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ODYSSEY SENIOR ORACLE



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CHILDHOOD MOMENTS

MOM FOOLED US GOOD! BY RENÉ ROBINSON

On a summer morning when school was out, our mom needed to go somewhere. I can't remember where she was going, but I do remember that she told me and my five sisters that Florence, the oldest, was in charge and that we couldn't go outside.

For the next hour or so, things went okay, but then we began to hear the rest of the neighborhood kids outside having fun. We were peeking out the windows and doors and wanted to go outside really bad. Either my sister Marilyn or I asked Florence if we could go outside in the yard, which was surrounded by a metal fence with holes shaped like triangles that had been painted silver. It had a gate with a handle that you had to pull up to enter and push back down to close or you got in trouble. The yard consisted of a small, silver-painted pond that had goldfish, grass around the pond, and the edges around the grass filled with four o'clock flowers Mom had planted. As a child I found it amazing because the four o'clock flowers would open every day at four o'clock; it was like magic. There was a dirty wooden porch with three raggedy kitchen chairs that the adults would sit on, and it had six stairs that we would jump from to the ground for fun. And, oh yeah, goody-two-shoes Florence said no.



I can't remember what happened next; I just remember we were outside. The plan was to stay in the yard and watch for Mom to come from the way that she always walked home. Well, I guess you probably know what happened. She walked home from the opposite way. We were watching from the right and she walked home from the left. We were busted.

Of course, we got a good fussing, but we also got a whooping with one of Dad's belts too! All six of us, including Florence who didn't go outside, got a whooping.

This is my unforgettable story of the Six Little Girls, which was our nickname, given to us by our older brothers and sisters.



MY DAD AND MRS. JAMES BY MARCIA BROWN

When I was in the eighth grade, I had a teacher named Mrs. James. I loved to read out loud. Mrs. James would let other students read out loud, but not me. I told my parents about this and requested that one of them come to the school to talk to Mrs. James to see why I could not read out loud.

My father came to the school, and he and Mrs. James stepped out in the hall to talk. At this time, my friends in the class stated, "Whose fine father is that?" I informed them that that was my father.

Mrs. James called me to come to the hallway to talk. When my father, Mrs. James, and I started talking about why I wasn't able to read out loud, Mrs. James told my father that I was very intelligent and she already knew that I could read. She said that she wanted to give the other students a chance to read out loud so they could acquire better reading skills.

When my father left, as he walked down the hall to exit the school, I saw Mrs. James staring and smiling at my father. My father was so fine that even Mrs. James liked him.

THAT'S NOT MY HOUSE BY PAMELA BRACEY

Let me start from the night before when my father took me out to buy me new clothes for school and some doll furniture and things for my doll for my room. Because I was the only girl, I had my own room. The next day I got up, went to school, and all was well until I got close to my house and saw fire trucks and lights all around. I kept saying, "That's not my house! That's not my house!" The closer I got . . . it was my house.

I went in, and all hell was going on. My youngest brother and my father's girlfriend's son had been playing with matches on my bed and burnt up my



whole bedroom and porch and hallway and some of the bathroom and the boys' bedroom. They were maybe three years old. My new clothes and doll furniture . . . my room . . . all destroyed.

It didn't bother me so much. I was glad they were safe, and because my father never really bought me anything, I didn't have it long enough to enjoy it or miss it.



COOKING WITH GREASE BY ROSLYN PHILLIPS

The first time I was left in charge of my younger brother and sister, I was 14, my brother was 9, and my sister was 10. Oh, how I was proud and in charge, the summer of 1969. It was beautiful outside, I was sitting on a bench, and, oh yeah, I was living in "CHA" Chicago Housing Authority, fondly known to some as "the projects." My sister and brother were running, playing hide and seek, tag, etc.

Oh, it's lunch time. I catch the elevator up to the sixth floor, holler down to my siblings, "Don't leave the playground! Fixing you guys lunch." I go inside and start my siblings some good ole fashioned hand cut French fries, cooked in lard. Knock on my door. Oh, my goodness, it's my childhood crush, Victor Cole. I'm so immersed and lusting for Victor. Yep, I forgot the fries were frying in a skillet until he said, "Roz, your kitchen is on fire!" Yep, I scorched the kitchen—black walls, etc. I had to call my parents, who by the way were working. Neighbors stepped in and did the best clean-up job possible.



I will never forget the look of disappointment on my mother's face. "Roz," she said, "what the hell was you doing?"

"Umm I, I, I..."

Yep, my sister and brother in unison said, "Mom, she was on the porch with a boy."

In time, I gained my mom's trust again, and I learned a valuable lesson I teach today: If you're cooking with grease, stay in the kitchen!

WHAT A BEAUTIFUL DAY FOR A COCA-COLA BY LENORA RODIN

It was a hot muggy day in Chicago, and I was sitting in the stairway with my neighbor's son. We had to be about six or seven years of age.

I was hungry, sad, and depressed, and I remember this because I was always in this state of being. You see, my mother was an alcoholic, and when she was not drunk she was sleeping and when she was not sleeping she was looking to get drunk.

My childhood was a nightmare. 'Anywhoo' I was constantly teased by other children saying things like, "Your mother is a drunk. Your mother is a drunk." So on this particular day, the boy that I was sitting with on the stairs in the hallway proceeded to tease me: "Your mother is a drunk. Your mother is a drunk."

I was too young to know about slogans or taglines, but in 1906 Coca Cola had one that said, "The Great National Temperance Beverage," and in 2016 the saying was "Taste the Feeling." Well, too bad that the bottle that sat next to me on the stairs had not been drunk by me because if it had maybe my temperance would have been better. But since it wasn't, I just did like the 2016 slogan and let him taste the feeling. Yes, that's right: taste the feeling of the bottle right upside his head. All I remember is him screaming and his mother begging my mother not to beat me.

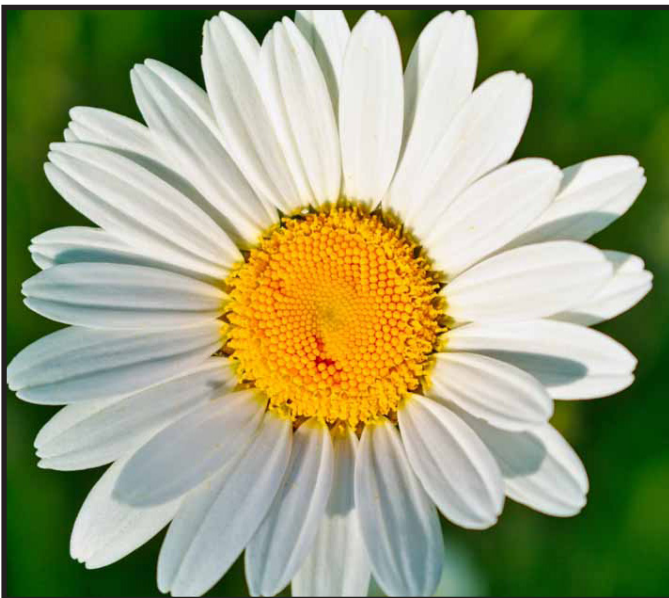
Boy oh boy, what a beautiful day for a Coca-Cola.



DAISY**BY CHRISTINA WAGNER**

One sunny Saturday morning during my 13th year, I remember waking up feeling fresh and excited about what I might do on this “free” day. I pulled on my blue jeans and raced down the stairs, stopping in the kitchen to pet our little dog, Tina, and searching for our cat, Daisy. But Daisy was not to be found in her usual spot, and no one seemed to have seen her yet. I turned the corner, and there I saw her, sprawled in a most unnatural position at the foot of a stool she must have been sleeping on earlier; tangled among her limbs was the silky blue blanket that normally covered the stool. I stooped down to touch her soft white fur and was shocked to find her body cold to the touch. I went running back to the kitchen with tears flowing down my cheeks, unable to speak.

“What happened?” “What’s the matter?” my parents cried as they saw me shaking and crying uncontrollably. I somehow managed to get out the word “Daisy,” but that was all I could say. My parents jumped up from the kitchen table and ran to the back room with me. “Oh, no,” my mother said. “Poor thing,” my dad whispered with a catch in his voice. “It must have been a heart attack,” my mother surmised. I sobbed even harder, a crushing feeling in my chest pushing me so hard that I crumpled into a heap on the floor.



I remember my dad found a box and gently placed Daisy and the blue blanket in it. For some reason, I insisted that we get Daisy a blue coffin, and she must be buried in the pet cemetery on Prospect Avenue that we passed on the way to my aunt’s house. My parents exchanged glances and solemnly promised to take Daisy there. My mother went to the living room and made a quiet phone call. A bit later, we drove off with Daisy and me in the back seat to the pet cemetery. I said goodbye to Daisy through my tears, and my dad gently carried her into the building. Of course, I knew even then we could not afford to have a casket for Daisy or afford to have her buried, but I held on to this idea. When my father came back without her, I asked, “Will she have a blue casket? Will they bury her here?” My father assured me that the casket would be blue and Daisy would be put to rest with all the other animals in the cemetery.

Somehow, even knowing in my heart that this would not be possible, I held onto that idea and found comfort in it. I remember feeling very guilty that I had not given Daisy as much attention as I did our dog, Tina, and feeling so sad that I would never have the chance to make it up to her. I had never felt such deep sadness or such regret until that day, although I have felt both many times since.

MOTHER MARY LEE MARTIN
BY MS. BEATRICE CHATMAN

First I would like to talk about my mother, Mary Lee Martin. She laid the groundwork and foundation for me. I attribute my success in life and stability to my mother.

Mother Mary Lee Martin was born February 2, 1917 in Greenville, Mississippi. She passed away January 30, 2013.

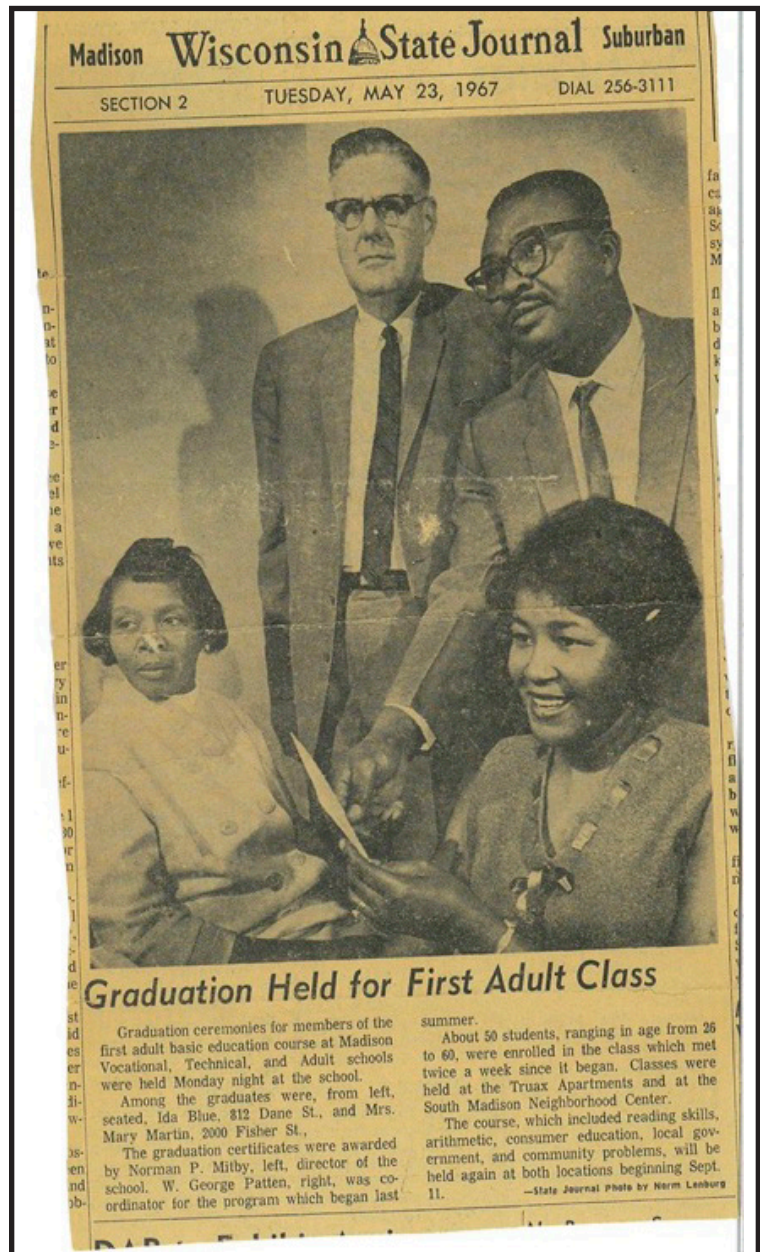
Mother came to Madison in 1941 in search of a better life and job opportunities. She joined Mt. Zion Baptist Church in 1941. She served God happily in many ways. While a member of Mt. Zion, she sang in the choir, served on the Mothers' Board, was an usher, and always visited the sick and shut-in. Mother was very active in the church.

