

YEAR 1, ISSUE 2



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ODYSSEY BEYOND WARS ORACLE



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Dear Reader,

As we set off together on our first two semesters of Odyssey Beyond Wars, students were asked to define an “odyssey” – a long, wandering adventure filled with highs and lows – and what being part of the Odyssey Project meant to them.

As with any journey, this one brought a mix of emotion: from trepidation (“I have had some moments of fear, but I believe I will get with it. I plan to stick and stay!” - Sanford Jones) and apprehension (“I have been very anxious to be here. It was an immense blessing to be accepted.” - Marlene Toledo), to excitement (“I’m elated to be a part of this program. I’m just looking for comradery and joyful learning.” - Nicole Hanson), and determination (“I really could not believe that I had been given the opportunity to become a university student at UW-Madison. 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.” - Juan Ramirez).

This past year has truly mirrored an odyssey. On most Tuesday evenings (except two, once when we got to see “The Hello Girls” at The Overture – thanks to Sarah Marty and Four Seasons Theater! – and the other when a rogue April snowstorm confined us to Zoom) we gathered at the UW South Madison Partnership to discuss Homer’s 3,000 year-old epic The Odyssey, a play based on his other tale, The Iliad, and a variety of modern writers who have chronicled the veteran experience. We celebrated birthdays and life milestones together. Supported one another through some significant health and other tough issues. And shared some tears, but more laughter.

We also put pen to paper and shared our own stories. And now, a full 32 weeks after embarking on this journey, we celebrate as it draws to a close. For some, this represents an end of a chapter in their lives. For others, another Odyssey, just beginning. Regardless, every story, every word took great care and courage to share with a wider audience.

This program owes thanks to so many – to Sarah Lensmire, Gwendolyn Coale, Christina Demars, Bobbie Wang, and Kevin Mullen for everything you do to support OBW on a weekly basis; to Division of Continuing Studies Dean Jeff Russell and Odyssey Project Director Emily Auerbach for your support; and to our classroom guests Emily Auerbach, Christine Cina (Odyssey Navigator), James DeVita (American Players Theater), Sarah Marty (Four Seasons Theater), Kevin Ryan (Team Rubicon), and storytellers Brendon Panke, Mel Hammond, and Scott Schultz.

Most of all, though, I would like to offer my heartfelt gratitude to the students themselves. This mighty group of nine has demonstrated over and again a love of learning, joy for life, and trust both in me and each other that is both inspiring and humbling. I’m in awe of how much they’ve collectively endured and accomplished, and I’m quite certain I’ve learned more from them this year than they could ever learn from me.

Erin Ceello

WHAT COURAGE MEANS TO ME

Courage can mean many different things, from rising to a challenge, to persevering to standing up for what we believe in, and more. In an essay we read titled “On Courage,” UW-Madison’s Dr. Richard Avramenko asserts that courage is a relational virtue, gaining its importance when we are in community with others as opposed to one we should assign to heroes on pedestals. He finds there are five types of courage – martial, political, moral, economic and existential courage – and defines it as “that which inspires us to overcome ourselves.” After reading and discussing “On Courage,” OBW students were asked to define courage for themselves.

Courage to me is surviving Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, as the Department of Defense never needed to enact policy that discriminated against a minority community. It is also having the strength and resiliency to bounce back from life’s challenges.

Enlisting amongst the DADT policy was the scariest thing that I ever did. There were so many unknowns. Then I came back to Wisconsin from living in Florida from ‘99 to ‘00, and experienced life differently. Down there, I surrounded myself with ‘out’ individuals, only to come to Wisconsin to have to hide in the closet again. **(Erik Huelsbeck)**

Courage is standing up to yourself or someone else when needed to accomplish a task or protect someone or thing for pride, self-respect, similar words would be bravery, heroism, gallantry, prowess, nerve, valor, spirit, spunk or daring. It could be physical or mental courage or courageousness. **(Gary Lothe)**

I think courage is when all the chips are down and you are still willing to pick them up and try again.



I think courage is when you can look someone in the eye and tell them you love them and truly mean it.

I think courage is knowing when to throw in the towel or just simply facing your fears and not just walking away with no solution.

I think courage is just daring to be yourself. **(Lori Lacy)**

In my younger days, I thought courage meant to be fearless, to not back down from a fight or bully. I thought it meant to walk into danger and put my life on the line. I took many life-altering chances. I am blessed to not be in the penitentiary or graveyard.

As I grew older, I began to understand that my meaning of courage is knowing the difference between right and wrong and being able to lean towards the right. In knowing when to stand up and walk away. Courage to me is facing the challenges of life, knowing that I can’t always control the outcome. Knowing that I don’t always need to win. Knowing that I can live life on life’s terms. Knowing that I can attempt to be the bigger man. I am grateful to the universe and my family for allowing me to be just me and not need to be the center of the universe. **(Sanford Jones)**

What Does Courage Mean to me?

Courage Means...

To have strength

To resolve

To face fear

To face danger

Or adversity

Courage means...

To persevere

To be steadfast

To willingly and in spite

Of fear face challenges

No matter how tough

Things get,

No matter how uphill

The struggle becomes

It means not to quit

It means not to surrender.

I don't want to end here; I am dreaming about engaging in further education and completing a so lofty 50-year-old dream of acquiring a law degree. My goal would be assisting the immigrant community struggling to get their paperwork completed. I want to keep on keeping on and continue in higher education to serve the community of veterans and assist the disadvantaged population with their community reintegration to promote prosocial citizens.

Living in poverty teaches a powerful lesson, to keep your strong virtues despite the struggle, to fight for your dreams and to stay in the fight no matter how bloody your head and heart have become in the process towards my journey to be financially, emotionally, physically and spiritually. I was in the midst of losing my house two years ago, the only option was to file for bankruptcy. I struggle to pay \$2,000 a month and by the end of 2025, I will not have any savings on my retirement plans. I was unable to continue working 12-hour days as my health became a chronic struggle, being diabetic, having degenerative conditions and chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, and long



COVID symptoms lead to disabling conditions.

Furthermore, healing the inner voices is a difficult task for mental health issues arising from PTSD from MST. Sometimes being courageous means being strong enough to be stoic and not engage in violence. Odyssey Beyond Wars has returned my prayers to engage in the healing process. I pray that I can carry on this journey towards the fullest capacity and call on my better angels to guide me! Thank you, Erin, and OBW staff for your guidance and your support in our endeavors. You are the angels on earth, we continuously pray for. Much respect!
(Marlene Toledo)

Had you asked me this six years ago, my answer would have been very different – probably almost cliché.

And maybe it still would have been until exactly one year ago, when I thought I was being courageous by choosing to control how my life would end. I thought I was showing courage by not letting these diseases that consume me get worse to the point of possibly becoming a vegetable for my family to take care of. The possibility of my sons having to see me on a ventilator or nonverbal terrifies me. Controlling the end of my life now before any of those things could ever happen felt so courageous.

I thought I was being so brave.

Only in my survival have I learned what true courage is. True courage is choosing to fight to live each day as best you can.

Courage soars up from the depths of your soul to save you when you least expect it. Many feel courage is doing things for or saving others. But to me it is saving yourself in spite of yourself.

I could spend hours telling tales of courageous people or ways I've been courageous, but when I truly sit with it...

courage is you,
fighting with you,
for you. **(Nicole Hanson)**

Defining courage is a dilemma as old as humanity itself. We as humans went against the Woolly Mammoth to sustain our families, we survived Ice Ages, Wars and Invasions. We moved to greener pastures and moved again to far off lands that were as exotic as they were dangerous, and we did all this carrying our children, our spouses and our elderly.

Courage, also called bravery and valor, is the choice and willingness to confront agony, pain, danger, uncertainty, intimidation and the possibility of death.

At the end of every courageous act there is the goal of survival, either the survival of oneself or the survival of the family, unit or nation by the act of selfless sacrifice, which means death.

Courage defines us as individuals. We think we know ourselves until mortal danger creeps against us and we decide to either freeze, fight or flee. When a loved one is involved and is in perilous danger, whether it's a son or daughter or a significant other or a comrade at arms, we as humans step up to defend them to strike the enemy down and be stricken with the enemy if needed.

