. One year later she fell in love with another man by the name of William Common. On her 22nd birthday, she sat on Lake Michigan singing to the world, "I'm 22 years old!" while drinking a Martell, which had a pungent bark taste like burnt bacon. She began to feel sick and vomited into the lake. Then she found out she was pregnant with her third child, Myisha Denise Black.

Over the years of being my mother's child, I have witnessed the struggles, heartbreaks, and the let-downs she has faced. I've watched her work three jobs to take care of my brother and me. I've been with her homeless and looking for new opportunities to survive and strive for better for my brother and me. I've seen her go to school to become a beautician and own quite a few of her own hair salons, as well as going back to school to get her associate's degree in Echocardiogram tech. She worked at UW from sunrise to sunset to make a better life for my brother and me. I've witnessed her being

abused physically and emotionally. I've witnessed her gain the strength to get out of the hectic circumstances time and time again.

This courageous woman has given me strength and the will to be a survivor. When I was 15 years old, I fell into a deep depression, and the only person who helped me see what I was worth was my strong mother. She has sheltered me to become the best person she knows. My mother is now ill with sarcoidosis and is recovering from heart surgery. All the while during her recovery, she has not given up on life and is still in pursuit of happiness and success. When I'm feeling down, she is always there to give me words of encouragement, wisdom, and strength. She has displayed courage to me and my brother is more than one way. She is my rock, and she will always stand strong for her family.

A Mother Who Never Gave Up **By Mikiea Price**

The person that I think has courage is my mom. I feel that it takes a strong woman to overcome some things she has been challenged with. She is a brave woman. She had many challenges, such as addiction, loss of education, and emotional and physical abuse. I love that she shared her testimony with others.

The reason why I feel my mom has so much courage is because she has been on the street since she was 14 years old. She never completed eighth grade, nor did she experience high school. She has six kids who she never raised, has been on drugs, and never held a job until 2012. She lost her youngest son when he was 14 years old, and his death gave her life. She is

now three years clean as of today. She has her own apartment and holds a job. What I aspire to the most is pushing forward in spite of many doors being closed. My brother's death gave her hope and determination.

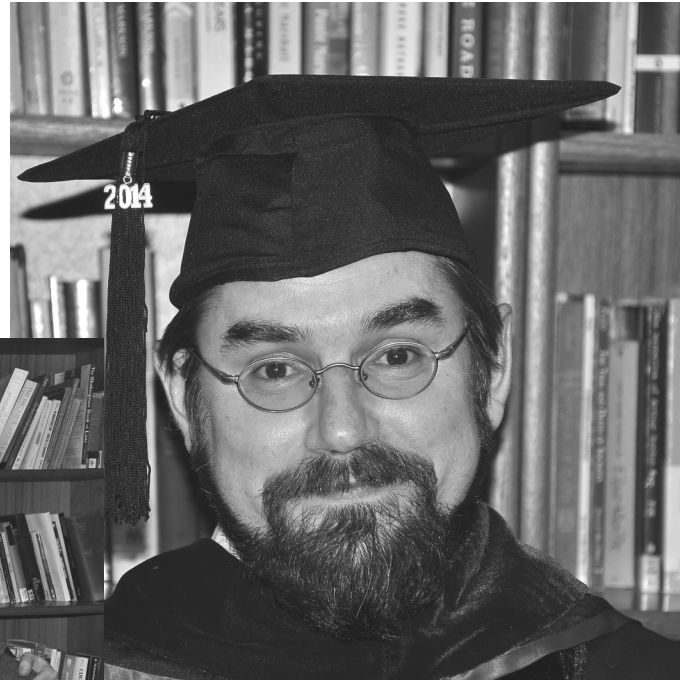
What amazes me the most is her speaking to others, telling the story of how God saved her. She mentions that she almost overdosed and was non-responsive. She's had so many trials, but the loss of her son changed her life. I feel like she has so much courage because she is giving back to her community sharing hope.

The moral of the story is to never give up in life. Life can throw curve balls and get to where you can't see the light. Never give up, people. Life may not make sense when you're going through it, but it does have a purpose.



CELEBRATING DR. KEVIN MULLEN

On December 21, Kevin Mullen walked in a ceremony with his advisor, Craig Werner, at UW to receive his Ph.D. The night before, he marked the occasion with a dinner party at Emily's house for Kevin's family and friends.



