

YEAR 1, ISSUE 1



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ODYSSEY BEYOND WARS ORACLE



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www.odyssey.wisc.edu



Dear Reader:

You are holding in your hands the inaugural edition of the Odyssey Beyond Wars Oracle, written by the inaugural class of OBW – a small but mighty group of military veterans.

Each one of these veterans has taken very different journeys to enrolling in OBW, and many have different goals, both for this year and beyond. Some are working toward a college degree or have dreams of advanced degrees. Some are chasing a lifelong love of learning. Others are seeking a sense of purpose, or simply want to feel part of a community.

Many have faced significant challenges before, during, and after their military service, from poverty and violence to sexual trauma and substance abuse, from incarceration to being unhoused. But all of them have in common resilience, hope, and a fierce sense of determination. It's an incredible group of people. I've always felt extraordinarily lucky to be able to do what I do for a living, but never more so than now, on Tuesday evenings, when I walk into our OBW classroom and get to laugh and learn alongside them.

A program like this couldn't exist just anywhere. It takes people who both recognize a need and are willing to champion it – people like Division of Continuing Studies Dean Jeff Russell, and Odyssey Project Director Emily Auerbach, without whom OBW would never have been possible. Others who lent their support and expertise include UW Director of Veteran Services Joe Rasmussen, VetsCAN board member and advocate Will Atkinson, CVSOs Janelle Gallatin and Sandy Deich, Disabled Veteran Outreach Program Specialists Shea Roberts and Nathaniel Belnap, and UW-Madison/Odyssey-affiliated veterans and authors Wyl Schuth, Doug Bradley, and Craig Werner.

It also takes an extraordinary amount of teamwork to run, and at Odyssey, we have the very best team. Special thanks to Em Azad, Sarah Lensmire, Gwendolyn Coale, Char Braxton, Christina Demars, Bobbie Wang, and Kevin Mullen for everything you do to support OBW on a weekly basis, and to those who have taken time out of their already-busy schedules to share their expertise and knowledge with this OBW class: Charles Konsitzke of UW-Madison's MIA Project, Vietnam veteran and author, Doug Bradley; UW-Madison Emeritus Prof. of Art History, Gene Phillips; and Veteran Print Project creator, Yvette Pino.

A final thanks to the students themselves. I am continually inspired by their enthusiasm and tenacity, encouraged by their support of one another, and humbled by their vulnerability and trust, both in me and each other. It's a beautiful thing to witness – a gift they're also providing to you with the words they've penned in the pages that follow.

We hope you enjoy!

Sincerely,
Erin Celello & the 2024 OBW Class
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WHAT DOES ODYSSEY MEAN TO YOU?

Students were asked what their feelings were on starting Odyssey Beyond Wars, what being a part of the Odyssey program means to them, and how this class might be an odyssey for them, personally.



I love to write. I completed Odyssey Class of 2012 and the first Odyssey Senior class. Since I'm a veteran, I felt, "Why not?" **(Marcia Brown)**



It felt great! It let me know I was part of something much larger than myself. **(Ortese Lomax)**



I'm elated to be a part of this program. I never got to use my GI bill because I had no idea what to get a PhD in, but I love learning. Disability these last few years took school completely off the table. I'm just looking for comradery and joyful learning. **(Nicole Hanson)**



I really could not believe that I had been given the opportunity to become a university student at UW-Madison. I'm Old School with a passion to learn from myself, my environment, my peers, my superiors, and my professors. I WILL attain both scholarly and academic goals no matter what the price. That is my desire. There.....I have said it. Now there's no turning back. Thank you for your support. **(Juan Ramirez)**



Each veteran has their own definition of what an odyssey is that is unique to their journey. I am looking forward to taking an honest look into some of my reasonings and listening to others' stories. **(Erik Huelsbeck)**



I have been very anxious to be here. It was an immense blessing to be accepted. **(Marlene Toledo)**



I feel a little weariness and fear since it's been since Odyssey 2010 that I have done any writing or classwork. I have had some moments of fear, but I believe I will get with it. I plan to stick and stay! **(Sanford Jones)**



I am happy to be a part of such a worthwhile program. I hope to accomplish a lot through this time we spend together. **(Loretta Lacy)**



WHERE WE'RE FROM

In her poem "Where I'm From," George Ella Lyon wrestles with themes of identity, home, and personal history. By looking back on her own upbringing and pinpointing the things that make her unique, Lyon comes to understand herself more completely. We used this poem as an exercise for introducing ourselves in the first week of class.