Mother worked in housekeeping at St. Mary's Hospital for 25 years. She also cleaned homes in Nakoma and Shorewood.

Mother had good work ethics. She didn't have a car but didn't miss a day of work, come rain, sleet, or snow, unless it was an illness.

Mother Mary Lee Martin purchased her first home on Fisher St. Then she purchased her next house on Ridgewood Way in the Town of Madison. She had to struggle and fight for loans from local banks because she was a single black woman.

She attended Madison Vocational School (currently MATC) to obtain her adult basic education certificate. The course included reading skills, arithmetic, consumer education, local government, and community problems, all of which she passed.



JOYFUL CHILDHOOD MEMORIES BY MS. BEATRICE CHATMAN

My roots are here in Madison, and I am proud to be a native Madisonian. I attended Franklin Elementary School and Central High School. I also took courses at Vocational School (currently MATC).

I began my employment with the State of Wisconsin, Department of Administration, from 1971-1978 in several program support positions. In 1979, I transferred to the Department of Health and Social Services in the Human Resources area. Then I was promoted to the Department of Corrections in Human Resources. I retired from the Department of Corrections in 2007 after serving 35 years with the State of Wisconsin.

Joyful childhood memories include going on vacation and taking the train or bus to Chicago and Mississippi to visit relatives.

I remember catching a bus to go downtown for shopping. I loved riding a bus. Mother didn't have a car. I went to parades downtown for Memorial Day, Children's Day, St Patrick's, and the Fourth of July.



I took piano lessons at the Wisconsin School of Music.

I went to Vilas Park and Zoo for fireworks, picnics, fishing, barbecues, and swimming.

I went to Penn Park and Brittingham Park for playing games, picnics, barbecues, fishing, swimming, and ice skating.



The center of activity for young children was the Neighborhood House (currently Boys and Girls Club) and the St. Martin House (currently Multicultural Catholic Center), which was attended by children from all ethnic groups. I had so much fun: playing games, watching movies, and doing crafts, sewing lessons, cooking classes, dance lessons, camping, fishing, picnics, hay rides, roller skating, and ice skating.

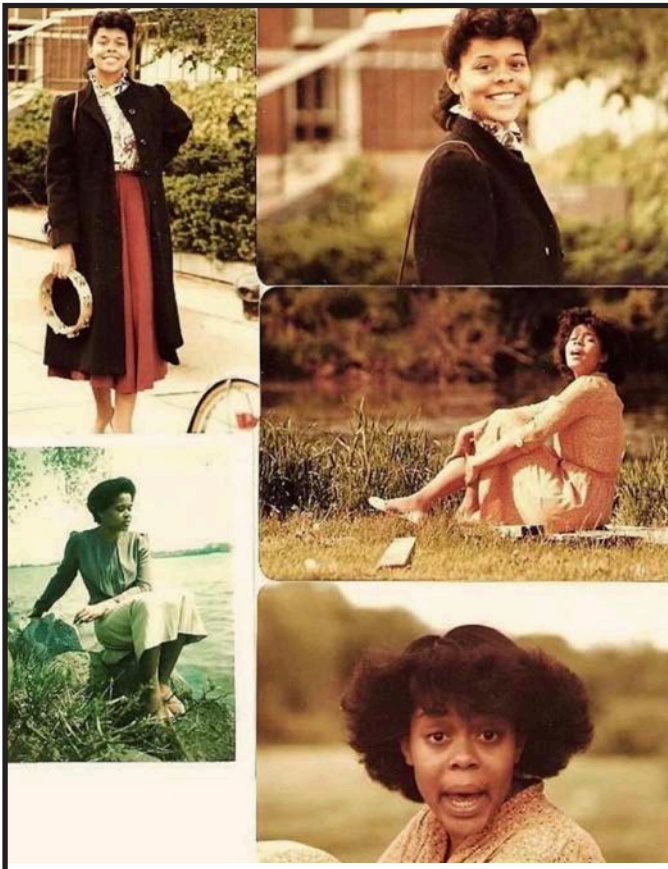
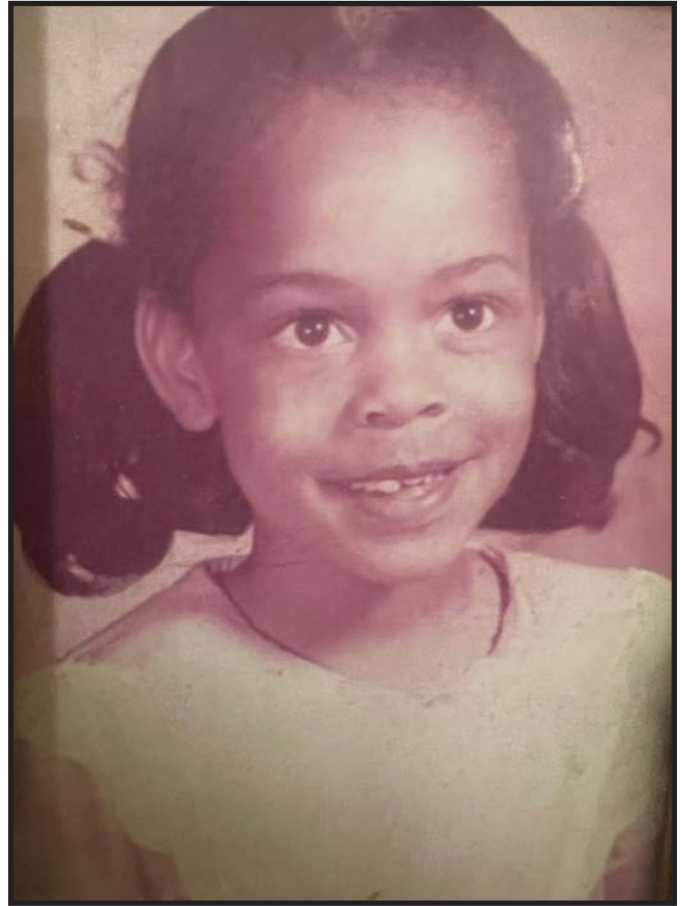
This was in the good old days—so much fun!

DANCING TO THE GREATEST LOVE OF ALL **BY SHERRI BESTER**

I enjoyed being a dancer from the youngest days of first learning to walk in my life unto my adult life of the present. I danced throughout my childhood when I was sad or troubled until I felt happy again with joy overflowing my life completely.

I danced when I was happy or excited about my life and the precious gifts that came into my life when I danced. I danced in my bedroom at home every day and before I went to bed at night. I danced at both church programs and school programs throughout my childhood.

I danced inside my mind when I was in public confused, sad, or uncomfortable with what was going on around me. I danced, danced, danced throughout my imagination completely with humble dance moves of strength and completeness. I would dance the blues away until total happiness and joy became complete within my every being.

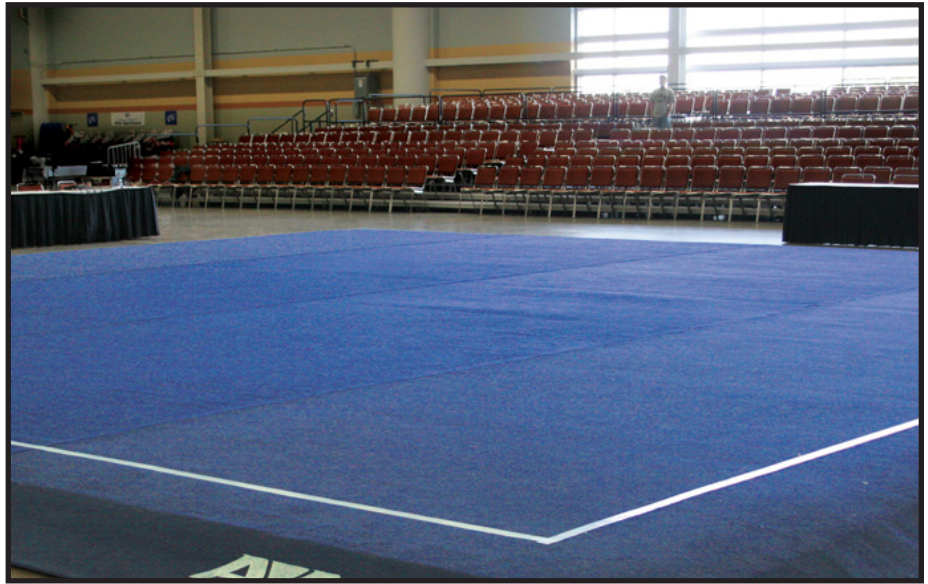


I entered the gymnastics team when I was 12 years old in the seventh grade of high school. My favorite area of gymnastics was the floor exercises where I danced, danced, danced gymnastics away. I made it to second place in Wisconsin in the floor exercises my first year of gymnastics.

The floor exercises in gymnastics were like dancing modern dance in which amid the dancing I would do gymnastic moves such as cartwheels on my elbows, backward flips high into the air, and the splits with my two legs spread complete open and apart, wide on the floor.

I could easily believe that I made second place in Wisconsin in the area of floor exercises of gymnastics when I did, but it was much more difficult for me in the area of the uneven bars of gymnastics, in which I also made it to second place in the Wisconsin gymnastics competition. I was so excited that I had won. I was surprised that I won second place on the uneven bars. I boldly practiced daily and humbly.

I was at the workout for the Wisconsin competitions when I overheard different parents and adults talking about how they couldn't believe a nigger won second place in the Wisconsin gymnastic competition. They were also saying they were surprised by the song that I picked out to do my floor gymnastic floor exercise to—The Greatest Love of All. Written by composers Michael Masser (music) and Linda Creed (Lyrics), The Greatest Love of All was originally recorded in 1977 by American singer and guitarist George Benson and became a hit song years later by Whitney Houston.



The parents and adults kept talking so ugly until I nervously fell off the gymnastic uneven bars and sprained my ankle on the floor beneath the uneven bars. I hurt my ankle and began to cry, cry, cry all the pain away. I left the gymnastic competition sad and afraid by all the mean things that were being said out loud. I went home with all the things said inside my head. I quit the final gymnastic competition and dropped out hurting tremendously with a broken heart and sprained ankle.

I stayed in gymnastics for the rest of my years in high school but did not compete any more at all in the Wisconsin gymnastic competitions until my senior year. I enjoyed gymnastics every day after school. I became better and better and grew tremendously in gymnastics floor exercises and uneven bars exercises also.

When I was a senior in high school, I entered a talent show competition at a neighborhood park. After I won the contest at the park, I started back at my gymnastic competition in floor exercises and won first place in Wisconsin. I did my gymnastics floor exercise dance at the park and the senior high school competition to the song "The Greatest Love of All."