It takes courage to survive debilitating mental illnesses such as PTSD and deep depression and chronic physical ailments. These survivors made a decision to fight against intangible, invisible enemies that work daily and nightly against us to eventually see our demise.

Courage is about the FIGHT. How we handle stress and duress. We as individuals all have experienced courageous acts as well as cowardice acts by ourselves or those around us.

We have taken on bullies on our schoolyards after we had no choice but to fight for our honor and pride. We have taken on dictators on our battlefields to fight for those that have been oppressed for way too long.

We do not wake up as heroes or heroines. We wake up tired of being hungry, tired of

being bullied, tired of being oppressed and tired of being sick. We decide that enough is enough and our family, our neighbors, our friends, our nation and our allies are counting on us to do the right thing, FINALLY, and that takes COURAGE. **(Juan Ramirez)**

To me, courage takes on multiple faces. It can be something as simply waking up in the morning and not knowing what the day is going to bring, to facing the day-to-day challenge of having an illness or physical disability, or facing the scorn of society.

A person's courage can't be defined by certain traits, standards, theories, or anticipated outcomes. It can be called "Life," which none of us can determine. I find my courage in being able to take the loss of both parents and using that as a driving force in my life, to keep me focused and make a better "me" today and tomorrow than the day before. Accepting the trials of courage not only gives you the ammunition to take any and all things that may come into your life, but the courage to accept defeat at times and turn that into a lesson and the power to become courageous!

I've found that courage can be mental and emotional, in addition to being physical, with mental being the most profound. I could easily be walking down the street, see someone being physically abused by another person, and I must decide mentally, "should I go and try to stop what's going on?" – in other words, having the mental courage to turn a negative situation into something positive.

As I matured and was able to experience life, my very first act of courage was facing myself in the mirror each morning. I had to accept the fact that I may not be what everyone expected me to be or even if I was actually happy with myself. After I was able to overcome that "self-persecution," I realized my courage had been there all along! **(TC Lomax)**



WOMEN OF COURAGE

In ancient Greece, courage was a virtue only proven in battle. Kings would shout “aner esti!” (“Be men!”) to their warriors to hold their ground or to charge the enemy. Only men were worthy of the honor of being thought of as courageous, not women.

But women throughout history – from Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman and Rosa Parks, to the U.S. “Hello Girls” of WWI and the Russian “Night Witches of WWII, to modern-day Malala Yousafzai – have proven that theory wrong time and time again. Still, it was less than 50 years ago that women still needed their husband’s permission to take out a credit card and only a decade since the military removed its ban on women in combat. And only one woman – Emily Wilson – has translated Homer’s Odyssey into English – the first woman to do so in more than 3,000 years.

So, in celebration of International Women’s Day and the gains in equality women have made, and in recognition of how far there still is to go, we acknowledge the women in our lives and the courage they have shown in both big and small ways.

TO KNOW HER IS TO LOVE HER BY MARCIA BROWN

On September 4, 1920, Margaret Marilyn Miller graced this world with her presence. She was born to Emanuel Fred and Nora Johnson Miller in Helena, Arkansas. Her parents were blessed to make the acquaintance of their first and only child. With the death of both her parents, Margaret was adopted at the age of 13 by her mother’s sister, Fannie Johnson, and moved to Chicago, IL. She graduated from DuSable High School in 1941. The caption under her yearbook picture read, “To know her is to love her”. Margaret raised six children practically on her own and was an enthusiastic community activist and a strict disciplinarian. My mother was a loving, compassionate person and an awesome parent.

My mother, Margaret Miller, met my father, Lawrence Brown, in 1952, and married on April 25, 1953. My parents were

blessed with six children: five daughters and one son. I am the second oldest child. When my father abandoned the family in the early seventies, my mother became a single parent. Oh, what a single parent she was!

We weren’t allowed to play with certain kids because of their behavior. My mother enforced a 9 pm curfew on weekdays and an 11 pm curfew on weekends when we were teenagers. We were required to attend Sunday School or Morning Service on Sundays. A few of our neighbors owned cars and would take their children on rides all over Chicago. My mother couldn’t afford a car, but that didn’t stop her. On Sundays, my mother took me and my siblings on CTA buses and trains to different parts of Chicago after dinner. This gave me a sense of direction on how to get to various locations in Chicago and how to return home.

My mother was a stickler on grammar. While listening to



me inform her of a certain event that transpired during my day, she would correct my grammar in the middle of the story.

My mother loved working with children and in the community. She would go door to door collecting donations for “The March of Dimes.” She was the first person in our apartment building to open a daycare center. She cared for children from ages 6 months to five years old, and only 10 children at a time. She implemented a cooking and sewing class in the social room at our apartment building.

My mother attended Wilson and Loop Junior Colleges in Chicago when she was in her 40s. With her background in Child and Elementary Education, she became a Teacher’s Aide at Coleman and John M. Smyth Elementary Schools. My mother was a trailblazer in the fight against bullying. If children were fighting on school grounds, my mother would take it upon herself to break them up. She would get their names and report them to the principal and sometimes to their parents.

My mother belonged to many professional, civic, and social organizations. She was the President of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) at Ludwig van Beethoven Elementary School, where my siblings and I attended. She was a member of the Municipal Employees Society of Chicago; the Women’s Auxiliary of the Foreign Wars (VFW); the DuSable 41ers, and the Dorcas Art and Charity Club. She also sang in the True Light Baptist Church Choir.

My mother would be so tired sometimes that she would be sleeping, sitting up in a chair at the dining room table. If I had to use the restroom in the middle of the night, I would see her sitting up in the chair with her eyes closed. I used to wake her up and say, “Mama, why don’t you go get in bed and go to sleep?” She would say, “Child, I’m alright.”

I honor and respect my mother for the good moral qualities she instilled in me as a child. Had she not been a strict disciplinarian, I could have been a teenage mother. I get my strong, unwavering belief in God because I was raised in the church. I attribute my moral, ethical, and social qualities to my mother’s ability to persevere from the obstacles

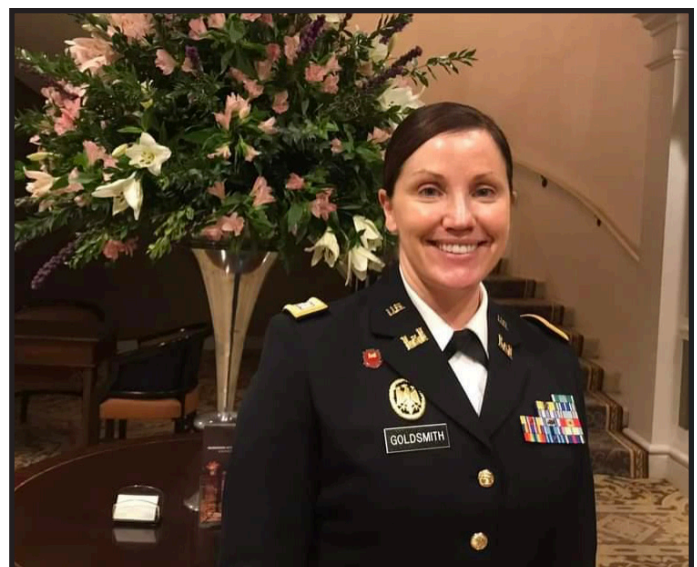
in her life to raise six children on her own.

My mother died on February 26, 1989. Her death affected her family, friends, and the community. I was living in San Francisco, CA when I got the devastating news of her death. I broke down crying when the plane approached Chicago. As soon as I saw the sparkling city lights, I thought, “This will be the first time in Chicago that I won’t get to talk with my mama.”

There were not enough seats for people to sit down at her afternoon funeral service. People had to stand along the back wall and out the front door. My family and I were in awe of some of the people who came to celebrate her life. While extending their condolences, many mourners expressed their love and appreciation for my mother. Reverend Winfield Phillips delivered her eulogy. He stated, “To have known her is to have loved her.”

MAMA CATE BY NICOLE HANSON

For me, choosing the Woman of Courage to honor took about 0.3 seconds. Cathy (Cate) Goldsmith blends courage with devotion, joy, and light. If you were to ask her to quickly describe herself she will likely say ‘I’m a mom of 2 amazing adults. I am a retired Veteran who served our country for 32 years. I am strong and resilient.’ This list, though accurate, misses one major defining characteristic: Cate Goldsmith is a Warrior.