Here is Lyon's poem (right), followed by Odyssey Beyond Wars students' poems inspired by it.

Where I'm From By Ortese "TC" Lomax

I'm from water
From sand and fog.

I am from the city on the border
Safe, comforting: relaxing the body and soul.

I am from shelter
Providing sanctuary; a place to focus
I'm from sharing and bringing.

I'm from George and Tina.
From Friday nights at the drive-in and late night
homework sessions.

The 10 Commandments, for rules to live and learn.
I'm from Australia because the openness frees your mind
and soul.

German chocolate cake and home-made ice cream.
I'm from George and Tina...
George gave me the foundation
to become the man I am.
Tina showed me how to be strong, yet fair.
Family albums that explain every aspect of my childhood.

Where I'm From by George Ella Lyon



I am from clothespins,
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.
I am from the dirt under the back porch.
(Black, glistening,
it tasted like beets.)
I am from the forsythia bush
the Dutch elm
whose long-gone limbs I remember
as if they were my own.

I'm from fudge and eyeglasses,
from Imogene and Alafair.
I'm from the know-it-alls
and the pass-it-ons,
from Perk up! and Pipe down!
I'm from He restoreth my soul
with a cottonball lamb
and ten verses I can say myself.

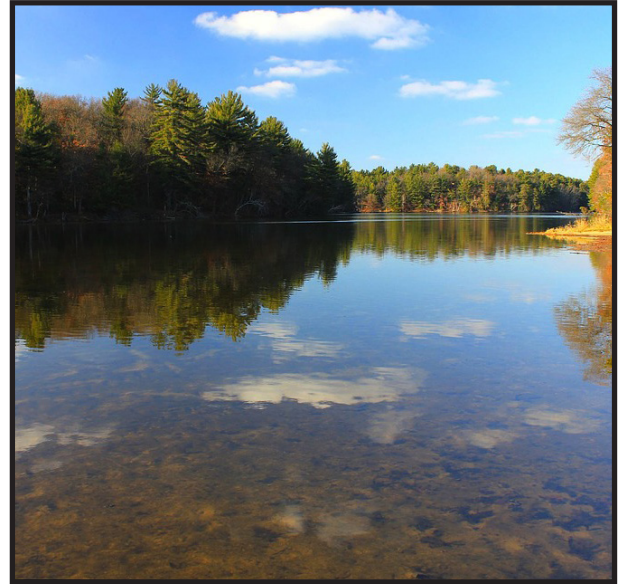
I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch,
fried corn and strong coffee.
From the finger my grandfather lost
to the auger,
the eye my father shut to keep his sight.

Under my bed was a dress box
spilling old pictures,
a sift of lost faces
to drift beneath my dreams.
I am from those moments--
snapped before I budded --
leaf-fall from the family tree.

Where I'm From
by Nicole Hanson

I am from river beds,
From prairies and backroads.
I am from the lake.
Cool, fresh, always loud with laughter,
smelling of algae and fish.
I am from quilts.
Crocheted or sewn.
Some tattered with time.
All surrounded in the love they were crafted with.

I am from the calm and the chaos.
From Susan and Peter.
I'm from the providers and the takers,
From 'we don't do that here' and 'you aren't enough.'



I am from the prophet who took my father.
From the God who left me faithless.
I'm from nowhere but found peace upon the
rollercoaster.
From pancakes and pie and mushroom gravy pork chops.

I am from his morning coffee crew
in the bait shop.
From 100s of caps hung from the ceiling.
From his welcoming smile straight to his eyes.