From The Greatest Love of All:

*. . . I decided long ago
Never to walk in anyone's shadows
If I fail, if I succeed
At least I'll live as I believe
No matter what they take from me
They can't take away my dignity
Because the greatest love of all
Is happening to me
I found the greatest love of all
Inside of me
The greatest love of all
Is easy to achieve
Learning to love yourself
It is the greatest love of all. . . .*



FAMILY STORIES

My story happened in 1980. It's a horror story but is being told to all the family, old and new generations, over and over.

My Uncle Lloyd was a Cook County correctional officer. He got married to a woman with three kids of her own, and she and my uncle had two more, so a total of five kids. Money was scarce, so my uncle took on a job at McDonald's on 117th Halsted in Chicago, moonlighting as a security guard. My uncle was coming out of the men's washroom with his head down. The story goes that he lifted his head to a shotgun pointed at him. The robber fired, blowing my uncle away. He never had a chance to fire his weapon. The funeral was televised and so huge. The story to this day is still being told! **(Roslyn Phillips)**

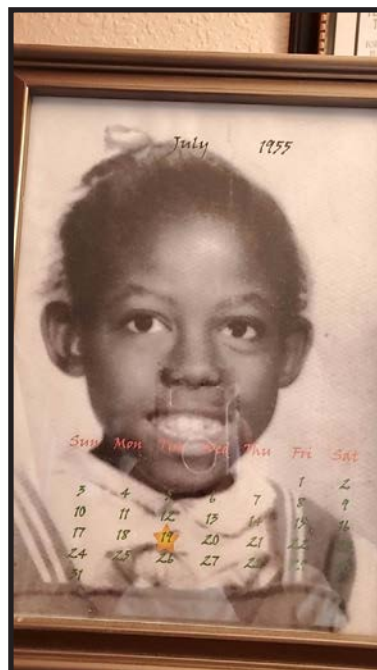


When I was a child age 12, my siblings and I would spend our summers down south in Yantley, Alabama, with my grandparents on my father's side. The first summer that we went down south was not a good experience. The mosquitoes would bite me so much that I didn't want to go outside. My siblings and I boarded the train to Meridian, Mississippi, 20 miles from Yantley, where our grandfather would pick us up from the train station.

We had left Chicago, Illinois, two days after school let out for the summer, and we returned two days before

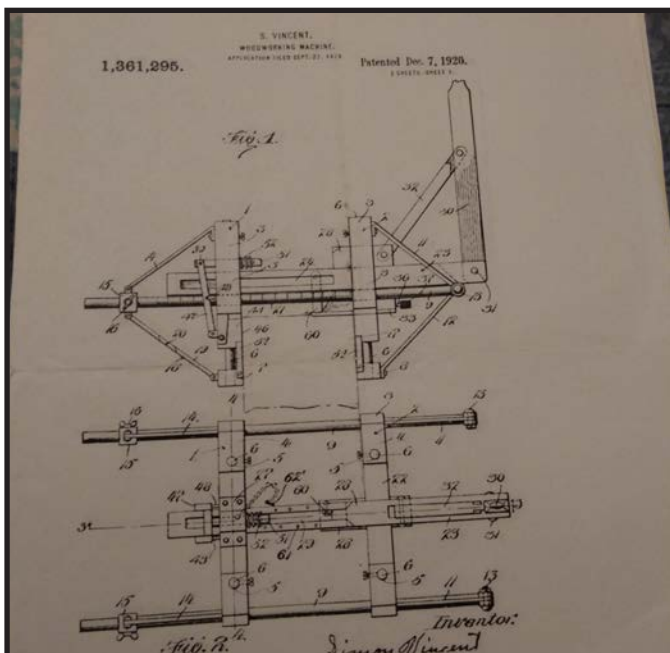
school started in September. Unbeknownst to my siblings and me, the reason we were down south for so long is because my mother had a heart attack. My Aunt Clozell was the person to tell me this after I was fully grown. **(Marcia Brown)**

I was told by my oldest cousin why we ended up moving from Abbeyville, South Carolina, to Evanston, Illinois. It was to save my grandfather's life. You see, his family had money, and his best friend back then was very rich and owned a lot of property. Some white people wanted to buy this friend's property but he refused to sell, so they hung him. My grandmother moved the family up north so that they would not hang her husband (my grandfather). **(Lenora Rodin)**





My grandfather, Simon Vincent, was in a Black Gentlemen's Inventions group. He had invented a few things. One was the turn signal for cars. That was stolen from him because it was not patented. Another was something like a pull horse that to this day is being sold at Lowe's. It also was stolen because it wasn't patented. **(Pamela Bracey)**



My mother told me she took my sister to school in a little red wagon. She was the first African American to go to Carrie Stern Elementary School in Greenville, Mississippi, in the 1960s. People spit on my mother and sister and called them niggers. My mother held her head high and kept walking my sister to school in the little red wagon. She prayed to God and kept walking my sister to school every day in the little red wagon. **(Sherri Bester)**

My grandmother fell in love with a gentleman who migrated to Puerto Rico. All my life, I believed he was born in Spain. But a few years ago, it was hinted that he might have been born on the Canary Islands. This changed my genealogy research because I never thought of the Canary Islands. Now we have to look in another direction. I have no oral history from my grandfather's side of the family. **(Socorro Lopez)**

My uncle told me about his brother's funeral in Philadelphia. He wondered why his casket wasn't open. One person that was there told him, "If you want to get out of here alive, don't ask questions!" **(Ms. Sarah Wells)**



When my mother was about 10 years old, she attended the graveside services of a dear neighbor. She remembered wandering around the gravestones, reading the names and dates. Much to her amazement, she saw several gravestones with the last name Cawley. After the service, she excitedly told her Grandma Cawley that she had counted 11 Cawleys in the cemetery.

Her grandma said to her, "They're no relation to us." When my mother protested the unlikelihood of this in the small-town cemetery, she was met with a stern, "No Relation! Your grandpa had no brothers and sisters. No cousins either." The rest of the family confirmed that. It turned out later that they had disowned these other Cawleys because they were Dunkers. (*Dunkers were members of the Church of the Brethren, a Christian denomination that practiced total immersion for baptism and the opposition to the taking of oaths and to military service.*) **(Christina Wagner)**

My mother told me about a house they moved into that had several coins on the basement floor. This is because there used to be slot machines before they moved in. **(Mary Wells)**

One Sunday morning late in 1938, when my nine-year-old father was living in Berlin, Germany, his family got a warning phone call while having breakfast. A Jewish friend said her husband had just been seized by the Nazis. When a second warning phone call came, my grandmother said, "Get out of here!" to her husband, who wanted to finish his breakfast.

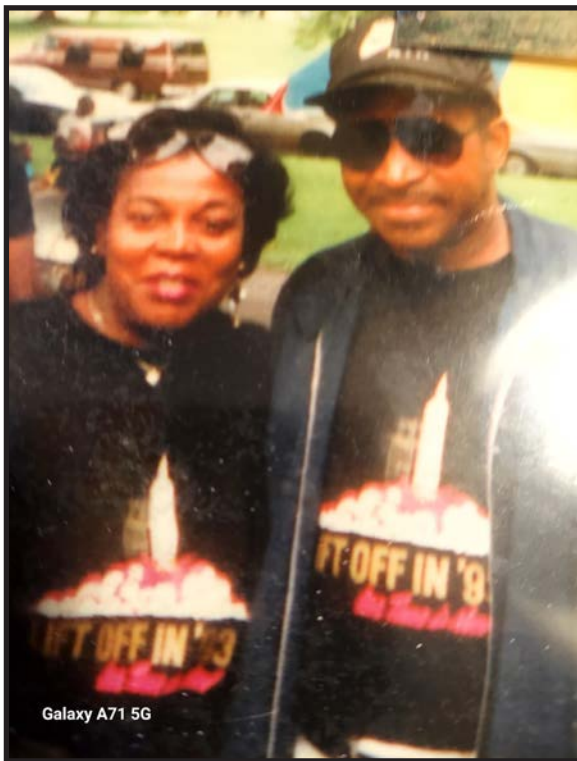
Just then, there was a knock at the door. It was armed Gestapo, looking to capture my grandfather and send him to a concentration camp, even though he was a decorated German soldier from World War I. The Gestapo interrogated my young father and his sister in separate rooms about where their father was, and they repeated what they had been told to say: "He went to his office." In reality, he had just escaped out the back door and was headed to Frankfurt. Two months later, on January 30, 1939, my father's family fled Germany, never to return. **(Emily Auerbach)**



PEOPLE AND PLACES

FAMILY LOVE AND THE BUD BILLIKEN PARADE BY ROSLYN PHILLIPS

Boy, from the age of five is as far back as my memories lie: a family reunion and the annual “Bud Billiken Back-to-School Parade and Picnic.” This parade dated back to 1929 in Chicago, IL (Washington Park/ Southside of Chicago). It is one of the largest African American parades in the USA, held annually on the second Saturday in August.



Now, my parents were born in 1936, and the families have attended, weather permitting, every year until ten years ago when the families stopped going due to heavy gang violence, shootings, stabbings, etc. Enough of the bad. My younger sister and brother couldn't sleep on Friday nights prior to the picnic. We always got a new outfit, gym shoes/sandals/socks. My mom always kept my lil' brother's hair faded, and my baby sister and I had new barrettes and ribbons for our pony tails. The Friday night before the parade/picnic, my mom would be preparing our picnic basket consisting of sandwiches, fried chicken, potato salad, watermelon, cookies, her homemade pound cakes, juices, water, my dad's Schlitz beer, plums, strawberries, etc.

Yes, we actually had picnic baskets, coolers.

She would send us to bed early because it took us hours to fall asleep, excited, bouncing off the walls. All of our family came every year. My mom had four sisters and one brother, my mom and dad had three kids, and my aunts and uncles had four or five kids apiece. We couldn't wait to see our cousins and family. My grandparents came out every year until their deaths. Now, this was my mom's side, but my dad's side came as well. Our family was so blessed to have both sides of the family, partying together.





We would arrive at the park, set up, lay our blankets out, and run to see the three- to four-hour parade. I had the opportunity to be in the parade three times in my childhood: as a high school pom pom girl, Girl Scout, and on a neighborhood float. When the parade ended, we went back to the activities at the picnic—so much laughter, tears of joy, hugs, and kisses. I was pretty popular in my family. I was always laughing, helping my elders, fixing plates, serving beverages, etc. The elders played cards (bid whisk) with music blaring. We hated when it started to turn dark. Until next year, my family.

My family didn't have a lot of money but we had love more than any rich-in-dollars family! Thank you, Lord, for my wonderful family memories.





MY MOTHER AND A PAINFUL FAMILY STORY BY SHERRI BESTER

My mother's maiden name is Ann Lou McMullin She is 81 years old. She is a strong, loving, Christian, African American woman. Her mother is African American and her father is Caucasian Irish.

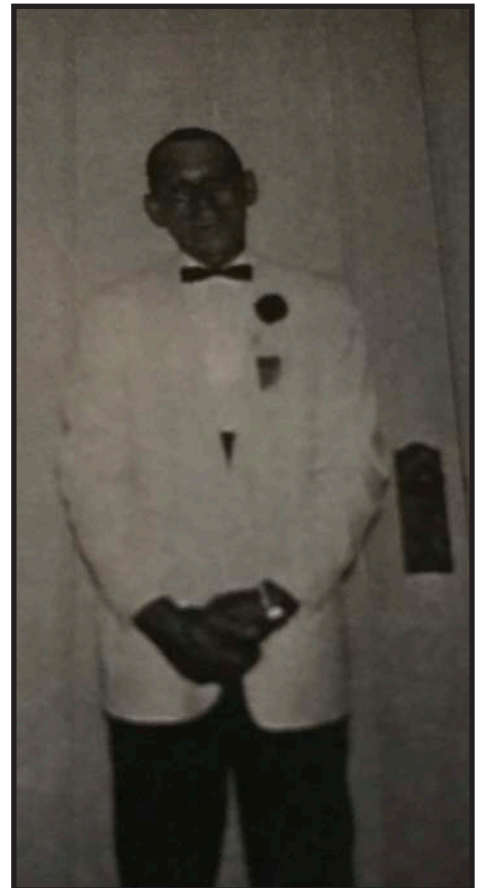
My mother has Alzheimer's disease and lives with my two sisters in Dallas, Texas, in a loving home/house. My mother has a website where she tells stories of her past childhood experiences that my niece set up for her to speak. My mother tells beautiful stories of her lifetime experiences of turning struggles into victories.