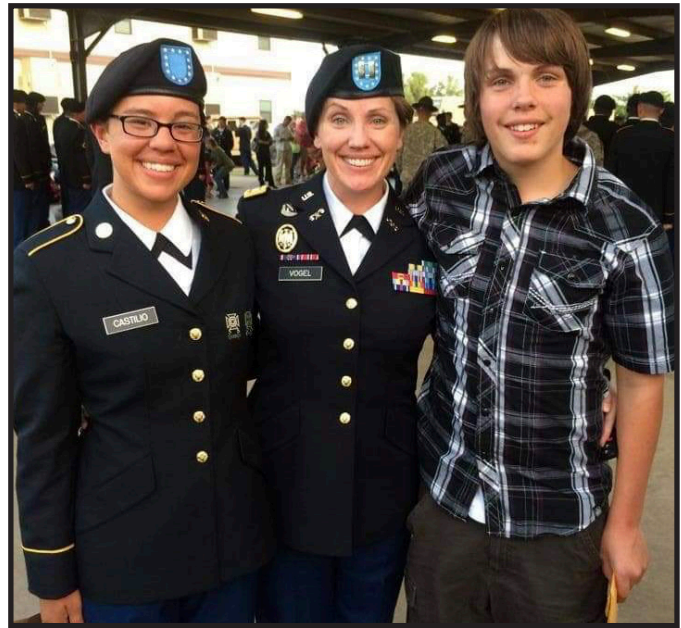


Warrior in the sense of being the person who will fiercely and unabashedly fight for herself and her loved ones. I feel I'm doing this courageous woman a disservice. Warrior sounds like a brute, growling around stomping on everyone in their way. Cate, though fully able to stomp you or put two shots center mass if needed, is a "kill em with kindness" warrior.

The positivity in the face of adversity she carries is contagious. Maybe it's all the years of service where she truly embraced the pick yourself up by your bootstraps mentality or maybe it is just a gift she blesses us with. I suspect it is the latter.

Cate has known male dominated work life since she was 17 years old. She has pushed back on the "you can't do that you're a girl" mentality her entire career. Doing so without malice but rather pure grace. Her track record as a positive role model and leader led her to be chosen by senior leadership to become the first female Infantry Officer for the state of Wisconsin. Her career path led her elsewhere, but the courage and fortitude of character to stand forth and say "absolutely put me on the front lines. I've got this" is remarkable. She would have completed this ceiling breaking role with the same excellence she brought to every role. She'd tell you 'there's nothing courageous about it. I'm just doing my job.' This humility mixed with her clear focus towards career advancement just adds to the ticks on her courage columns. Career focus and determination cannot be understated. After many successful years as an E7, Master Sergeant, for the US Air Force, she chose to branch transfer to become an Officer in the US Army. Retiring as a Captain, she truly maximized her 32 years of service by seeking opportunities to assist her country to the fullest.

I would be remiss if I only shared her work-related courage. Her family life courage is also unparalleled. A single mom of 2 terrific adults, her influence on their own character development led to both of them choosing to serve in the Armed Forces. She was even able to 'share' part of her deployment assisting NATO Special Operations Component Command in Afghanistan with her son,



Jameson. The pride she describes when speaking of Lauren and Jameson is immeasurable. Her nurturing side makes her someone you want to know and be around. My best example would be my husband. Johannes often struggles to connect with others. He is very personable but rarely opens up to others. For as long as I have known them both, approximately 20 years, he has only referred to her as Mama Cate. Even when this was frowned upon at times given she was his superior. Their mutual admiration always lifted them past that 'trivial detail.' He can go months without speaking to her and he will still share more than he would with probably anyone else but me. That level of trust and respect does not come easily to him.

As a female, a portion of Cate's courageousness stands out to me greater than others because her resiliency is immeasurable and awe inspiring. During Cate's last marriage, her partner was determined to father a child with her. Jameson and Lauren are children from previous marriages. Determined to father a child feels inaccurate. The level of desire was unhealthy for both of them. Cate's loyalty led her to continued attempts to conceive for him. Cate suffered ten miscarriages with this partner. He would not relent. Verbal and physical abuse followed. Particularly anger towards her successful career progression over his own as a similarly ranked Army officer. The violence she suffered would have beaten me and most all

of us for the rest of our lives. Cate, the Warrior Soul, preserved. She has gone on to continued greatness in her personal and professional life. I am limiting this story and the details but trust my heart when it shares, she is incredible. We can all push forward if she has.

Being the soul so many look up to is courageous. Being the soul so many want to be around is courageous. Being the soul willing to break boundaries no matter the obstacle is courageous. Being the soul who ignored almost complete hearing loss to fight on is courageous. Being the soul who cares for dogs and horses better than many care for humans is courageous. Being a soul who overcame tremendous domestic violence is courageous. Being the soul who walks with utter humility is courageous. Being the soul who brings joy with a simple smile that shares her whole heart is courageous. Courage erupts from the amazing soul that is Cathy Goldsmith. I shall forever be grateful to have Mama Cate to inspire me.

LIFE LESSONS DE VIE DE LA CUISINE BY ERIK HUELSBECK

Those who know me know that I love food (hence, the reasoning behind my title being in French!) That love for culinary creations came from the courageous women in my life.

The kitchen can be challenging, and my mothers, sister, grandmother and aunts have impacted me in and out of the kitchen with their strength.

My mother's courageousness came from her humility with her own struggles with mental health. She taught me that it's okay not to be okay, and to ask for help when it's needed. My mother taught me that I am resourceful, but as a cook, sometimes substitutions need to be made. As the



seasons change, being resourceful is less of a choice and more of a necessity.

My step mother's (ma) courage is her ability to love unconditionally, since I am her son by marriage. She never had to be that way with me. Instead, she guided me in the kitchen and life, reading recipes with me and helping to teach me faith, love, and understanding (and to waste nothing in the kitchen). She always sends me quotes on having faith in God and to reach out for help whenever it's needed, and mostly how to have faith, love and understanding with myself. She has also taught me resiliency, that when I fall, I need to dust myself off

and get back up. Added to that, she taught me so much in the kitchen, from learning cooking and baking family generational recipes to her famous 6B casserole.

Grandma also had a huge impact on me growing up. She loves "new recipes." That taught me to try new things even if I think I won't like them.

My sister is very strong and independent, but for love she wears her heart on her sleeve and unfortunately, some people took that kindness for granted. But she always loved me for me and supported my gayness (but that's a whole chapter in itself.) For all she's taught me about life, I think I maybe taught her a few things in the kitchen.

If it wasn't for these women, I likely would never have found something I'm good at and love doing like cooking and baking. I probably would have burnt boiling water.



WOMAN OF COURAGE
BY SANFORD JONES

In my life, I have known many courageous women. My older sister was my protector. She always made my life easier. She made sure I was safe at all times. She learned this action and behavior from my mom.

Mom was the most powerful, courageous woman I've ever known. She raised two daughters, four sons, her youngest sister, and was a sister-mother to all of her siblings. Sister is what she was called by everyone who knew her except her children. Her name was Bessie, but only a select few used her real name.

My dad worked shift wood in the steel mills. He worked all three shifts and had to sleep according to the shift he worked. This left mom mostly in charge of teaching and raising the family. At that time mom had one daughter, four sons and her younger 12 year old sister who came to live with us after their mom passed from cancer. We all know how to cook, clean, sew and take care of each other. Mom taught us to be self-sufficient and independent while always remembering to keep family first.

Mom was a crossing guard for 30 years, and she was president of the PTA at our grade school. She always insisted we know the importance of education for her young ones even though she never finished high school.

Mom taught us how to love and share with each other. She was the teacher, disciplinarian and the one that taught us that family makes the world go round. My mom drove us everywhere we needed to go. She insisted that my dad move us from the old troubled neighborhood because it was changing for the worse.

When my one younger brother and I decided to abandon our teachings and understanding of right and wrong to become bad boys in the hood, my mom had other plans. She made it almost impossible. She would show up in the middle of a gang fight to find her two sons and demand we get in the car and go home. If you tried to refuse you had better be ready for a different kind of fight that you had no chance of winning.