I am from front porch sitting.
From howling at the ballgame.
From ice cream sundae, lemonade, and popcorn in tow.

I am from the anger and despair
shed from the Monster's mouth.
From hiding under the covers of the daybed.
From shedding wounds never comes soon.
I go forward in the arms of my sons
With the solidity of my husband's love.

Where I'm From by Gary S. Lothe

I am from being spanked on the butt and crying like a baby.
 I am from the Sun Prairie Corn Festival, eating sweet corn,
 going on rides and eating French toast.
 I am from getting dirty and playing in the mud.
 I am from playing with GI Joes, tinker toys,
 Lincoln logs, and Hot Wheels.
 I am from being a knucklehead, and changing to a grown man.
 I am from the Army, be all that you can be.
 I am from digging foxholes, setting up camouflage nets, and moving through the woods with weapon in
 combat status.
 I am from being homeless, sleeping under the bridge, homeless shelter, camper and tent.
 I am from helping and doing favors for people and friends,
 being taken advantage of and being stabbed in the back.
 I am from accomplishing my goals, working, going to school and bettering myself.
 I am from having a strong back and a weak mind.
 I am from going from young to old.
 I am from having a weaker back and a stronger mind.
 I am from doing pushups to retiring from the military.
 I am from my favorite music from the Beatles to all the rock and roll from the 60's and 70's.
 I am going from living to living and do not look forward to dying.



Where I'm From By Loretta Lacy

I am from Mississippi
 Clarksdale and Jackson.
 I am from the Deltas.
 Down home cooking and close knit family.
 I'm from religious and church going.
 From momma and daddy
 From "treat people right" and "always
 count your blessings before you complain."
 I am from spirituality and
 Bible believing.
 I am from Racine, Wisconsin
 Still eating chitterlings and collard greens
 From the mother who made our clothes
 In the basement, and grew our food
 In the backyard.
 The father who worked in a foundry
 Until his health went bad.
 That's what makes me who I am.

Where I'm From
By Marlene Toledo

I am from the roots of the Maquilishuatl, lotus flower bomb
 From the tasty dishes of the Izote Flower,
 and the fresh seafood of the coastal savannas,
 From vacations and diversions on the beaches each holy week.
 I am from the crater of the Izalco volcano, silent
 From, and the fury of the active Chaparrastique,
 spewing hot dust, choking the gente.

I am from the corn people, the coffee lands, the luscious
 sugar canes, various organic bananas, plantains, zapotes,
 papayas, and ripe mangoes hanging from the tree by
 which, the infamous El Cipitillo, enamors all women, and
 La Cihuanaba, cried aloud banging her chests on a river
 rock, because her husband left her, as legends go!

From the comales heating on the wooden fires and all the housekeepers organizing feeding
 the livestock under the red almond tree out in the open patio, surrounded by the fruits of our labor.
 I am from pupusas as soul food

Warm spiced meat with melted cheese stuffed in corn pastry. The vinegar from the pickled curtido
 running down my wrists.

I am from the Judeo Christian and the Roman Catholics.

Always celebrating baptisms, weddings, holy communion, and holy processions. Every day during holy
 week, all month in May, and all year round going to the immaculate cathedral, crawling up the steep
 steps on hands and knees to keep up with my parents to sing and pray. Counting the beads on a
 rosary for the dead for nine straight days.

From the Ancestry of the Molina and Sánchez to the Barraza, Romero, Chicas, and Orantes. Trading
 orators for the neat and compact. Jumping into the waters of Lake Michigan. Gathering Flowers in
 Madison and settling in Toledo.

I am from the abundant kitchens of fruits and vegetables, livestock, legumes and grains. Lovingly placed
 on the red wooden dining table and countertops.

From highly intelligent peoples and a beautifully created family of God, the father.

I am from private schools, taught by my father, raised by my mother, my favorite teacher since grades K-7.

I am from a family of eight children, two older brothers, one younger, me, and four sisters. The struggle
 with addiction and suffering of poor health sent the family into despair, leaving eight children to
 divide amongst the willing relatives

Then growing to 13 after our adoption.