My mother told me a story about her mother and father and a date they went on together. My grandmother and grandfather were like two innocent teenagers in love with each other, like two love birds, my mother told me. She said one evening my grandfather took my mother on a date to eat out, like he often did. She said they were happy and excited as they giggled, cuddled, and kissed each other all evening long.

She said out of nowhere a group of prejudiced, hateful, violent men came up to their table. They kept saying mean, evil, and ugly things about my grandmother. My grandfather said, "Stop, stop, stop!" After they continued, he finally stood to his feet to say "Stop!" out loud and clear. The group of men only got louder and said, "What do you mean this is your wife? You mean this is your nigger whore." Before my grandfather could stand to his feet, one of the men knocked him down to the floor. Then the men beat my grandfather all around the floor tremendously and violently right there before my grandmother's eyes. My grandmother was crying and saying, "Please, please, please, stop! Someone please help me!" They left my grandfather there on the floor, beaten, as my grandmother cried out confused and in great pain.

MY BROTHER, JAMES SLAYDEN BY MS. SARAH WELLS

My older brother, Jim, was a tall slender man who had a smile on his face most of the time and bright red hair. He was a hardworking man whose father was "Scott-Irish." Brother Jim had a happy-go-lucky personality. He loved to play his guitar, and most of all he loved people. He was a great conversationalist. He believed he never met a stranger. He loved baseball and was a member of the local Negro League baseball team. His grandkids called him Granddaddy Red.



THE ROBERT TAYLOR HOMES
BY MARCIA BROWN

In 1960, my family and I moved from the westside of Chicago to the southside. We moved to the Robert Taylor Homes (The Projects). Robert Taylor Homes was the largest apartment complex ever built in the Midwest. The apartment building stretched from 39th to 55th Streets, with buildings on both state and federal streets. Each building consisted of 16 floors with 10 apartments on each floor. A long concrete walkway stretched from one end of the floor to the other end, with two elevators in the middle and five apartments on either side of the elevators. The two apartments nearest to the elevators on either side were two-bedroom apartments occupied by small families. The two end apartments on each side had four bedrooms for large families. All the other apartments had three bedrooms. My family lived on the third floor in apartment 302--one bedroom for my parents and two bedrooms for us kids.

When we moved to the Robert Taylor Homes, it was new, and we were one of the original families to move there. I was so happy that we lived on the third floor and not the sixteenth floor. Sometimes the elevators were broken, so I just walked up to the third floor. I felt sorry for the residents that had to walk further than the third floor, especially if they were carrying groceries. Sometimes the water pressure was low, preventing the residents on the higher floors from getting any water. When this happened, my parents would happily fill any containers they had with our water.

Each floor had a fence that was attached to the floor up about 12-13 inches. Sometimes people would throw heavy items up over the fence and down to the first floor, injuring residents coming in and out of the building. After these incidents, the fence was moved all the way up to the ceiling. Now we were in jail (LOL). When you walked up to the building at night with the ceiling lights dimly lit on each floor with the fence from floor to ceiling and people looking out through the fence with their fingers entered in the fence holes, it looked like prisoners behind bars, waiting to get out.

One good thing about living in the projects was you always had someone to play with. Your neighbors went to school with you, and we children played outside. There was a big playground very close to my apartment building. It was equipped with swings, sliding boards, monkey bars and two basketball hoops. My sister's friends and I would play in the playground, shoot hoops, and play Double Dutch. We kids would stay outside all day, but when the street lights illuminated, that was our clue to start heading home. One day, I was playing Double Dutch when the street lights came on. I had been on one of the ends of the



rope turning for another girl while she jumped in the middle. It was now my turn. I saw my sisters and other friends running home because the street lights were illuminated. My sister said, "Denyse, you better come on. It's time to go upstairs." I said, "Not yet, it's my turn to jump."

The next thing I saw was my mother coming toward me with a belt in her hands. She whipped me all the way from the playground to our third-floor apartment. From that day forward, I always came home as soon as the street lights illuminated.

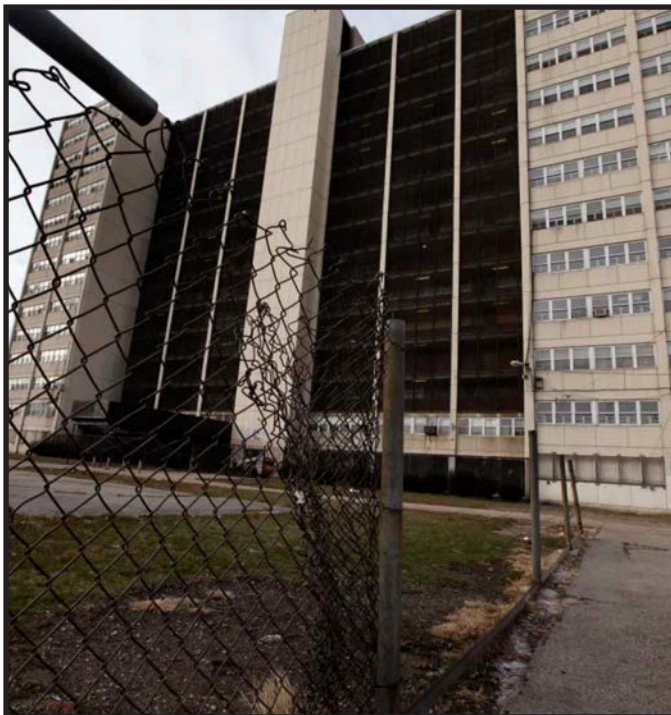
We used to walk two blocks to and from school each day. The building that we lived in (as well as the other buildings in my neighborhood) was white. One day, coming home from school I went to the wrong building and opened the door to apartment 302. A girl came to the door who was not my sister. I was in the wrong apartment and building! After this encounter, the girl and I became friends.

When we first moved into the Robert Taylor Homes, it was originally built to house working Black families. After a while, low income and welfare recipients were allowed to move in. That was when things went downhill in the project. The elevators were no longer clean but held a pungent smell of urine. It smelled so bad it was hard to breathe. You could get a contact high from the weed smell floating in the tight confines of the small elevators. People would rob residents that rode the elevators. They would snatch women's purses, other people's jewelry off their necks, and sometimes their groceries while jumping off the elevator when the door opened.

There were gang wars between the apartment buildings. If you lived on 39th to 45th streets, you were living in Black Stone Rangers territory. If you lived on 48th to 55th Street, you lived in the Vice Lords Territory.

Sometimes the gang wars jumped off into the playground outside my building. Whenever there was a shooting, my mother would turn off all of our lights in the apartment and escort all of us kids into the bathroom for safety. We would all hunker down in the bathroom until the shooting stopped. Living on the third floor was dangerous because we could hear the bullets fly by our windows.

I couldn't wait until I turned 18 years old so I could move out of my mother's house and out of the Robert Taylor Homes. When I turned 18 years old and graduated from high school, I went away to college at Illinois State University.



Many years later while driving down State Street in Chicago, IL, I was surprised to see that all the projects from 35th-55th Street were no longer there. This was a good thing! Whoever built these projects must have been on something (drugs or alcohol).

It made me angry to see all those Black people packed on top of each other like sardines in a can, caged like animals in a prison. I was told that before the Robert Taylor Homes were demolished, the displaced families were moved to homes in the suburbs.

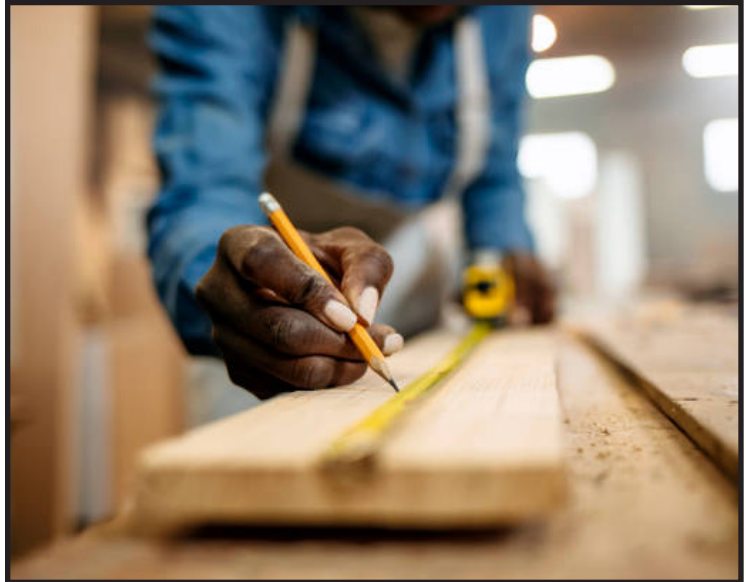
Later on, a lot of whites living in the suburbs got tired of living there and commuting to the city of Chicago where they worked. Now the whites live in the city and the Blacks live in the suburbs. But if you don't have a car, you have to ride public transportation. In Chicago the buses and train operate 24 hours per day. In the suburbs the buses stop operating at 9 p.m.

**LOVING FAMILY HOME
BY PAMELA BRACEY**

My place is 5019 Hayes St. Until I started aging, I used to know the telephone number—ah, I just remembered it. This house brought family together for all the good times. Even when I went there and no one was there, the love was still there.

This house started off as a two-bedroom, one-bath home for seven children and two adults. My grandfather, a carpenter by trade, had a group of people do a makeover on this house. Before it was destroyed, he had lifted the house up and put in a finished basement with a fireplace, two bedrooms, a kitchen, an office for himself, a full bathroom, and kitchen.

My first year of life I lived there. The main floor extended out to another bedroom with bathroom and a sewing room for my grandmother. Third floor, there were two more bedrooms and another bathroom. I loved the creaking of the stairs. In the kitchen was another room used a lot for a guest room.



This home was love in my childhood. Everyone there smiled and laughed with fun, happiness, and good food. It was the only house on a dead-end street, so we played outside all the time safely.



My uncle was the last proprietor of this land that we owned in Washington D.C. He became ill and the neighborhood had gotten bad. While he was in the hospital, the house was broken into and someone set fire to it. It just got to be too much for the family there. So it was sold, and they tore down the house.

When I revisited it in 2019, I believe the only thing standing was the larger-than-life (to me) evergreen tree. We could look out the window to see it. The kitchen had two big windows, one over the sink and the other to see who was coming over. There were windows of all sizes everywhere. My grandfather made an insert in the living room that had a tin roof. When it rained, it was so calming.

My grandfather taught his four sons the carpenter trade also. They never worked for anybody. They built houses for some famous people, including the first Black astronaut, and they built a bank in Washington D.C. as well.

SMITHVILLE CEMETERY BY CHRIS WAGNER

“Cornfields on one side; soybeans on the other” is how my sister and I would describe the road to the rural area where my father grew up, about 16 miles from Peoria, Illinois. It was a trip we made frequently with my dad to visit family, friends—and the Smithville Cemetery. Smithville itself is an unincorporated village, now officially part of a larger town called Hanna City. Turn south a little past the Hog Trof Restaurant in Hanna and head down Glasford Road a couple miles, but don’t blink or you’ll miss Smithville.