Our friends' parents that still lived in the old neighborhood would call my mom and let her know where to find us because then they knew our friends were getting home also. We would be doing things we knew were wrong and someone would yell, "Here come the paddy wagon!" That meant my mom in the blue station wagon on the prowl to find her sons and she wasn't leaving until she had us.

I joined the Army to keep my mom off of those streets, because if I was out there, she was out there. Most of my bad boy friends died in those streets or went to prison, but thanks to the persistence of Mrs. Bessie Jones all of her sons lived to be senior citizens. Her sons are all alive and thriving in their 60s and 70s.



When my mom grew older and became ill and needed a lot of care, guess who was there to take care of our Queen for the last five years of her life? Those same boys she embarrassed and chased out of the rough streets of Gary, Indiana. Our mom pushed and shoved and fought to be sure her sons had a chance at life. And a chance at life was what we all got. I truly never expected to live to be a senior citizen

of good standing. I have to admit that my mom was successful in showing not only her children but a lot of others from our neighborhoods how to become productive members of society.

Mom died in Madison at the age of 82 years old. We took her back to Gary for her final resting place. There were almost 300 people at her funeral. Most of her friends and family were gone already. These were friends and family of the many people she touched, led, and taught how to live life to its fullest – to be all you could be. Mrs. Bessie, as most of our friends called her, had a huge influence on most of the kids in every neighborhood we ever lived in.

I don't really believe in heroes, but my mom was not just the most courageous woman I ever met, she was my "Shero" and I miss her and love her dearly.

KARINA FLORES
BY JUAN RAMIREZ

Her name was Karina Flores. Obviously an alias. One of many aliases that she used. She was a rogue on the run from a three letter agency that I care not to mention here due to respect for her patriotic endeavor and the people she worked for. Karina was a trained hacker, an elusive person and a true patriot.

She was a Filipino American by birth, divorced, worked in Washington D.C. and called Albuquerque New Mexico her adopted hometown.

Like me she truly had no official past to talk about and no long term future plans to boast about either.

She found me; I didn't find her. Our meeting on that dark, cold rainy night was not perchance. She planned it out meticulously. She had done her homework well on me and I was selected under her specific criteria to successfully conduct the upcoming clandestine operation.

My job was to take her across the country from East to West and North to South for her to conduct face to face linkups with secondary assistant agency managers to pass on the information she was holding as a courier. One thing I was certain about: one of us or even both of us were not going to make it out alive. Knowing this as she briefed me, I volunteered for the mission without remorse or hesitation. She was the Courier and I was her Transporter. We were now a team.

The mission took three months to complete. I drove from Texas to Illinois to New Mexico to the District of Columbia. One night ended up in Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico. That is a story in itself.

At first I was suspicious about her and her operation but my suspicions went away when I saw her in action, hacking away in some computer terminal in Dallas or having covert contacts out in the middle of nowhere Utah.

After three months, the mission was over. I dropped her off in Laredo, Texas. She asked me to go with her to the Rio Grande Valley and start a new life of covert and clandestine adventures – an offer I definitively declined. Two days later it was Christmas. I spent the holiday with my son and daughters and grandchildren and the presiding President of the United States was not assassinated by an inner circle conspiracy that had been dismantled and stopped just in time.

Thank you, Karina Flores. A true Patriot and unsung Heroine.



THE WOMAN I KNOW WITH THE MOST COURAGE BY TC LOMAX

Courage isn't what you say but rather in what you do and how you feel as a person. Havisteen "Tina" Lomax proved that you can have the courage to go after whatever you want, face any obstacle that may come up, stand your ground, and be the best "YOU" that you can be!

The woman I personally know who has the most courage began her journey on June 22, 1958 at the age of 19 (actually, a number of months before that.) During those two defining moments of becoming a first time wife and soon after that, a first-time mother, her journey and examples of courage escalated nonstop. This woman I'm referring to is my very own mother, Havisteen "Tina" Lomax!

Facing each day not fully knowing what to expect from her new life, she went into it with strong determination and will power. Mom would tell dad, "George, don't come home from work with a bad attitude. That won't help our family grow." I can still remember her posting notes on a bulletin board, giving each one of us a daily challenge or task and after each one was completed, she'd



ask us how it went and what we learned from it. Growing up, she would also tell us to show courage at school if any of us were being bullied by classmates.

A year after my birth, she was content being a mother and a housewife and at the same time, giving birth to another child and subsequently, others after that. Being courageous enough to raise a family while her husband worked, she did the main part of it without help from her family (She was an only child), but was determined to keep moving forward.

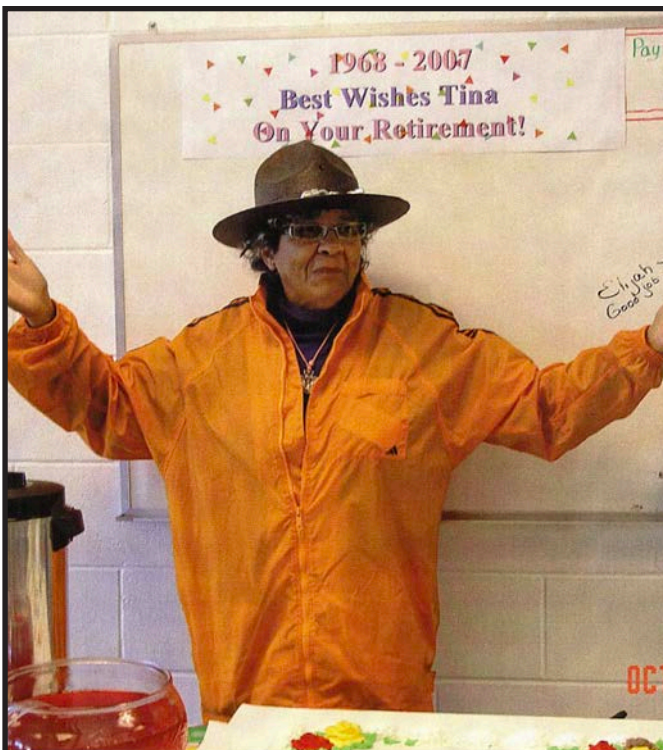


As the years progressed and her children grew older, she was at the point where she wanted to venture into the workforce and find employment suitable to her liking. She found that in becoming a Store Security Officer for various department stores. At that particular time, it was predominantly a male dominated profession, but my mom showed courage enough to prove she could perform the job as well as any man and eventually made a name for herself.

But being a security officer for department stores proved to be fulfilling to a certain degree, and she had courage to take that desire to the

next level by becoming a Safety Patrol Supervisor with the local police department. She relished the position because it was a challenge to her and she showed those above her she was capable of something more by becoming a member of the Police Reserves. As a regular "reservist" she handled every task assigned to her with a positive outlook and it got to the point where some of her supervisors asked her for advice and insight on various issues within the department. And because of her determination and courage, she stood her ground and said, "Hey, this is Tina Lomax you're dealing with!" Eventually, this gave way to the final rung on her ladder, which was running the Parks Patrol, with other officers under her command.

In that position and with all others, she still showed love and caring for her family and showed enough courage to balance both at home and away, never backing away from any challenge that came her way, be it people drinking in a park without a permit to actually finding a deceased person, to being chased by a boa constrictor (okay...very little courage there!). Eventually, as years progressed, she accepted the courage to say, "I've done what I've wanted to do with my life and still have a family since the very first day!"



MY MATRIARCHAL LEGACY BY MARLENE TOLEDO

In reverence to the great women who raised, educated, nurtured, and instilled values and virtues during the primal phases of life, it is with great pride I acquaint you to the matriarchal part of my family.

Jacinta Chicas de Romero (Mama Chinta) married her sweetheart Narciso Romero (Papa Chicho), and together both raised eight children [Amparo (RIP), Antonio (RIP), Conchita (RIP), Celina, Paula Rosario, Jose Domingo, Gloria (RIP) and Lucita], in the Village of El Rosario, Morazan, El Salvador. These women learned that God, family, and education was an asset and endeavored in their career building as teachers, mothers, deacons and university professors.