44 years after I have my own family of three, a dog and a vagabond spouse.

From a family of soccer hooligans, salsa dancers, cumbias, musicians, artists, gardeners, and educators. I
 come from a Classy Few.

fighting the injustices of this world, from whence all mental illness arises.

Deep in my soul are many memories of my love maps, and my hard to overcome unfaithfulness of two
 husbands.

I have kept loyal to my dearest mother, and it created fiction with my adoptive mother.

I believe in Angels; I believe in miracles and God is sending messages which I cannot ignore further

I am taking the challenge to travel through the Odyssey and take the time to know myself.

I'm from across the universe, ad infinitum, ad nauseum, Cognito, ergo sum!



Where I'm From By Juan Ramirez

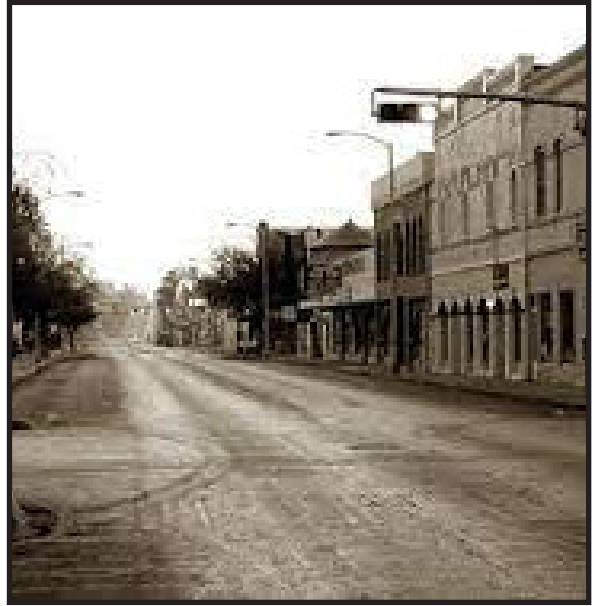
I was born in San Antonio, Texas
in the late 60s
during the national racial upheavals
that inflicted our country to its roots.

My father took our family to Eagle Pass, Texas
when I was five and I grew up on both sides
of the US / Mexican border.

We were a mercantile middle class family.
I did all my public schooling on the US side
and all my social upbringing on the Mexican side.
Other than political and ethnic turmoil and even some
Native American problems since
The Great Kickapoo Tribe lived two blocks away from us.
Never a boring day on 90 Main Street Eagle Pass Texas 78852.

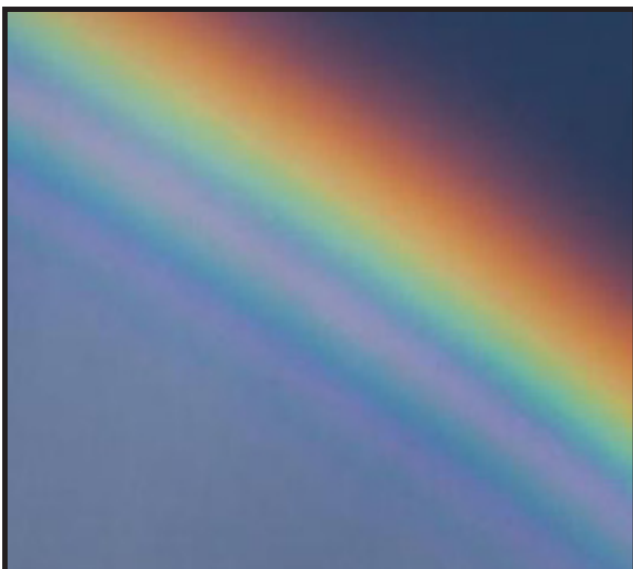
My US hometown never grew over 20,000 inhabitants.
Young people grow up and head towards greener pastures.
My Mexican Hometown of Piedras Negras Coahuila Mexico
has grown exponentially, now over a 100,000 population to date.