Kevin as Odyssey instructor By Brandi Whitlock

When I met with Kevin on Wednesday nights, I would come in early before class starts. I love to meet with Kevin because I think that he is funny and easy to talk to, and he makes you think outside the box.

I think that he sees in you what you don't. I think he knows that we can write more than what we are doing if we just put our mind to it. Kevin is a teacher!



ENCOUNTERING EBENEZER SCROOGE



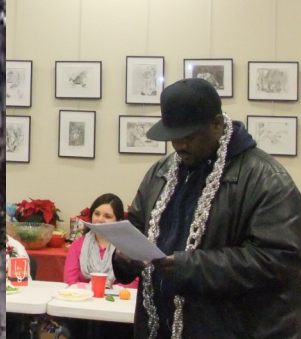
At the end of the story Scrooge changes his unflattering ways and becomes charming, caring, happy, joyful, and friendly—the complete opposite of his former self. **(Lakoyé Buford)**



Scrooge is no longer an ornery grump. He has come to be more appreciative and giving. He was once always mean and angry, but now he is cheerful, apologetic, and loving.

He is festive and ready to live a better life.

(Jessi Hodges)



Scrooge learned that he should not value money and should put family first. He knows now that by giving back to the community and being generous, he can help in ways unimaginable,

especially for those who are poor. **(Michelle Conley)**

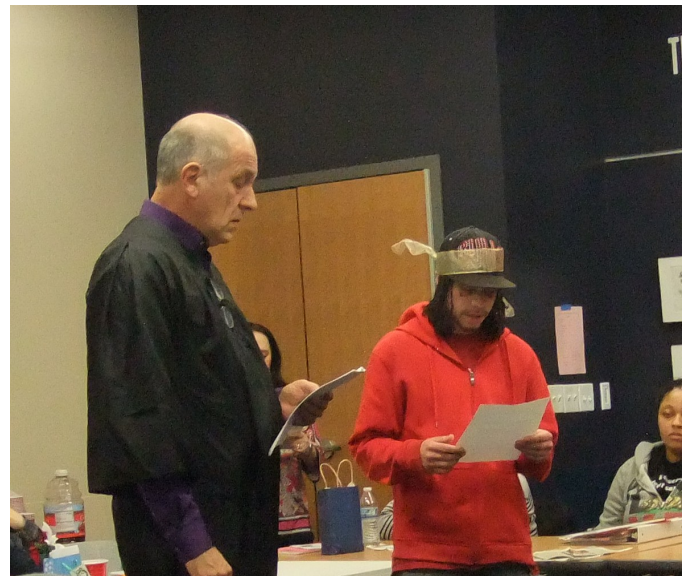
Scrooge is more compassionate and opened his heart to the people he knew and lived around. In the beginning, he was grumpy and didn't have a good holiday spirit. He began to feel for the disadvantages of the poor and sick. **(Patricia McKnight)**

Scrooge in the beginning was a very mean, tight, some might say evil person that only cared about money. Everything was about him. In the end, after all the spirits showed him everything—Past, Present, and Future—he saw things that made him want to change his ways and become a better person—a loving and caring person. **(Melissa Dominguez)**





Scrooge now is giving, loving, and compassionate and thinks of others before him. All the visions that Christmas-Yet-to-Come showed him make him think more of his legacy if he continues to be cold. He now understands why he became bitter and knows better than to make others the same way with his actions. **(Sahira Rocillo Ramírez)**



Thanks to the sights that the ghosts of Christmas showed Scrooge, he finally realizes how bad his actions were. It's time to change, help others, be generous, and show interest in humanity, not only during Christmas time but all year long. **(Natalia Rodríguez Miramontes)**



At the end of the story, Scrooge is different. He is no longer mean, and he now gives donations to charities. He raises his employee's salary. He is happy. All of this is because of everything the ghosts showed him. **(Veronica Tinajero)**

Scrooge is more giving. He helps the Cratchit family with Tiny Tim, who does not die. He gives Cratchit a large raise and assists his troubled family. Scrooge brings a little of the Christmas spirit every day, respecting the lessons of Christmas more than any man alive. Scrooge attends Fred's Christmas party and spreads the Christmas cheer. **(Brandi Whitlock)**

Scrooge learned that happiness is not obtained in the money that you have. It is more important to have family and love, both of which he missed out on. Scrooge gave up his miserly ways because he finally realized that people, especially the poor, could benefit from his generosity. **(Lenora Rodin)**