Mama Chinta became the first teacher in the village and taught her own children how to read, write and arithmetic. Papa Chicho was a farmer and raised cattle, horses, chickens, and other livestock on a 60-acre farm. Their relationship was very stable on a humble farm where their children were raised to work diligently on the farm, and their discipline included doing farm work and studying every day. There was no running water or electricity in the village, and the children had to study during the day and read under an oil lamp in the evening. Their eight children were raised to respect and protect each other.

My core memories include receiving my grandparents in our house, who always brought freshly baked breads, vegetables, grains, eggs, live chickens, and a white palomino they rode all the way from the Village. Grandma would spend her time in the kitchen, instructing the maids how to

make tamales and other recipes that would feed our family during the weekdays. Grandma would start making tortillas in a “comal” our grandfather had made from the clay in his farmland. Grandma taught the maids to grind the corn on a stone mill, which had a rolling pin made of the same river stone. I was always present in the kitchen as I enjoyed my grandmother’s visit to our home and loved it when she boiled the lemon leaves to bathe me, adding baby cologne. My grandpa invited my father to plant roses and trees in our backyard. My father learned grandpa’s agricultural finesse and proudly showed his garden as he had several fruitful trees and blossoming citrus and medicinal herbs to share with grandpa for his return.

In 1958, my mother (Conchita) met my father (Andres Rogelio Orantes) in the Village of El Rosario, where he was a teacher and principal in an elementary school. They got married in December of 1958, and then she courageously left her village and moved to the big city of Gotera, Morazan. From 1959 to 1962, Mom gave birth to my first two brothers (Rogelio Salvador and Cesar Noel). My oldest brothers attended schools in the city of Gotera, and they were walked to school by the maids. The town of Gotera had narrow streets made of stucco and dirt roads. Mom walked quite the distance to teach in school. My brother and I played along the way and climbed mango trees and looked for fruits in the lavish pastures where the cattle roamed. Just before arriving at school, there was a huge hill, which we always cried climbing as it was a tedious climb. Mom walked continuously and was not disturbed by our shenanigans.

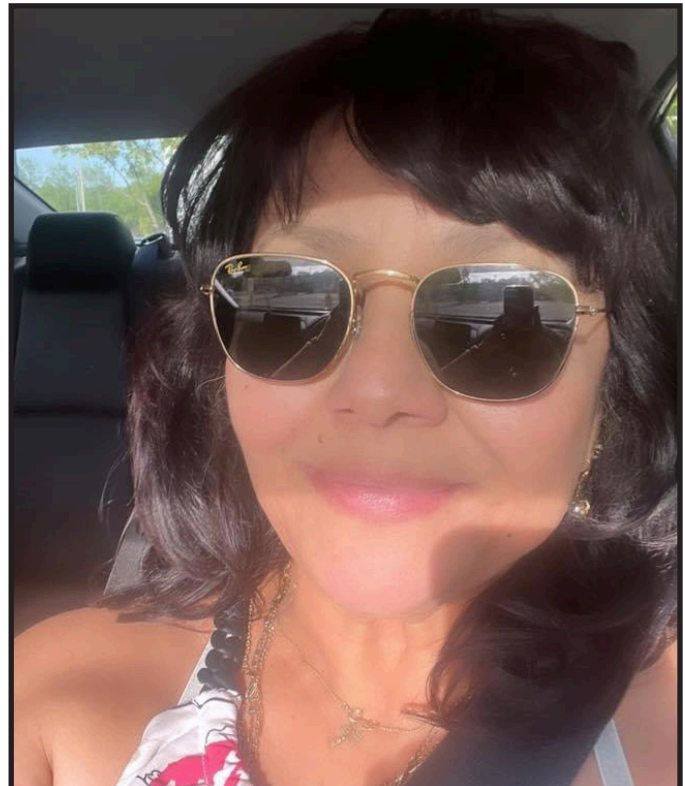
We climbed huge mountains to find firewood and to get our Christmas trees and swam in the deep crystal-clear rivers and lakes where during times of water shortages we had to wash our clothes and cook our grilled chicken. Mom was in control of everything, she would have the maids gather the big bags of laundry and she prepared the little ones to walk to the river. I grew up near the oceans, Mom always cooked everything before we left, and we traveled two hours away during Spring break, Winter break, and other holidays. Mom was courageous to allow us to roam along the shore

and not worry about us getting lost or drowning.

Mom became the first teacher in her family and taught in an elementary school during the first 12 years of my life. We had to walk to school every day, get up very early in the morning, and arrive at school on time to open the classroom before the other students arrived. The prior night, Mom prepared her school lessons and read to me the fables and stories she was going to teach her students the following day.

During our walks to school, there were times it rained so hard, the creeks would be flooded, making it impossible to cross over. Sometimes, we were stranded for hours waiting for the water to subside. We would be invited to Mom’s students’ houses to have dinner and would be served freshly made sweet corn tamales and grilled steak, as these farmers always made homemade dinners and cheese for their own use.

During the years 1970 through 1974, Mom was elected as the City Mayor, and her duties multiplied as she gave birth to three little girls (Xiomara, Norma and Milagro). I had been the



only girl in the family until Mom had two more children from 1967 to 1969, my first brother was born, (Oscar Manfredy) and then my sister (Betsy Ivonnet). She showed humility and bravery by walking miles and miles to work during her third trimester. Mom was a disciplined and courageous woman, involved in high power positions and diligently carrying through her duties. Mom was brave as she gave birth assisted by a home nurse (parteras) to five of her eight children. Mom was a hard-working woman, not afraid to hold a position of power in a patriarchal society while working two full time jobs.



During the time we lived in Morazan, our house was full of other people who stayed at the house, including my aunts, attending classes at the University of El Salvador in Gotera, and my uncles, who worked as teachers in the vicinity. My father had a daughter with another woman, Ruth Elizabeth, who moved in to live with us as well. I recall that she had disciplinary issues and Mom had to teach her manners. Mom did not complain or fuss about anything, she was an analytical person and solved problems as they came. Mom was always serene; she had a Mona Lisa sort of smile that grabbed your immediate attention.

Mother took pride in herself as she always dressed in fancy tailored dresses and three-piece suits, adding a stylish hairdo and her shoes were always shiny and polished. Mom always wore undergarments that included nylons and slips added to her matching panties and braziers. She smelled beautiful and her sister Paula Rosario had brought a gift from her trip to New York, New York, and given her a Chanel No. 5 perfume which she wore sparingly. My mother was a very sophisticated and stylish teacher, her demeanor during her socializing with other coworkers was that of a highly confident person, smiling and commanding the audience.

Mom appeared to be a very happy person, during the years 1959 to 1972, but my father began to drink and socialize with the military men stationed in the Army base in the city and got highly involved in presidential politics. My mother was working in the City Hall and was starting to get burned out and anemic from having so many children and going through an early pre-menopause with heavy menstrual bleeding (menorrhagia). During 1973, my father's chronic alcoholism devastated our family as

it was the pivotal point in our traumatic experience with domestic abuse and hiding from our father's wrath when angry and drunk. My father started to change jobs frequently due to high absenteeism or not showing up and not calling work. He had become irresponsible and would drink 100% pure corn distilled vodka, until he started getting drunk and became very angry. One time during the town carnival, he climbed into the bull ring arena to take on the bull. The bull chased him through the town, and he hid in a store. Mom used to lock him up, but he would get out of jail right away.

Dad was increasingly aggressive and violent, and would become insanely jealous of Mom. She used to hide us at her friend's house as he would send her to the hospital after taking a frying pan to her head. Eventually, Mom took all the courage she had and moved my sister and me to a different city where we went to school. Her school administrators advised her to take the other children to the orphanage section of her school. The nuns and social workers helped her make these decisions, as she was often in the hospital with anemia and other ailments. Mom had resorted to drinking heavily after a long bout of domestic violence and feelings of despair.

Mom was showing up to school with big bruises and it was evident that the abuse was increasing. We were notified that she had been in a hospital, where she was admitted with pneumonia and other ailments. Mom had deteriorated physically,

and emotionally. Her spiritual strength was evident during her last breath as she asked us to remain together as family.

Her end is a tragic story; however, she lived courageously raising her children to love each other and that education is extremely important, and God saves us from all dangers. Mom was a valiant hero in my mind, she was a warrior and fought her demons to get us to safety.