I miss both of my hometowns
but I have finally found a home here
in Madison Wisconsin.
I plan to stay here
for the rest of my
remaining life and
I'm looking forward to it.



Where I'm From By Erik Huelsbeck

I am from dreams
From mom and dad
I am from the town of Apples
Music Miles, Houdini's disappearing magic.
I am from a community that embraces differences
I'm from opportunity and love
From Huelsbeck and Meyer
I'm from the dysfunction and understanding
From tallness and height
I'm from atheism, who understands no god
I'm from Appleton, rubens, sauerkraut.
From the height of World War Ili and grandfathers
Patton and purple heart.
The different shades of the rainbow
Representing love, inclusion and acceptance
But then these differ to who I speak to individually.



**Where I'm From
By Sanford Jones**

I am from steel country
Fire, soot and smog.

I am from all black schools
In a city of many shades.

I am from concrete jungles
Traffic and stop lights.

I am from Gary the Steel city
Where my ancestors descended seeking freedom.

I am from the projects to the military.

I am from seeking freedom to fighting for freedom.

I am from young black man lost to
Grown black man found.

I am from street gangs and destruction
To militant man looking to make changes

I am from addiction to recovery finding
Myself in spite of myself.

I am from self love growing from self
Loathing. I am an example for
my young. Can you imagine that?



**Where I'm From
By Marcia Brown**

I am from the South Side of Chicago
Residing in the largest apartment
complex ever built in the midwest.
Balls bouncing on the basketball court,
Jump ropes swishing in the playground
While I jump in.

Families talking at the dinner table,
Recounting how their work or school day fared
Clanging of silverware against the plates
With each spoonful of food deposited
Into their mouths.

I am from the blaring of police sirens
And the screeching of ambulances on their
Way to an emergency situation (probably
A shooting between the gangs).
Replaced by the pitter patter of feet
from children playing in the playground.

I am from fried chicken and barbeque ribs,
Hot dogs and whatever you want to be barbequed,
Smells wafting through the neighborhood
And through the opened windows of my apartment.

I am from people jammed together
Like sardines in a metal can
Dimly lit ceiling lights
Fences stretching to the top
Fingers sticking out of fence holes
Like a prisoner in prison locked up
With nowhere to go.



STUDENT METAPHORS

I am a burst of sunshine on a backdrop of a cloudy sky.
My enthusiasm shines when I'm given a task to complete.
I love to talk and give my unadulterated opinion on any
subject in a conversation. When I walk into a room, I will
be noticed because I am full of energy and anticipation.
Just like the sun competes with the clouds, I will shine
regardless of the outcome. **(Marcia Brown)**



I am light in spite of the darkness I used to be. I am what
shines on my family and friends. I am light with no on
and off switch. I choose to remain light! **(Sanford Jones)**

I am a scattered mess.

Disorganized chaos fills my head and covers my counters.

Ideas flow past like a leaf on a rushing river, beautifully resting atop the foamy waves while it catches
your gaze but gone before you can capture its true essence. **(Nicole Hanson)**

I used to be a shadow, but now I am a beacon. Before, I only existed because of the images of others;
not knowing my own purpose. But as time progressed, the shadow was surrounded by light, becoming
a beacon shining toward a positive path and outlook and the shadow I used to be is now replaced by
MAKING a shadow for who I truly am! **(TC Lomax)**

I am an Odyssey.
I have come from afar.
I have been blown off my path by terrible winds
I have lost my way. Again
I am Odyssey.

I have been shipwrecked more than once.
I have been lost in the arms of others
I have been looking for my home for way too long.
I am Odyssey.

I have seen thousands of horizons on my path.
I have seen thousands of Dusks and thousands of
Dawns.
East to West and North to South I have traveled.
I am Odyssey

Have I Eternally lost my way?
Is there still a home for me to pray?
No..... it has been too long.
I am Home.
This, my life, has always been Home,
For I am Odyssey. **(Juan Ramirez)**



I am a leaf on a tree.
That leaf may be small
But the tree is tall. **(Erik Huelsbeck)**

VISIT TO THE MIA PROJECT

Our class visited the UW-Madison MIA Recovery and Identification Project, which works in conjunction with the Department of Defense to recover missing U.S. military personnel from past global conflicts through annual field excavations and year-round research. The project consists of an interdisciplinary team of academic experts and student volunteers in the fields of history, archaeology, forensic anthropology, and biology. Approximately 82,000 service members are still missing today – 1,500 from Wisconsin. Here are some reactions from the visit.