Smithville Cemetery was founded in 1847 and has far more residents than the village has had for many years now. My dad remembered when one of the old houses there was once the grade school he attended, but now, Smithville is strictly residential.



You don’t have to drive more than a block or two to find the imposing cement brick columns and iron gates of the cemetery where the terrain suddenly changes: you’ll see the gently rolling hills of the well-kept cemetery, dotted with stones and monuments, surrounded by huge oak, maple, elm, and fir trees.

On one side of the cemetery, dozens of sheep graze in a pasture, adding to a sense of peaceful reverence.



I remember their gentle baaing against the backdrop of the wind whistling through the trees and the otherworldly tinkle of wind chimes on newer graves. It never felt like a morbid place.

My dad took us there frequently on Saturday mornings to care for the graves of our ancestors: clean the stones, plant grass where a bald spot had appeared, weed the dandelions, and place artificial flowers in the vases. Unlike the cemeteries in the “big” city of Peoria, Smithville was lax in its rules about decorating the graves. People were allowed to leave memorials of all kinds to their loved ones on and around the monuments. Little Christmas trees, favorite toys, etc. adorned the newer graves and were not touched as long as the gravesites were neatly kept. My father had planted a peony bush on his mother’s grave, and part of our visit was always caring for it.

While my dad was working, my sister and I wandered through the cemetery, fascinated by the old, crumbling white stones from the mid-1800s. We would try to make out the names, dates, and

inscriptions on the stones, searching for the oldest dates. My sister and I were especially moved by the inscriptions on the stones of babies and children: “beloved infant daughter of..,” “greatly mourned,” “always in our hearts.”

After my father died and was buried in Smithville, my mother, niece, and I took care of the graves for many years. When my youngest great-nephew, Bailey, was old enough to drive, he surprised us when he announced one day that he was going out to care for the graves, which he did until he joined the Marines and was sent to Japan.

One year ago, my niece got the knock on her farmhouse door that no mother ever wants to hear: a Marine officer there to tell her that Bailey had been killed in a car accident in Japan. My last visit to Smithville Cemetery was when we laid Bailey to rest, next to his great-grandpa’s grave that he had carefully tended and next to his great-grandma, who had died while he was in Japan: Beloved son, brother, grandson, nephew greatly mourned... always in our hearts.

A TOUGH COOKIE **BY SOCORRO LOPEZ**

When my parents migrated to New York City, my brother and I were left in the care of my grandma for several months back in Puerto Rico. Grandma was not an affectionate person or very supportive. Grandma was a tough cookie. Life on the island with her was rough. To paraphrase Dickens, “They were not the best of times.” I was eight years old, and I thought my grandmother’s behavior was a norm. Life was tough with her; she beat you in a blink in an eye and wasn’t sorry.

As an adult I understood what made my grandmother into the character that she was. She had many siblings growing up and she grew up rough; she didn’t have it easy. At the age of 12 she was married to an older man who beat her. She never went to school, and she couldn’t read or write. If she had any dreams, they were beaten out of her.

Back in the 1920s women were not able to dream of any careers. Latina women were properties of their husbands. The mentality of Latino men during my grandma’s time was to humiliate them and keep them pregnant. Grandma endured all these behaviors because Latino men ruled the home, and she couldn’t



return to her parents’ home. There was no equality in the marriage. My grandmother learned to be a survivor. She also never had close friends that she could talk to over coffee, and she never had any visitors to her home.

I will always remember the look on my grandmother’s face when she saw me ironing my pants at the age of 16. She told me, “That is not the way you iron pants!” Grandma Tomasa put the pants correctly on the ironing board and made me iron the pants over and over until I got it right. My grandma used to iron for other folks for a living. Every time I iron, my memories take me back 47 years ago, and I iron my pants like she taught me. This lesson will never go away.

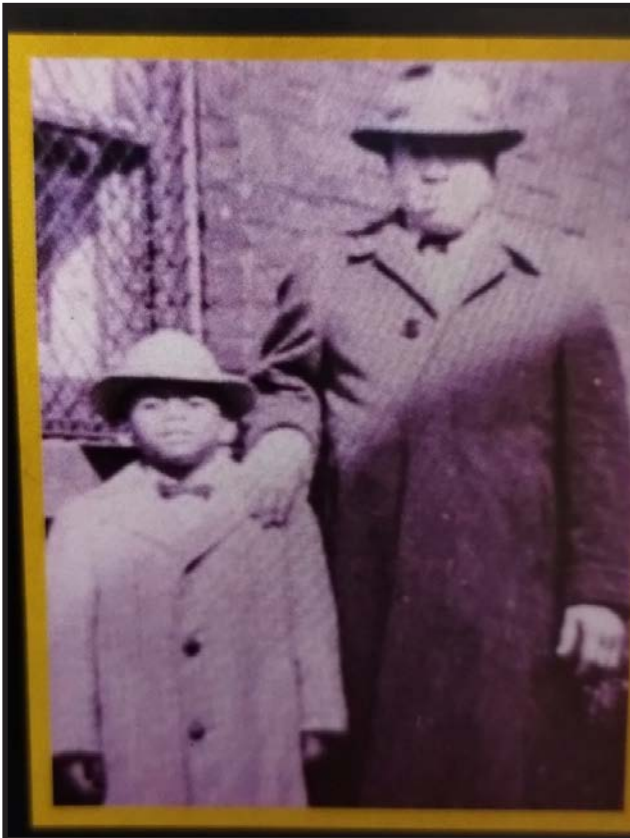
A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RACKET GAME BY LENORA RODIN

One of the biggest money-making operations regarding illegal lotteries was the policy racket. It was also called the numbers racket, the numbers game, or simply playing the numbers. This poor man's lottery operated primarily in poor Black, Latino, and Italian neighborhoods from the late 1890s well into the 1960s. Some cities that were major cogs in the policy racket were New York, Chicago, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Atlanta, just to name a few.



The game itself consisted of a player picking any three-digit number from 0 to 999. The odds were about a thousand to one against winning, while the payoff might be anywhere from six-hundred and eight-hundred to one for a winner. Bets were generally a nickel or a dime, but any amount was acceptable, even as small as a single cent.

Those who ran, owned, and controlled the policy racket were called Policy Racket Kings and Queens.



These people, as we will see, nickled and dined their way into millions of dollars. This illegal lottery flourished during Prohibition and the Depression and did very well until state-run lotteries came on the scene.

A lot of people like my aunt would choose their numbers based off a dream. They had dream books which still are in existence today.

The story of my numbers running uncle, as told by my first cousin, Robert McBride

My cousin Robert is a 76-year-old Vietnam veteran and still alive. Robert is a father of five, three of which are still living, grandfather of eight, and great-grandfather of one. I have always looked up to him because to me he was the one that got away—yes, got away from the madness of our family. This is not to say that he escaped without any scars. When he came home on break from the Navy one summer day, he looked so good in his uniform. At that time, I wished that I could return with him.

When you are young, people look taller and older than they really are. When I looked up at him on that warm summer day in his white uniform, oh how I wished that he was my dad coming to get me and not my cousin on leave from duty. He came and left and life continued.

Albert Senior

Albert Sr was married to my Aunt Mary, and he was known on the southside of Chicago as a numbers runner. He always wore a large dress coat with a lot of pockets in it, and that was due to him carrying his slips and receipts for his numbers.

Al Senior was always very well dressed, although he suffered from a skin disease known as vitiligo. Al always wore a suit, tie, and a blocked Stetson hat. Albert Sr was well respected in the Southside neighborhood in which he lived and ran his numbers.

Every time you would see Al Sr, he would have Al Jr with him, who was dressed just as nice. My uncle Al was a very nice, easy-going man who took no mess. He always demanded respect.

MOUNT ZION BAPTIST CHURCH BY BEATRICE CHATMAN

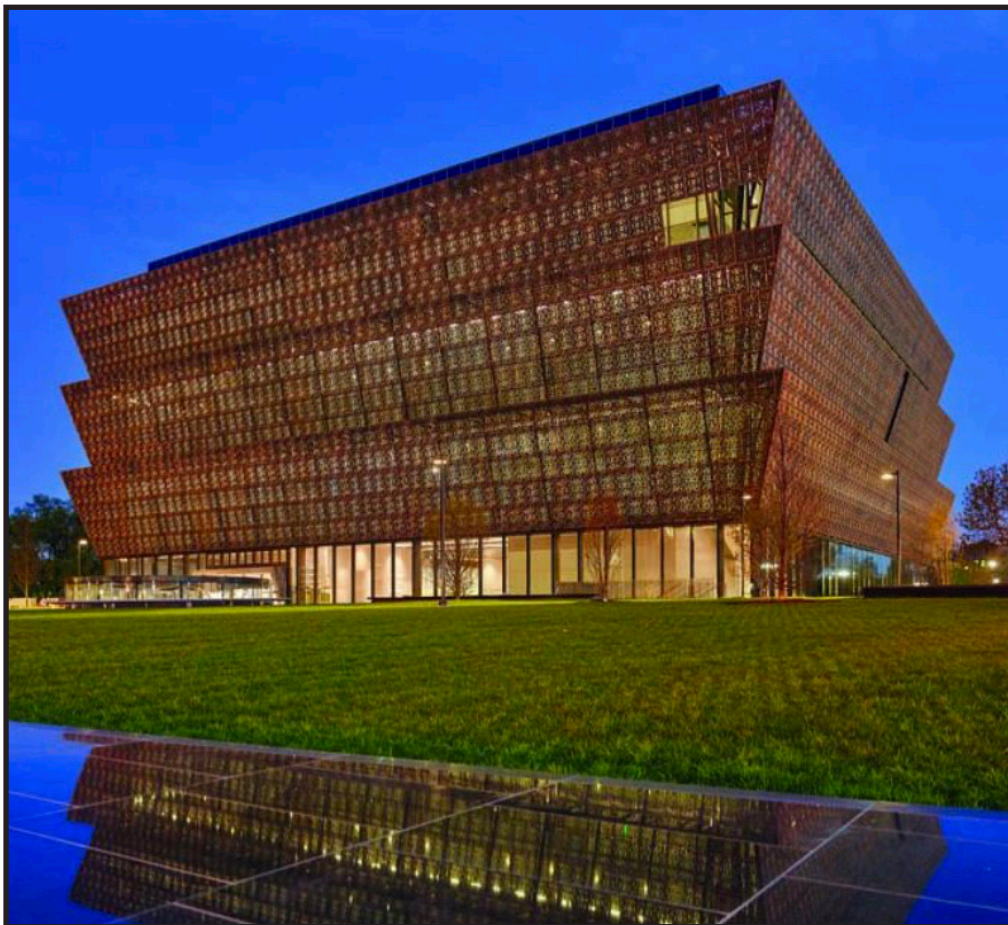
The church was really the foundation for Blacks. In 1911, Mount Zion Baptist Church was first located on W. Johnson St. In the 1950s, Mount Zion moved to its current location on Fisher St.

My memories are of my mother taking me and my sister Jeanette, who lives in Florida now, to church every Sunday. The church had their activities besides worship services and funerals. The church had dinners, potlucks, picnics, conventions, resources, and counseling. I loved going to the picnics at Brittingham Park. So much fun!



**THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE
BY MARY WELLS**

The National Museum of African-American History and Culture (NMAAHC) is my all-time favorite place! I watched the groundbreaking ceremony in 2012 virtually as well as watched the monthly updates over four years. I watched in anticipation and knew that there was no other place I wanted to be. I HAD TO BE at the dedication ceremony of this historic building.



My son Frederick and I were so excited just to be a part of history and have a story to pass down for generations to come. It was September of 2016. The weather was nice, and believe me I certainly got lots of steps on my pedometer that weekend.

The first two days were spent outside on the sprawling grounds, which had to have spanned a few acres easily. There were so many activities such as music tents, tents that offered free healthy eating recipes, as well as tents that had every kind of food you could imagine for purchase. And, of course, there were history tents.