As a mother myself, I have instilled in my children to become students of life, as my mother taught me to read, so I taught my children as early as possible, reading and playing classical music during my pregnancies. I finished my education during my last trimester with my firstborn. I played sports, as my mother taught me during our recesses in grade school. I mirrored my mother in choosing and staying loyal to the men we married. My aunt mentioned one day that my current husband looks like my father. I often wonder why I choose the men that are like my dad, but I am courageous and educated enough, or perhaps resilient enough, to fight back or not be bothered by the abandonment, cheating, drinking and other drug abuse that my current husband engages in when he takes off on weekends. My coping mechanisms are to engage and focus on my family, my children, who as adults know the importance of being healthy, strong and employed, and to be independent, as paying bills is a sobering experience.

WOMEN CAN DO EVERYTHING MEN CAN DO BY GARY LOTHE

My essay is short stories about courageous women in my life. First is my courageous Mother and Aunt Bernice's life stories. Next, I am writing about when I was at Fort Lewis Washington, and I was a demonstrator on a rope obstacle course. I observed and witnessed several courageous women climb across that rope.

Back in the 1970's my father would go to the bar on the weekends, usually on Friday night with his brother Clifford. He would come around 10- 11 p.m. and my mother would be very upset because

he would not bring her along. Sometimes the men wanted to be with other men. I remember this happened several times when I was younger. I remember one time it got very physical. My mother threw a sugar bowl at him and cut his elbow open, and it was bleeding on the counter. This was the worst time I saw my mother frustrated at him. They were married for over 50 years. My father passed away six months after his 50th wedding anniversary.

I remember my aunt Bernice who had a rough life. Nobody really talked about it much, but I know that her husband Art used to drink quite often and come home and beat my aunt up. This is when I was very young and before I was born. Bernice's grandson Dale, who I used to work for, cleaning his bar, told me that Art would go down to the bar and get drunk and obnoxious. The bartender did not say anything or kick him out because he had money, and he would go back to the bar and pay the owner of the bar for the damages. He did this several times.

I wrote to my sister JoAnn, and this is what she told me: "I don't remember a lot about Art, but I think everyone liked him. All of us kids did. We used to visit them often on the farm outside Columbus in the early 50's, sometimes with Margaret, Jim, and Kenny (Butchie). Kenny and I had fun at the farm. Art used to keep Limburger cheese in a jar in the basement. When he brought it up at mealtime and opened the jar, all the kids would shriek at



the smell. I don't remember ever hearing anything about hurting Bernice. That may not be entirely true and could have been an exaggerated incident. Art and Bernice worked hard on the farm.... I do remember hearing that his sons thought he was in Pearl Harbor. He used to go to Club 51 outside of DeForest. Apparently, it was jokingly called "Pearl Harbor" by the locals. Mom told me that story.... When Mom was diagnosed with MS in 1972, I went with her to the apartment. The neurologist talked to me privately and told me not to tell her as it might make her worse.



parts of her body, but it was better than dealing with that excruciating pain. I remember Dad would always hide behind the newspaper when Me, Steve and Mark would get in trouble. Mother would chase us around the house with a belt. She would not catch us too often, but once in a while she would get a couple of good whacks on us.

In the 1990's, I left for the 84th Division in Madison. This was in a drill sergeant unit, and I was a sergeant.

That was one of the hardest things in my life...to act normal after that appointment and then go home and tell dad. We stopped at Margaret's on the way home that day. I remember going into the upstairs bathroom and crying. Margaret came in and hugged me. That was very wrong of that Doctor to not tell Mom. Mom was afraid that she had cancer and we weren't telling her. Later, she figured out by herself that she had Multiple Sclerosis."

As for me, I think our mom was a courageous woman. She had a lot of pain with her Multiple Sclerosis but did not complain. It must have been hard for her to lose her mother when she was only 3 or 4 years old. I think everyone wanted to look out for her as she was the youngest of 11. She was the only sibling that graduated from high school. Her mom died in 1930 during the depression. The older siblings had to quit school and go to work. Those were hard times. Her father eventually lost the farm. She went to live with relatives, Celia and Conrad. They had a nearby farm on Hwy V outside of DeForest.

My mother also struggled with neuritis and suffered a lot of pain. She had an operation and was given medicine to help with it, but it did not do any good. They finally had to cut the nerve off that was causing the pain. This worked but it also stopped the nerve endings, so she had no feeling at all in certain

I was in B and D Company. I went to Fort Lewis, Washington with some people in the 84th Division to train officers on the obstacle course and other tasks. I was a demonstrator on climbing the ropes. I was in good shape, and I had to climb across those ropes between fifteen to twenty times per day. I was also training the PRC 77 military communication radio. I had a good time. I received an Army Commendation medal for this mission. There were several women and men who had to go through this course and pass to finish the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) to be an officer in the Army. The only people I saw who failed were men because they were slightly overweight. I did not see any women fail, which was pretty amazing to me. Some of these women were just as in shape as the men and some were even better shape than some. I was very impressed.

Despite the way women were discriminated against they demonstrated courage and strength. My mother had to deal with excruciating pain and suffering along with my father drinking too much. My aunt Bernice also dealt with her husband drinking too much. When I was a demonstrator on the ropes course, the only people I saw who failed were men because they were slightly overweight. I did not see any women fail, which was pretty amazing to me and proved to me that women could do what the men could do.

STORYTELLING

Oral storytelling is a tradition as old as time, as we've seen with Homer's Odyssey, which most scholars believe was performed for years before ever being written down. The tradition is alive and well in Madison, which boasts a rich storytelling scene that offers workshops, open mics, and slams most weeks of the year. Storytellers Brendon Panke (The Moth & Madison Storytellers), Mel Hammond (Mad City Story Slam), and Scott Schultz (The Heartbeat Center for Writing, Literacy and the Arts) conducted a three-week workshop to help students create and mold their own stories for graduation.

TICKLING BONNIE TO DEATH **BY MARCIA BROWN**

When I was four years old, I had a best friend named Bonnie who was also four years old. We lived on the west side of Chicago, Illinois. We loved to play on the front of my apartment building's porch. One day we were playing and tickling each other. We tickled each other in our stomachs, backs, and along each other's arms. I was having so much fun tickling Bonnie, but Bonnie was not enjoying this game as much as I was.

As I tickled her, she kept saying, "Stop it, Denyse, I don't want to play this game." I continued tickling her and laughing. Suddenly, Bonnie began to run down the hall towards her apartment. I continued tickling her until she reached her apartment and closed the door in my face.

The next day, I knocked on Bonnie's apartment door to see if she could come out to play. Her brother answered the door. I said, "Can Bonnie come out to play?" He looked at me, with a solemn face, and said, "Bonnie is dead." I burst out crying and ran home to my apartment.

When my mother heard me crying, she said, "What is wrong with you, Denyse, why are you crying?" I said,

in between my crocodile tears, "I killed Bonnie, I killed Bonnie. I'm sorry. She told me to stop tickling her, and I didn't stop, I killed Bonnie."

My mother took me by the hand and we walked over to Bonnie's apartment. As we walked to Bonnie's apartment, I continued crying and saying, "I killed Bonnie, I'm so sorry." When her brother answered the door, my mother said, "Where is your sister Bonnie?" He explained to my mother that Bonnie choked on some popcorn and no household member could perform the Heimlich Maneuver. Bonnie passed away before the ambulance arrived at their apartment.

I thought that I tickled Bonnie to death. I thought that since I didn't stop tickling her when she asked



me to, this was the reason why she passed away.

My family and I attended her funeral the next week after her passing. I couldn't stop crying during the entire service, still thinking that I killed my best friend. I noticed many people crying with sad faces at the funeral. I made up my mind, at the tender age of four, that I did not like funerals, because everyone was sad.

For many years, I refused to attend any funerals, unless it was a close family member's.

When I became a member of Mt Zion Baptist Church, I was asked to join the Usher Ministry. I understood that one of the ushers' duties is to usher funerals. I prayed over this proposal, and with The Holy Spirit's guidance, I joined the Mt Zion Usher Board.