I had a few mixed feelings about UW-Madison's MIA Project, but it had nothing to do with the project. It had more to do with the Mantra "No One Left Behind," and the fact that more that can and should be done as 82,000 US service members have been left behind. I feel that the research and work that the project does is truly needed and so inspiring. These service members deserve to come home. Although most of the fallen heroes' family members are now deceased, this is definitely a race against time, but that shouldn't matter. I couldn't imagine the loneliness some family members went through without the closure or truth of what happened to those they loved. Also, I would never want to have a grave site where no one even knows where I am and to perish alone. Our fallen heroes deserve much more than this, and this should be a project backed by the nation, DOD, VA, and state legislatures. Recovery of the fallen is definitely a race against time. **(Erik Huelsbeck)**

I find it appalling that little, if anything, has been done to fund the MIA project. In the Capitol, there are people in \$1,000 suits with \$10 IQs deciding how much money to allocate for over-expensive housing around Madison when families have been without their loved ones for more than decades because to some legislators, MIA stands for "Minimal Interest Allowed" instead of "Missing in Action."

Members of the military, veterans, and their families deserve closure for the families and the men who bravely fought and died for our country and state, and the legislature must realize these men are more than just "faces without names." If the tables were turned and they lost a loved one in any past conflict, they would do anything in their power to make things right for their family, but since they have no direct or personal interest in these MIAs, they are in the mindset of "why bother?"



If we as Wisconsin residents are to be proud of the accomplishments our government has made regarding veterans, it should begin with digging more into locating our MIAs and letting them know, to a certain degree, that their lives weren't lost in vain. **(TC Lomax)**

I enjoyed our class trip to UW's MIA Recovery and Identification Project. I was impressed by how dedicated Chuck and Torrey are about this project. I did not know that there were so many MIAs (82,000), and I have a new understanding of how slow the government works. I don't understand why the government won't excavate the graves of MIAs buried in the tombs of unknown soldiers to get the DNA that would be helpful in linking them to their families. **(Marcia Brown)**

THE THINGS WE CARRIED

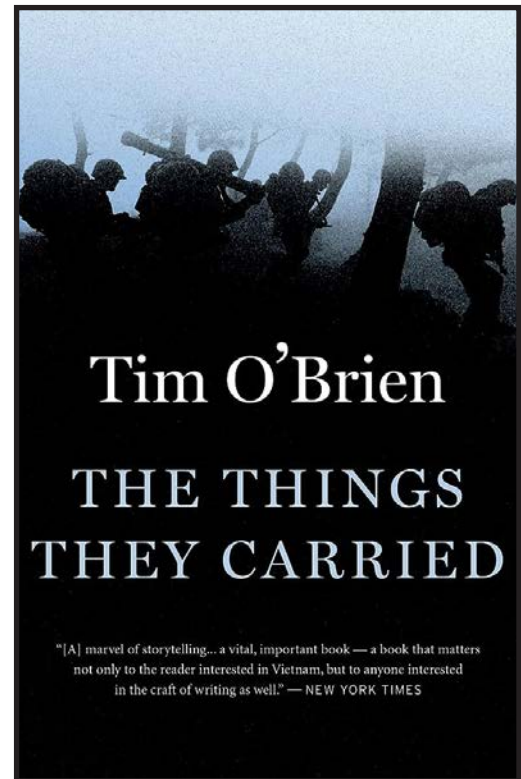
We read and discussed Tim O'Brien's short story "The Things They Carried." After, students created lists of things they've carried on their own journeys. What follows is the weaving together of many of the items on those lists in order to tell our class's collective story.