The formal opening ceremony was a long A-List that included President Barack Obama, Stevie Wonder, Oprah, Will Smith, Pattie LaBelle, Angela Bassett, and US Representative John Lewis. I loved the feeling of every race coming together to celebrate the grand opening. It felt like the largest Juneteenth, and ALL NATIONALITIES were represented.

Once inside the 85,000 square-foot museum, we started our self-guided tour on the bottom level—the history of slavery. Each of the five levels is dedicated to certain time periods, such as the Civil Rights Movement, sports, and music achievements. Some of my favorite pieces I will always remember are the shawl that Harriet Tubman wore, Chuck Berry's Red Cadillac, James Brown's shoes, and the first Jet Magazine. I would highly recommend you putting this museum on YOUR bucket list. Here is the link to secure your tickets: <https://event.etix.com/ticket/e/1018702/national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture-timed-entry-passes-washington-national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture-general-public>



ALUMNI CORNER



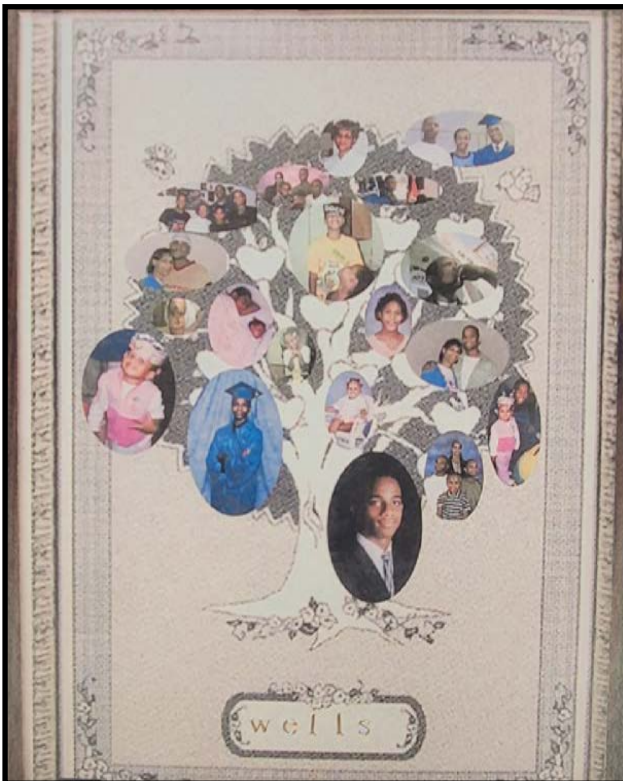
MARY WELLS, CLASS OF 2007

Christmas Mosaic

Christmas has always held a special place in my heart, and always will. My parents made my two brothers, three sisters, and me feel special on Christmas morning, even though our mosaic stones were clouded with the dysfunction of alcoholism. We knew it was a struggle for our parents to make ends meet, but we always had plenty of love, a roof over our heads, food on the table, and clean clothes. On Christmas Eve, my parents would let us see if we could stay up until midnight, and if we could, we could open our presents.

As the years went on and my Christmas Mosaic was being built, I realized one day that the gifts under the tree were not brought to our house by Santa Claus. That's when my Christmas Mosaic started to have a noticeable change. I still looked forward to Christmas wholeheartedly. I enjoyed the anticipation of those wonderful visits we would make to our grandmother's house as a family and the family members that would come over to our house during the season.

The colors of my Christmas Mosaic changed when I became a mother with three beautiful children of my own: Douglas, Frederick, and Ricky (Fred-Rick-Douglas). I had the pleasures of making sure their Christmases were anticipated as much as I remembered. They knew also that they too were rich in love, although we didn't have other material things. I enjoyed having them help me decorate the house and make cookies and homemade ornaments.



I also started a new tradition where we would pile in the car a couple of days before Christmas and drive around the nicer neighborhoods to look at their Christmas light decorations. I hope that they will remember this tradition and do it themselves. The stones changed colors once again as my oldest son Doug had a daughter named Gabrielle. She too has enjoyed the traditions that we have surrounding Christmas. Gabrielle really enjoys cooking. She and I have started our own cookbook of favorite foods that she likes to prepare. Her favorite of all things is the Homemade Overnight French Toast, topped with fresh strawberry slices and powdered sugar.

In 2002, my mosaic stones changed drastically when my son Douglas lost his life in a tragic car accident. My nephew and my son Doug were on their way to my house to pick up an early Christmas gift. They had to come across town but only made it all but two blocks away. My nephew was too intoxicated and shouldn't have been driving in the first place. My nephew apparently passed out behind the wheel.

The car hit a tree on the side of the car that my son was sitting on. My son was unconscious when the paramedics arrived, and he never regained consciousness. My Christmases have not been the same since.

The colors of my Christmas mosaic changed again in 2005. That was the first Christmas since the accident that I was able to put up a tree.

I am sure that the stones in my mosaic will continue to change as the pain eases over time and always will change as I continue on my Odyssey. As I continue on with my life's Odyssey, I envision that Christmas will still hold a special place in my heart with all of the traditions that have made each one special. My son's memory will live on through all of us, especially through his daughter Gabrielle.

Editorial: "I feel cheated!"

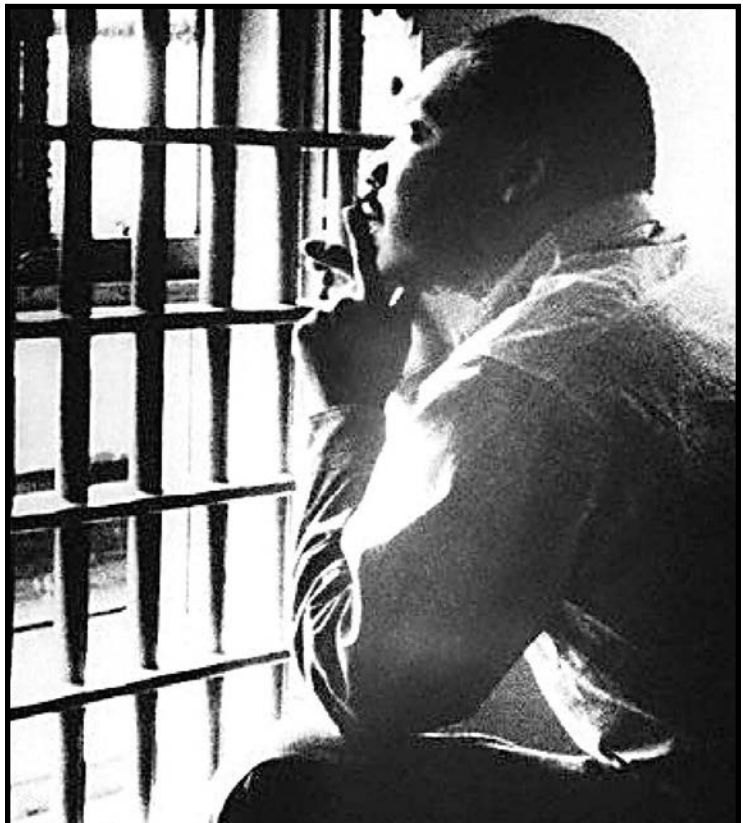
Mary Wells's editorial was broadcast four times on WORT on March 7, 2007 and was then placed in their audio archives.

I feel cheated!! After 48 years, I've just recently been introduced to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Letter from Birmingham Jail as a current student of the UW Madison Odyssey Project. As a product of the Madison Metropolitan School District, I should have encountered this inspiring essay about justice much sooner. It could have changed the course of my life, as Dr. King's message changed the course of this country.

African-American parents in Madison took for granted the fact that their children would be taught ALL of America's history when in fact we learned very little about our own ancestors' contributions. Has enough changed today?

Dr. King spoke about the "degenerating sense of 'nobodiness'" that many African Americans felt in the United States before the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. One way to make sure our current African-American students feel an inspiring sense of 'somebodiness' is by making sure that Letter from Birmingham Jail is required reading in the school system here in Madison.

It is not enough just to play a 30-second clip of the "I Have a Dream" speech. It is not enough to pull out for Black History Month a poster of Rosa Parks in the front of the bus. Parents, ask your children's teachers how many full works by African Americans are on their required reading lists. To quote Dr. King: "We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressor." Demand that your children not be cheated, as I was, out of the words of Martin Luther King, Jr.!



Mary Wells's Profile of 2007 Classmate Curtis Williams, son of Darnetta Carter '06

Curtis Williams is a young man who loves to travel. His favorite places he has journeyed through are Santa Monica and Los Angeles, California. He moved to Madison with his family at the age of 14 from Philadelphia. He graduated in 1991 from my alma mater, Madison West High School, joined the Army, and for the next four years was stationed in Texas and Kentucky. He was a weapons specialist and a tank operator. He likes to play chess, football and basketball. Some of his favorite foods are steak, liver, onions, and gravy. He isn't as shy as he appears to be, and he doesn't like to be in large crowds of people.

An interesting fact about Curtis is that there are quite a few members of his family who are left-handed, including his sister, Angela, and his mother. Angela is a current Odyssey student, and his mom (Darnetta Carter) is a graduate of Odyssey. While Curtis continues his educational goals here in the ever-changing climate of Madison, his future travels are never far from his thoughts—to warm destinations like Florida and Jamaica.



REN  ROBINSON, CLASS OF 2008

My Name, Thelona Ren  Robinson

My first name is a combination of my Dad's and Mom's names. My dad was named Thermon, and my mom was named Zelona, so I became Thelona. Because I have seven sisters (Ellen, Cathie, Florence, Marilyn, Jessica, Angela and Cheryl) with common but beautiful names, I was very curious as to what happened in 1959. My mom told me that my dad wanted to do something different. She also said there was a musician named Thelonious Monk. . . I was stuck on "Why me?" I was ribbed my entire childhood by classmates who called me Oscar Meyer Bolonee (phonetically spelled), Walonee, Falonee and anything else they could think of, all because my parents wanted to be different.

I'm not sure where my parents found my middle name, Ren . I had always heard it was French; however, I never looked it up until later on in life, only to find out it's spelled wrong. My parents actually gave me the masculine version, Ren , rather than the correct feminine spelling, Ren e. Oh well, they tried. For whatever reason, Ren  became the name by which I was called at home, in the neighborhood, and at church.

My last name, Robinson, belongs to my ex-husband, and even though we are no longer together, I still use it because I like the way Ren  Robinson sounds. . . Since my mom's death, Thelona has much significance. It's a part of my mom and dad that I am blessed to carry outwardly every day. As I grow older, I see a lot of my mom and dad in me and the family leadership that is required of me, which makes me believe they knew what they were doing. I'm their namesake. For a change, I'm proud to be just that!

Why Should Odyssey Be Funded?

Odyssey should be funded because there are a lot of people in the world just like me: people who as children made mistakes and poor decisions but have not lost hope; people who may not have had both parents in the home or no parents at all but have not lost hope; people who might have taken the least desired path but have not lost hope.

The Odyssey Project should be funded because it exudes hope: hope for those who refuse to give up; hope for those who refuse to be stuck at the poverty level; hope for those who want a better environment to raise their children; hope for those who want to make a difference; hope for those who want to give back. That's what the Odyssey Project does! It transforms hope into knowledge, and as we all know, knowledge is power.



Personally speaking, I never knew the likes of William Blake, Henry David Thoreau, Socrates, or



Gandhi. I never knew the difference between the Republican and Democratic Parties. The Federalist Papers, The Bill of Rights, The Stephen Douglas and Lincoln Debate: I had heard of them but that's about all. And slavery: My God, I'm Black and it hurts my heart to publicly admit it, but I never knew one iota about it. Therefore, to read an on-hand account by Frederick Douglass was overwhelming yet at the same time enlightening. By the way, John Brown, get this, I actually thought he was black. Last but not least, Emily Dickinson: I never heard of her or her poems. May God bless her confused soul!