RUN HARD BY NICOLE HANSON

Everyone has that one friend that you've had since middle school that sticks around and manages to be your 'time to get wayyyy outside your comfort zone' type and has seemingly bizarre but super cool hobbies. At least for me, a mostly girly-girl of the 90s who didn't do karate or go to all the weird, loud like super loud annoying 80000 wasps buzzing loud midget races every week. But man Tara Jo made them all look so cool.

We went to different colleges after high school. We kept in close contact with that glorious ding of the AIM or the 'you've got mail' voice. Randomly – as alllllll ideas of Tara Jo's are – she says *We need to travel Europe this summer. We just have to. Cuz we're almost done with college and we'll be old and never do it. So we did. We spent almost*

30 days traveling Eastern Europe during August. Dummies. Just like here it's disgustingly swamp butt hot. Eyeroll. We spent the first part doing all the touristy stuff. Eiffel tower, leaning tower of pizza. I mean Pisa. Gondolas in Venice. The Vatican and Coliseum. All the stuff.

Then our bus rolled us into the Austrian mountainside. Yup. Sound of Music, Julie Andrews, hills are alive, mountain area. We were there to play. We got to go white water rafting. We rode (ok most of us walked) bikes to a mountain top to a cute picnic and then tried not to die as you did the feet out to the side flying back down the mountain bike ride.....no brakes, one speeder kinda bike ride. Ate. Drank. Enjoyed a rainy reprieve. And then they offered us to do something called paraponting. This is in the time of bungee jumping. We could go paraponting for just 100 dollars American.....off a mountain, not just 50ft at the Dells or something. They'd told us paraponting was where you had a parachute like parasailing but off a mountain top instead of water. *Ummmm, yeah. Let's do this!*

We get to the spot. Tara Jo and I are both about 5ft 8in tall, but the Austrian men we were about to jump with were smaller than both of us and did not speak English. They played a cassette tape



that explained we'd ride in the gondola thing up to the top. They'd lay out the parachute on the ground behind us.....*Uhhhh what?....*but the tape continued before we could ask...they'd strap themselves to us, the parachute would fill with air, and off we'd go.

So, off we went. Or rather up we went. On the 10 minute ride no one said a word. Tara Jo and I just awkwardly smirked at how weird it was these guys wouldn't even speak to one another. Now it's go time. We literally are standing at the edge of a 3,500 ft cliff. I'm officially scared to death. Tara Jo and her tiny Austrian man go first. Woosh they are just floating. So cooooo...

"Run Hard." Huh? Who said that?

It was the tiny Austrian man strapped to my behind, calling over my shoulder. "Run hard. No wind. Theirs bad. Run hard. Go!!"

Whattttttt????? Fooooouuuk! Ok, here we go. I picked that little man up by the thighs and I ran harder than I have ever in my life. We were not gonna fall. I kept running and I think my eyes stayed closed a good 15 seconds before I heard in absolutely perfect, calm English "you can stop running now. You did great. Your friend's chute didn't open very fast so I was worried for you doing poorly too."

What the hell? Where had this calming voice been the whole time? I didn't need it now. I needed it back then – when I was afraid to run off the edge!

But there I was. 3500ft in the air. Surrounded by blue skies and gorgeous green mountains. Just soaring through the world somewhere I never imagined I'd be. Fifteen minutes later, yes 15 minutes of floating, I was back on the ground. Joy, pure joy, exuding from every ounce of my being as I ran over and swallowed up my taking-me-out-of-my-own-box friend in the biggest hug I ever gave her. I have eternal gratitude for this person who will always help me remember to challenge myself to think outside of my safe little box.

BONSAI

BY ERIK HUELSBECK

I have a Bonsai tree in my apartment which I named Juniper Berry. The reasoning behind this purchase was not only do I like the little trees, but I firmly believe that you can't judge a book by its cover as they thrive through harsh conditions, putting down roots in a shallow pot.

As a person, I see myself in Juniper. I've had my highs and lows. I've been subjected to violation and hate and survived domestic abuse. My enlistment in the Army didn't turn out quite as I hoped. I was disciplined for things I did and didn't do in ways that I didn't and don't approve of. I became homeless, and anyone who has been homeless knows there's a certain survival mentality that kicks in to help you hang on and make it through. There are probably other situations that I am forgetting. So the Bonsai to me represents strength, as I had some low days and survived some difficult situations.

But I am still alive. I am no longer homeless. In December I got my own keys to my own apartment. I do still struggle with substance use and abuse, but I am a survivor and without the strength of resiliency – like my little bonsai, Juniper – I don't know where I would be.



OPOU HAMBURGERS AND GREECE BY GARY LOTHE

In early November of 1982, a group of us in our brigade went on a trip from Vicenza, Italy to Athens, Greece. We were going to run the Greek Marathon. The Marathon was forty kilometers or twenty-five miles. We had five and a half hours to complete this run. This trip was set up by our brigade command. Our time off did not count against our military leave. We took a military plane that was paid for by the military. We had to pay for our food, expenses and lodging.



After we arrived in Athens, we stopped at a Greek restaurant. There was myself, our platoon leader captain, a specialist and a staff sergeant. I ordered a shish kabob. The specialist and staff sergeant ordered gyros. The captain wanted pizza. I said to the captain, "Why do you want pizza, we just came from Italy? Why don't you order some Greek food?" The captain wanted pizza. The Greek waiter said, "We do not have pizza." Therefore, the captain said, "I'll have a hamburger then."

The waiter took our order and prepared our food. The restaurant had sourdough bread in the middle of the table. The waiter then brought a plate of meatballs and placed them in the middle of the table with the sour dough bread. We all ate the meatballs and sour dough bread while waiting for our main dishes. Afterwards, we all got our food, except the captain did not get his hamburgers.

I had my Greek phrase book and Greek to English dictionary. I looked up how to say "where" in Greek, and it said "opou." I asked the waiter, "Opou hamburgers?" Then he pointed at the meatballs that we all had already eaten. About a month or two afterwards every time I saw the captain, I would say, "Opou hamburgers?" and the captain would laugh.

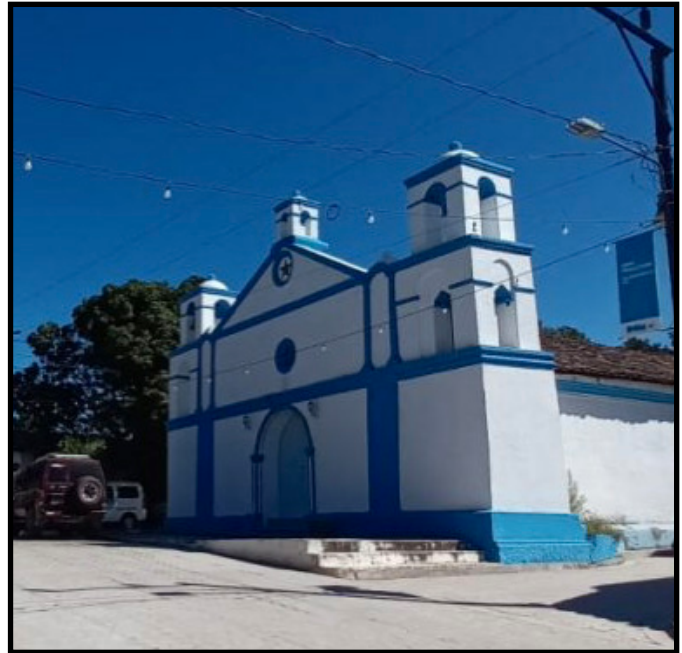
The next day we prepared for the forty-kilometer run. We had five and a half hours to complete the run. I was one of the first fifty people to cross the halfway mark. Our sergeant major was one of the fifty that was ahead of me. This was about an hour and a half into the run. I did not know how to pace myself because this was the longest run I had ever accomplished. My legs gave out on me, and I could not run much after that. I started walking most of the way after the halfway point. I still made it in five hours and fifteen minutes, so I still received a marathon medal. The sergeant major of our brigade made it in a little over three and a half hours, and he was over fifty years old.

The first place was some guy from Finland and the second-place guy was from Sweden – and he was over sixty years old. I remember he ran it in two hours and forty minutes. These guys were professional marathon runners. Our captain made it just in time, shortly after me. He made it in about five hours and twenty-five minutes. The specialist and the staff sergeant made the run, but were over five and a half hours, so they did not receive a medal. But they did get the certificate. We had a couple days before we would have to leave to go back to Italy, and we made the most of it, sightseeing around Athens and eating and drinking to our hearts' content.