We came from San Salvador, from Mississippi, from Eagle Pass, Texas and Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico. From the South side of Chicago, small towns in Wisconsin, and the concrete jungles of Pittsburgh.

Uncle Sam called and we answered, carrying our duffels to Ft. Jackson, South Carolina; Ft. Benning, Georgia; Ft. Dix, New Jersey; Ft. Benjamin Harrison, Indiana; Ft. Sam Houston, Texas; and to Alameda, California.

We learned discipline. Wore our BDUs and ODUs and ACUs. Trained in our MOSs. Carried our M16s everywhere we went.

We carried the insignias of infantry and medics and officers and accolades for our service: from good conduct and achievement ribbons to Bravo Zulu awards to a Meritorious Service Medal. We logged 3,000 hours underwater and were on our way to carrying Master Diver, Hazmat/Deep-sea Welding, Nitrox Diving, and Hardhat Diving certifications.



We were sent to Ft. Rucker, Alabama, and Presidio in the shadow of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, California. We carried our belongings to Germany in 1969 during the Vietnam War. To the Republic of Panama in 1989 for Operation Just Cause, where we turned our infantry positions into a profession and then an artform. To New Orleans in August of 2005 where we stood guard outside Harrah's Casino after Hurricane Katrina ripped through and watched as boats floated down the flooded streets. In Adak, Alaska, aboard the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star, we dove beneath the ice, carrying charges that would be set off to clear the way for ships. Some of us were surprised to find ourselves carrying babies, and then diaper bags.



When our service was done, we carried our DD214s, discharge papers and separation documents. We carried our time in the military back out into the world with us, like an invisible rucksack, sometimes feeling lost and alone and directionless as newly-minted civilians.

Some of us carried invisible wounds. Those of us who are Black faced racism and carried the knowledge that our country didn't love or respect us regardless of what we'd given it. Others were forced to carry a hidden part of ourselves under Don't Ask, Don't Tell, and still others, the pain of assault by those in charge we should have been able to trust.

We became auto workers and bus drivers and long-haul truckers, painters and custodians and poets. We worked in retail and construction. We worked for the Department of Corrections and were incarcerated. Some of us carried everything we had with us, living in shelters, under bridges, or in a treeline next to a Walmart during a Wisconsin winter.

We endured, carrying with us faith and compassion, motivation and resilience, discipline and dedication.

And somehow, we all ended up here, in Odyssey Beyond Wars.

Into this class, we carried open minds with a love of writing and reading. A thirst for learning. A desire to know why we are still going to war and why we can't find another way to figure out our differences.

Some of us carried with us the doubt and anxiety of entering a classroom again after many years away, but we overcame it and applied anyway. All of us now carry a lighter load: hopes and dreams – earning associates, bachelors, or Juris doctorate degrees, fresh and new beginnings, finding a purpose and comradery, and having a community of our own to belong to.



THE SOUNDTRACK OF OUR LIVES

Author and Vietnam veteran Doug Bradley helped us understand the importance music played in the lives of those who fought in Vietnam. Doug, along with Craig Werner, co-author of We Gotta Get Out of This Place: the Soundtrack of the Vietnam War, discovered that veterans were often reluctant to talk about their experiences, but when asked what song or songs defined their time in Vietnam, they were often able to tell their stories through music.

Inspired by Doug's visit, OBW students wrote about songs that form the soundtracks to their lives and designed their own album covers. Scan the QR code to access our full class playlist on Spotify!