Yes, this might be surprising to you, but in my world, where I come from, not knowing exists; it's sad but true.

So why fund Odyssey? Funding Odyssey is generational. Odyssey passes forward knowledge and learning skills that will undoubtedly be passed down to our children, our children's children, and their children. What better way to make a better America?

**Editorial: Affordable Dental Care?**

During the month of February, I experienced unrelenting pain caused by not one but two cavities. The nights were long, as the pain seemed more intense when I would lie down. My only source of relief was old-fashioned remedies: Gargle with half water, half peroxide, or warm salt water. Well, that got old, and it got old real quick.

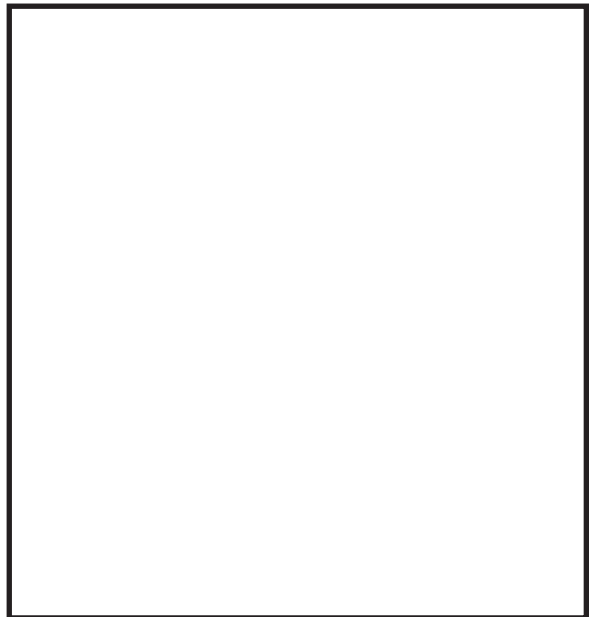
However, not having dental insurance or money to go to the dentist, I wondered what to do. Suddenly I remembered reading and retaining an article in the Wisconsin State Journal a few years ago about affordable dental clinics. Something inside warned me that I would need this information. So the next day I looked in my desk drawer and yes! There it was, right in front of me, the list that I so needed right now. I was ecstatic—still in pain but ecstatic.

Now the list consisted of four offices: American Dental Association, Meriter's Max W. Pohle Dental Clinic, Access Community Health Centers, and Affordable Dentures. My pursuit began.

American Dental was crossed off immediately because it had a Chicago area code. Next was Meriter's Dental Clinic, which I assumed to be somewhat expensive, so I skipped down to Access Community Health Center and made that much-anticipated phone call. My ecstasy soon diminished: no new patients until April and no emergency protocol in place. My only recourse was to call every morning in hopes of a cancellation or seek relief via Urgent Care or an Emergency Room.

Slightly disappointed and baffled, I hung up, called Meriter's Dental Clinic, and could not believe the words coming through the phone! It was as if I was listening to a recorded message: No appointments available for new patients, no emergency protocol, etc. I was appalled. I then contacted Affordable Dentures only to find they aren't affordable at all: \$20.00 consultation fee and \$70.00 for a mandatory x-ray, due at time of visit. So utilizing my only recourse, I sought treatment via Urgent Care. I received prescriptions for an infection and pain. I was then advised to seek treatment at Access or Meriter. Go figure: right back to square one!

And that to me is a problem. Most dental offices have a slot or two set aside for emergencies. Therefore, it's very difficult for me to understand why affordable dental places, typically for lower income individuals, don't. Do we not have emergencies? Does that not matter? Do we not matter? An inquiring mind wants to know. And a poetic mind observes: It seems a shame that one must wait through agony and pain, when all it takes is a stroke of a pen to jot down my name. A slot each day set aside for an emergency just in case. . . .





SHERRI BESTER, CLASS OF 2008

The Odyssey Dream

I describe myself and my interests now as that of great rebirth, growth, and change. Skeptical, secret, safe, silent sorrow scattered in the circles of my mind is no longer there, and now those once lost hopes, goals, and dreams are like overflowing seeds richly sprouting forth green and alive from once dormant, barren, dried out land. Reaching, believing, and touching the growth of flowers, I now shadow dance in a garden of precious, plentiful, planted Odyssey. . . I behold great love and acceptance in my Odyssey family as I trust, grow, change, learn, misunderstand, cry, laugh, succeed, fall, and then get helped right back up again. Sometimes I pinch and squeeze myself real tight because it all seems too good to be truth that this Odyssey isn't a dream I am sleeping through.

My Name, Sherri Genell Bester

My mother said that throughout her pregnancy with me in her belly's protection, I was a firecracker bursting across her stomach's sky in the midnight of her sweet yet sleepless dreams. . . . She said she knew right away that I was a dancer who danced quite a dance of unique creation. Yet my mother explained to me that after I was born, when she looked into my little, curious, searching face, she decided to name me Sherri because she had read that it was by meaning defined as "the little darling one." She expressed to me that when she finally beheld me in her arms, to her I appeared so sweet, kind and peaceful, a dancer of great love and energy from conception unto birth.

My grandmother gave me my middle name, "Genell," which I have always been told means "the gracious one." She passed on this name to me as a family name of my ancestors from one generation to another, and another, and another, and another as a blood promise to bring love, mercy, and peace into this world with faithful grace, beauty and eloquence.

My last name is Bester and was given to me with love after I vowed my love to my best friend of more than half my life today, James Bester. I first met James as a UW-Madison football player and brother of my roommate and friend at UW-Madison campus. . . . Our love overflowed endlessly into a fountain of two lives streaming forever together in rushing waters...

My family nickname "Cuppie" was created from a famous, popular, delicious ice cream dessert that I was addicted to when I was a little girl growing up down South melting in the undesirable heat of Greenville, Mississippi. The dessert was called Cherry Cup and was overflowing with fresh, sweet, red cherries showered with soft, cold, smooth whipped cream and covered with thick, dripping, sticky caramel. My grandmother started calling me Sherri Cuppie every time I indulged in this dessert after church on Sunday until eventually my family just called me "Cuppie" as my family nickname of love and endearment.



Music

Music is medicine to my heart, mind, body, soul, and spirit. . . I braid my daughter's hair to music early in the morning as the sun rises. . . I believe God created music as a voice to cover the earth with truth and power so the rhythms could reach even the ears of those who seem deaf. With music my heart continues to beat.

Love

"If I have unjustly wrested a plank from a drowning man, I must restore it to him though I drown myself. . . Truth is stronger than error." If I do wrong to anybody consciously or unconsciously, I must do everything within my power to make that wrong right even if I die trying to restore that evil into good. The price of righteousness and truth is worth the richest of death when necessary to debt's payment. I believe as the Holy Bible states in the book of Corinthians that "love does not keep a record of wrongs." I believe and live by the belief that all that really matters above all rules and laws of life is LOVE.



Beyond my human nature, LOVE must prevail past the greatest of all things, of all times and of all purposes of life itself. For in the end of all life it is LOVE that lasts, I believe, forever and past the greatest of all evil and good in life's eternal purpose and laws of righteousness.

Why Fund the Odyssey Project?

Why fund the Odyssey Project? When you decide to fund the Odyssey Project, you slice the sun in half and invite me into the middle of a great light of warmth, beauty, and change from frozen blinding darkness. You open up a package of the moon and stars and place them within my reach . . . as a whole new world . . . of hope-filled stars and moonlit guidance.

When you fund the Odyssey Project, you befriend a once depressed, fearful, wounded woman to break out of years of hidden, secret hibernation in a lonely closet, from behind a closed door . . . tightly buried beneath bedroom walls of flooded fountains of drowning tears. Please realize when you fund the Odyssey Project you knock down walls of separation and isolation to invite a woman's searching, hoping, believing mind to come back out to dwell and be covered within mighty millions of paper pages of dreams with directions of how to become truth. I then see, smell, hear, taste and touch masterpieces of rainbow-colored pathways that lead straight into a golden pot of golden knowledge, wisdom and virtue. .

When you give funds to the Odyssey Project, you give waters of life and bread from heaven to a thirsty and hungry woman searching past mere survival to find clear, honest, righteous pathways of life towards freedom.

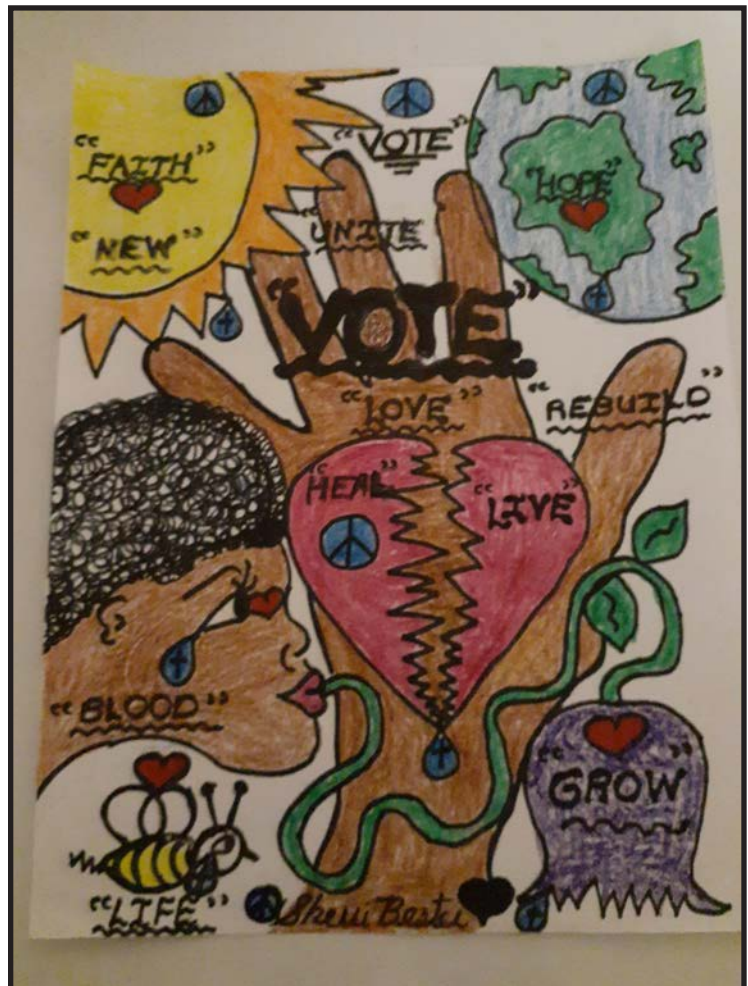
Why Vote?

Please, let me hold in my hands like a potter does clay your brilliant mind for a moment. Imagine your great-great-great-grandmother Maya secretly hidden in a hot, dark, smelly barn far away in the forest. She is frantically crying out in desperation both moans and groans to an unseen God while the Master beats your great-great great grandfather Ralph literally to death's doorway.

Danger screams out across the echoing forest, and the sights sounds, smells, tastes, and touches of abuse and murder prevail. . . Big Mama Maya weakly crawls over with bruised knees and trembling hands towards her beloved husband of over 50 years counting. . . Crawling slowly in unbearable pain and suffering your great great-great grandmother Maya moves closer towards your great great-great grandfather Ralph in hopes to help him survive past his destiny of death. . . Fiery, red, scorching, hot blazes of volcano juices pierce her thighs into crippled convolutions . . . throbbing and aching from the violation of the Master's rape filled punishment. Yet Big Mama Maya miraculously merges just enough strength to reach her doomed destiny. Big Daddy Ralph hangs there from the barn yard ceiling by a rope slightly swinging in freedom. . . Brutally beaten, bruised and bloody without one single breath of life left within him, your great-great-great grandfather was hanged from a lynching for the high price of your protection, justice, and freedom.