SCAN ME

The Long and Winding Road - The Beatles

I wish I could have done things differently in the military...If I could go back and change things, I would, but I cannot change the past, only the future. I have accomplished many goals and covered a lot of ground in my lifetime, so I cannot complain. It does not do any good anyways. Accomplishing goals and having a sense of humor is what keeps me going, like a Timex watch and the Energizer Bunny. **(Gary Lothe)**



Lacrimosa - Mozart

We listened to LP's while having a romantic dinner and drinking all night. In the military, I was easily preyed on, as I had fallen into that lifestyle after having been signed up for the military by my adoptive mother. As part of my Army Military Service, I was recruited into the Early Entrance Program (EEP) – enlisted at the age of seventeen (17), by my mother who knew my English was limited. Or had I been influenced by my peers, in high school, in the military, in college? Was I just acting out old traumas? Having unresolved issues of growing up in a domestic abuse environment, incestual household while having younger brothers and sisters to protect does make one stressed out before even being a child and enjoying all that you enjoyed as a young child. **(Marlene Toledo)**

What's Going On – Marvin Gaye

I've been listening to music since I was a toddler in diapers. My mom and dad played music from 33s on their record player every weekend. I can still see them stepping and slow dancing to the sounds of Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, Lonnie Liston Smith, Wes Montgomery, and many other jazz musicians and singers...I was a sophomore in high school when I first heard the album "What's Going On" by Marvin Gaye. I love to listen to the entire album every once and again. My favorite song on the album is "Inner City Blues": "Inflation no chance to increase finance/ Bills pile up sky high send that boy off to die/ Oh, make me want to holler the way they do my life/ duh, duh, duh/ Yeah, make me want to holler the way they do my life/ Oh, baby." This verse in the song has a powerful message. This song was released in 1971 when inflation was up and finances were down, so it was hard for people to pay their bills, including my family. This was a time when the draft was fully in effect, and soldiers were dying over in Vietnam.

(Marcia Brown)



Happy – Pharrell Williams

"Happy" has multiple meanings in my life. October 1, 2021 changed everything for me. The song was playing inside my motorcycle helmet when I was out riding that day. While I was waiting at the stop

light, a vehicle came from a parking lot, ran me over, and caused substantial damage to my right leg. Spending a year in the nursing home because of the accident, I played the song over and over again because I was "happy to be alive," considering the extent of my injuries and what could've happened. To this day, "Happy" remains a major part of my life! **(TC Lomax)**



AC/DC

My music genre is Rock and Roll – always has been and always will be. AC/DC is my most favorite band. I always go back to their music when the chips are down, when I'm being challenged by something bigger and badder than me, when my situation is precarious and dangerous. This band

and their songs bring me up to the plate to take on challenges that are over and above my pay grade, helping me to fight and win against impossible odds. I call them AC/DC battle songs.

While I was in the US Army, my entire career was in mechanized or armored infantry units. Both in the U.S. and abroad, I did nine brigade-level rotations and trained for battle against the Opfor, which was a Soviet-type and equipped force using their tactics. They always had the advantage of terrain, equipment, and movement. We were on their turf. Every mission, without fail, our APC and IFV drivers, gunners, and vehicle commander hooked up our tape recorder to the vehicle intercom system to the tunes of "Back in Black," "Heatseeker," "Hells Bells" and "For Those About to Rock" as we charged against the enemy in battle formation. Sometimes we won, most of the time we lost to the experienced Opfor. So every time I remember a Battalion or Brigade-level 500 vehicle attack, I remember attacking with the tunes of AC/DC. **(Juan Ramirez)**

Just Pretend – Bad Omens

I've driven thousands of miles. I've wrecked everything hundreds of times. I've never known how to do this life as a healthy soul. I gave up and hit the dead end, only to open Pandora's box and see the road open up in all directions for the first time ever. I am



learning to love myself in small ways. Forgiving my mistakes. Releasing the pain with each passing mile...I continue to fight for myself, my heart, and my broken soul. Fighting back against the monster. The thing is I also see now that I am not doing this alone. I'm fighting with the people who have always seen my best, freshly waxed exterior and the high end leather seats and comfy interior. The

kind of car you want to drive with for life. There is only one song on side B. It represents gratitude for patience. Mine towards my husband (and my sons.) The man who eternally reminds me: "I can wait for you at the bottom. I can stay away if you want me to. I can wait for years if I gotta. Heaven knows I ain't getting over you." "Just Pretend" by Bad Omens carries us both forward. Speed bumps, construction, and detours will always be ahead; but, what I have finally learned is that with our love our drive will go on. **(Nicole Hanson)**