This was the final lynching that broke your Big Mama Maya's heart. . . Before she died she managed to whisper these words in great power and demand out in the death-filled air of an empty echoing barn in that deep, dark forest of Mississippi madness, "It was worth it all for you, my great, great, great grandchildren, to at least try to sneak through the forest at nightfall to join the movement, protest and campaign of your forefathers, so that you each one day will cherish in the great glory of justice and freedom 'The Right to Vote'!"

Please, my brilliant brothers and sisters . . .
 . if for no other rhyme or reason, think of the blood shed by our great forefathers and foremothers in great sacrifice and great suffering and then go register to . . . VOTE!
 "Stand up and be counted" . . . VOTE! "Register your protest with a corrupt system" . . . VOTE!
 "This country has discriminated against people like you for a long time" . . . VOTE! . . .
 . I remember the blood that was shed by our forefathers and foremothers, and I don't want all that blood to be shed in vain. So I fight past all my fears, rejections, and excuses, and I VOTE! This is a meaningful way to honor our ancestors . . .VOTE! . . . Stand up boldly and don't be out-tricked by a corrupt system that sometimes sets up false stumbling blocks to detour you, frustrate you, and guide you to give up. . . VOTE! Come out of that cave and do not give in to your lack of knowledge . . . VOTE! . . .





LENORA RODIN, CLASS OF 2015

I Slipped through the Cracks

Slipped through the cracks means to escape notice or lack sufficient attention. It can also mean to get lost or be forgotten, especially within a system. And this is my short, very short, and to-the-point story.

I have always pictured myself as a little person surrounded by giants, meaning that everyone I encountered was better than me. That was because in my mind I did not exist: I had no actual being or importance as a person, and I was invisible to my family and to the world. I've never known love. I have always equated love with sex. The only difference was that when the sex was over so was the love, at least in my mind.

I was born on a hot summer day in July. I came into this world fighting and kicking, and I have been fighting and kicking ever since, fighting to protect myself and kicking to be seen and heard. After all, I had a story, a life, a voice. No matter how little or meaningless it may have been, it was mine.

I must have been in the first grade when I came home with my tooth knocked back by a girl in my class named Odessa Rodgers (who is dead now, by the way, and, NO, I did not kill her). I will never forget her name. No one in my home even noticed my tooth—not my grandmother who I lived with, not my mother who showed up periodically, and, hell, not the teacher that I was in class with Monday through Friday. This was the beginning of me slipping through the crack, The Educational Crack.

I learned at an early age to stay out of the way and to be afraid, very afraid. I lived most of my younger years in fear—fear of being hungry, fear of being raped, fear of being beaten, even fear of being killed. All of these fears stemmed from the violence that I saw in my family. I should have been removed from that house, but, once again, I slipped through the crack, The Family Abuse Crack. When I was growing up, we were not allowed to have problems or complaints, and there was no such thing as depression. DEPRESSION, WHAT! After all, we did not pay any bills, so what gave us the right to be depressed about anything? How Dare You! Forget the fact that your mother and all of your aunts and uncles were either drunk or high on some type of drug. Forget the fact that your mother just left you with her mother who showed you NO love in any kind of way. Forget the fact that you were abused as a child and when you came to live with your grandmother you lived in constant fear. I could go on, but I think that the message is clear. I slipped through the crack again, this time The Crack of Un-Diagnosed Mental Illness.



Yes, I am an example of a person who slipped through the cracks of life, but I have started on the path of correction so that some of the cracks that I slipped through can be closed and never opened again.



Song of Lenora

A hot sultry
moist day in July
That is Lenora.
A woman who cries all night till sunrise
That is Lenora
A dedicated hard-working sympathetic person
That is Lenora
Say it loud I'm black and I'm proud
That is Lenora....

Words

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

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

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

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

Tired of Being Sick and Tired

When your Blues aren't Blue enough and your Highs aren't High enough, that is when you know that you are Tired of being Sick and Tired. When you go to the liquor store without planning to go to the liquor store, when you get drunk without planning to get drunk, that is when you know that you are Tired of being Sick and Tired. When you are on a chase to capture that last feeling of euphoria from that last drug, only to end up alone and depressed, that is when you know that you are Tired of being Sick and Tired. When all else has failed and you can barely look at yourself in the mirror without disgust and disappointment, that is when you know that you are Tired of being Sick and Tired. Are you Tired of being Sick and Tired?



ROSLYN PHILLIPS, CLASS OF 2007

Music

Music to me is the voice when I can't speak, the eyes when I can't see. Music inspires, lifts me to great levels, whether sad or happy.

I love all music. I grew up in a home where on Saturday mornings we would wake up to the sounds of Motown. My dad, God rest his soul, loved music. We would sing, dance, sweep, mop, dust, and dance to the Tempting Temptations and Dashing Dells.

As I grew older, the love of music grew in me. Now I love the sounds of Gospel music. I sing in a Gospel choir, where I let the lord use my voice. Music: it does soothe the "savage beast."

My Odyssey

I am enrolled in the UW Odyssey Project, a course in the humanities made possible for adults. I can't thank my professors enough for making all that is happening in our lives come true. I am truly inspired and motivated even more to achieve my dream. This class is a challenge for me to achieve a goal by wandering without failing to become a leader in my own right, to conquer and get over my fears of achieving a degree, to follow this class from start to finish. Wow, that is my Odyssey.

The biggest thing I will remember is the bus ride to and from the Art Museum. I had a real chance to get to know the Odyssey Class of 2007. Our Odyssey Class in itself is art.



MARCIA BROWN, CLASS OF 2012

The Rich Should Pay Their Fair Share

Now is the time to tax the rich at a higher percentage rate than what is used today. Why do the wealthy get to stay wealthy while the poor continue to decline to the level of poverty? There are two classes of people in this world today, the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots. The wealthy receive tax credits, which help them to keep more of their money for themselves. The poor are forced to depend upon public and government assistance, food stamps, and other programs to survive in a world filled with greedy people. Wealthy people are greedy, figuring out more ways to qualify for tax cuts, not wanting to give their fair share of taxes to state and federal municipalities. Instead of the poor working two or three jobs at minimum wage to survive, the wealthy should be taxed at a higher percentage of their earned income.

Making a Case for Odyssey's Second Semester

The first semester of the Odyssey Project was more detailed than I anticipated. I came into this class with an open mind, ready and willing to learn as much as possible. The Odyssey Project has opened my mind to a fresh and endless world of knowledge. I am ready to explore my possibilities for future endeavors.

I love the way Jean Feraca makes Philosophy enjoyable. She makes the characters come to life as we discuss Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" and "The Trial and Death of Socrates." I also was thrilled to be able to participate in the reading of *Macbeth* [with Baron Kelly].

Coach is a serious and fun-loving teacher who brings humor to the class every Wednesday night. His teaching is unorthodox, but his message is clear. I need to use my memory in pronouncing and spelling words that are new to me. I use "big" words to communicating with my friends and family, thanks to Coach.

I am not particularly fond of History. History was my least favorite subject in high school. Craig Werner opened my eyes to reflect on the past, present, and future of American History. I respect and appreciate History from a different perspective now because of the teaching technique of Craig Werner.

Emily Auerbach is a powerhouse of a woman. She may be short in stature but is big in personality. I have learned to use writing as a way to express myself by the way Emily structures her homework assignments. . . . When discussing Emily Dickinson, Jane Austen, William Blake, and other poets, Emily Auerbach's face lights up the room with her enthusiasm. Her enthusiasm transfers to the class as we read and write about famous poets.



I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the University of Wisconsin for the money spent on making it possible for me to have this opportunity to continue my college education. I am truly grateful for your support. I will make you proud to have considered me for this rare and wonderful endeavor.

The Odyssey Class of 2012 is full of energetic, serious-minded, and caring individuals. I consider all the students and faculty a part of my family. I love this class as if they are a part of my biological family. I hope the class reciprocates these feelings. I am available to help any class members that need my assistance. I should be allowed to continue in the Odyssey Project for second semester because I think that I have shown growth in my ability to learn.



SOCORRO LOPEZ, CLASS OF 2006

Music

Music soothes my chaotic life. I listen to different music because each type brings forth memories, emotions, and moods. When I was young my dad listened to mambo, vals, danza, and boleros, and I learned to appreciate that. Now when I listen to any music of that era, it brings memories of my childhood and the family gatherings.

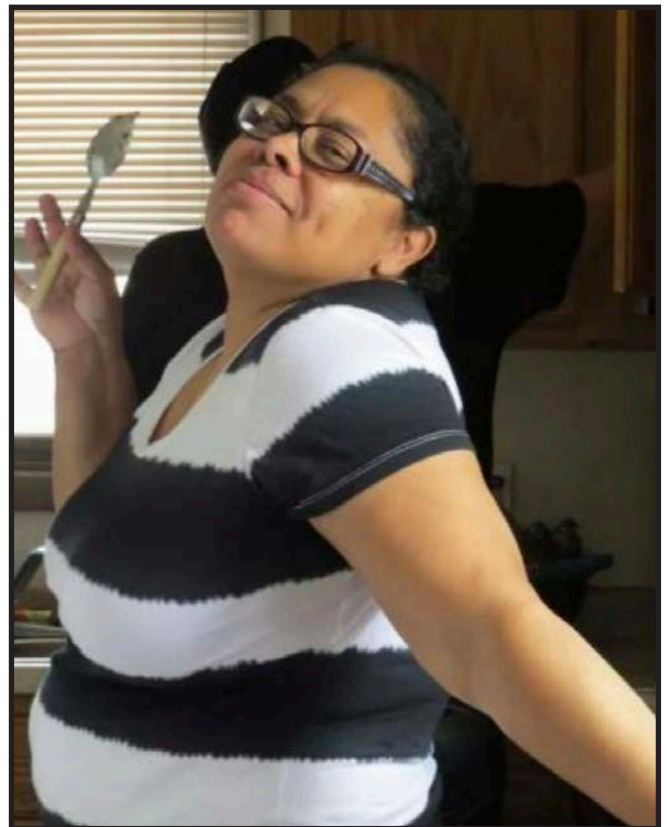
I listen to music from different decades because the music takes me through my childhood, teenage years, being single, being a parent, and listening to the music my teenage kids listen to. Music takes me back in time, to less stressful times, to happier times in my life. I switch stations to my moods.

From Blake to Poverty Today

William Blake writes in "Holy Thursday" from *Songs of Experience* these lines:

*Is this a holy thing to see
In a rich and fruitful land
Babes reduced to misery
Fed with cold and usurious hand?*

This poem caught my eye in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, After watching weeks of despair and hopelessness in the faces of residents in these affected states, my thoughts are of why all this poverty exists in a land that helps out other countries and funds other wars. Why do we have people living in conditions that we condemn in other countries?



Song of Socorro

Socorro Lopez, a creature, of Juan the son
Sensual, sassy, intelligent, prankster, and breeder.
No thinker, no one special above
Men and women or separate from them.

Special am I inside and out, and
I make harmony wherever I go.
The scene of this skin is finer than perfume.
This head more stable than heads
Of governments, leaders, and nations.

**CHAR BRAXTON, CLASS OF 2006****Destiny**

There are things you will never
Understand about me.
I've taken twenty steps forward

And fallen thirty back.

My brothers and sisters were
Born into slavery, only to have
The color of their black skin attacked.
Searching the skies for brighter days ahead.
Listening to lies about what the white man said.
Hiding in bushes, shivering from the cold.
I'm struggling to learn to read . . .
The letters . . . so black . . . so bold.
Remembering my black heritage and family tree,
The color purple, diamonds, rubies, and royalty.
The imperfections that you try
To use against me will only
Make me stronger, wiser,
And closer to reaching my degree.
I will keep my faith in GOD
And humanity
Because you will never have my soul
My strength
My willingness
And especially
My sanity.