IMMIGRATION BY MARLENE TOLEDO

While I completed my High School years (1979-1983), I was employed by the Manitowoc Public Schools (MPS), my first summer job! A bunch of kids and I scraped gum and other mess from the pupils' desks. I had a fun time being with a group of teens my age and doing the same job, with gusto. The next summer (1981), I worked as a teacher's aide and played baseball math with the students in summer school. And, during the last two years of High School, I worked as an ESL teacher. I was assigned the most adorable group of Hmong children ages 8 to 11, grades 3rd to 6th, learning English through field trips, music, games, and dancing. One of the older students had fallen in love with me and it was an awkward situation as he asked me out and I told him I had a headache. Later, he returned with an ointment for the headaches. The poor little dude was head over heels, but I was ethical in not dating or mingling with our students. I did learn to say I love you in Hmong (Kuv hlub koj). All the money I made during my employment was saved and under my name and my mother's name as the custodian. Then we received a call from my brother. He had just walked through the ocean shores in the intertidal zones, and he was now in the United States of America. He needed a pick-up.

So, on a Friday night that just happened to be the night of my high school graduation, my parents decided to pile all twelve ($7 + 3 + 2 = 12$) of us into the van, stop at the bank, and set off on our trip to get Rodrigo and pay the coyote his fees – some of which would be covered by my earnings from all of my summer jobs. We left immediately and traveled to Little Rock, Arkansas, racing to get the money to the coyote before he just left Rodrigo there. Dad did all the driving.



During our trip, we stayed in several hotels so our dad could rest. We were told not to go out of our rooms because there had been a homicide and the killer was at-large. Being scared to death, we closed all the windows and hid in our rooms.

Finally we made it to Rodrigo. He admired the development of my four little sisters, and how my little brother had become a young man. The last time we had all seen one another was about six years ago at our mother's funeral and before our adoption.

At a hotel on our drive north, Rodrigo began showing us the sea urchin spines in the bottom of his feet, which made them red and swollen. Mom was able to do microsurgery and tried to pull out all the spines before we continued traveling.

Along the way, we stopped at McDonald's and ate at the buffet at Ponderosa. My brother was yearning for his food back home and asked what we ate here. I told him we ate hot dogs, spaghetti, tuna casserole, and whole tomatoes in chili beans. Yearning for the food back home, he exclaimed "How will be able to live without tortillas?"

I translated our conversations for my parents. They said we could make a stop at El Rey in Milwaukee because they sold tortillas by the boxes. I was happy that we could go somewhere where we could interact with other Latinos and speak our language.

After El Rey, we all piled back in the van and headed to Manitowoc, but not three blocks from El Rey, I looked behind and saw my little sister Joy, running behind the van. I yelled at my dad to stop. We all got excited and as I hugged Joy to get her in the car, I could feel her heart pounding as her

strong arms and legs wrapped around my back. Mom and Dad were arguing, trying to pass blame on each other.

I was scheduled to deploy to Basic Training in October. After all that, my brother returned to El Salvador in August. He did not like the life we lived here. My brother has visited us several times since and I traveled to El Salvador. During the last visit with my brother, when he came to the States, he and his daughter and her children stole me away for a trip and hotel stay in Chicago, where we enjoyed ourselves swimming and playing in the pool and just being together. Immigration laws are so difficult and expensive, and many poor immigrants must come through whatever means possible.

The Ward by Juan Ramirez

I am a UNITED STATES ARMY COMBAT INFANTRY VETERAN.

I was taken – actually rescued– from Platteville Wisconsin. Did a transitional stop in Dodgeville and Lyfted to Madison, Wisconsin. The Lyft driver had gotten lost downtown and instead of taking me to the Madison VA Hospital, he dropped me off at The Beacon, which is a municipal homeless shelter somewhere downtown. Notice the term "Somewhere" – to this day I still don't know exactly where it is.

As I was processing into the facility my diabetes and high blood pressure hit me hard. I was literally dragging my two bags which felt like they weighed a ton each. I asked for a nurse before I passed out. I was informed



that I could access an artificial intelligence nurse on screen, an offer I quickly declined.

A social worker interviewed me in her makeshift office and I made her understand that the Lyft driver made a mistake and brought me here, wherever “here” was, and not to the Madison VA Hospital as planned.

She called the VA Hospital emergency room and after much argument with the clerk on the other side of the call an ambulance was finally dispatched to pick me up and take me to the hospital. My blood pressure and blood sugar levels were so high I could barely comprehend the paramedics when they spoke to me.

I was admitted to the emergency room and given a hospital gown, my phone taken away and a guard was placed in my room for THEIR security.

Finally I was admitted to the Acute Inpatient Mental Health Unit, otherwise known as 2B, or THE WARD, as the mental health inpatients referred to it. At midnight once my blood sugar levels and high blood pressures were controlled I was taken upstairs to be interned at THE WARD where I spent three weeks..

In THE WARD I was catered to with my own room, a private shower room, three meals a day, VA medications, and awesome nurses, psychiatrists and staff. It didn't take me long to get acquainted with the “ Tenants” as I invited them all to play board games, drink coffee and just talk, laugh and at times cry.

I became the informal leader of this peculiar crowd of Vets. An old saying states that “ It takes a lunatic to lead all the crazies,” and that lunatic was me.

I was counseled on mindfulness, did individual, group therapy and meditations. Water painted



portraits, played many board games and was interviewed in close confidential sessions with my psychiatrist, Dr. Chen, and her staff.

I explained to her that my mental illness came from an exterior malicious force that had been haunting me for years, that came after me continually and viciously and in force, “ IT “ never came alone. Whether she believed me or not was not my concern. I know that I was living a nightmare for the last twenty years and her science has yet to come on board with the hidden powers of the occult.

After three plus weeks I was released from THE WARD and placed into Porchlight VTHP, the Veterans Transitional Housing Program on Spring Street, Madison, Wisconsin.

It was quite an adventure at THE WARD. I needed that restful break by not worrying about where to access my water source, food source and overhead shelter from the elements, the three factors of survival.

I learned much about myself there in 2B. I learned that there are others who are in worse mental health situations than me and I do not ever wish to become them. Hence, the eternal fight is on and will carry my rejuvenating experience from THE WARD for the rest of my life.

COMING HOME

Homer's Odyssey is, at its heart, a story about "nostos," or a return, a homecoming, of a long-lost veteran of war. Odysseus struggles for ten long years to return to his wife and son, and to the life he once knew. OBW students wrote about their own notable homecomings.

I live at the Valor apartments and they are brand new. I will never forget that first day when I got my key. I didn't even know how to use it. I thought the lock was broken already. It was a fob, which I had never used before. But I was the first to use *everything*. I was so excited! I still am because it is so nice to come home to a nice clean apartment.

(Loretta Lacy)

When I was 20 years old, my two sisters and I acquired our own apartment located in Hyde Park. The apartment had two bedrooms, and I had a room by myself. My two sisters had to share a bed and a room.

My two sisters were supposed to move out of my mom's house and share the apartment.

One of my sisters said, "Denyse, why don't you move with us?"

I said, "If I move with ya'll I want to have a bedroom to myself."

Both of my sisters agreed that I could have my own room.

My mother bought a queen sized bed for them to share. I had a twin bed.

After a while, staying in the apartment I invited my boyfriend over to spend the night. One of my sisters said, "Oooo, I'm going to call Mama. You can't have a man sleep over!"

I said, "Why would you call Mama? Ya'll can have your boyfriends over too!" **(Marcia Brown)**



January 15, 1972. I finally got to come home after being stationed in Germany for 27 months. I actually got home three months early because the Army was going to an all volunteer force.

My brothers had a social club and they were having an affair on the day I got home. I didn't tell anyone I was coming home. I wanted to surprise them all.

I got to my mom's house at about 6:30 pm and surprised my mom, dad, and little sister. It was quite emotional. I was home for good. Now what was I going to do?

I spent the early part of the evening with my parents, but at about 9:00 pm, it was time to make my way to the affair my brothers were having. They had no idea I was home. We all shared a lot of the same friends so it was an awesome surprise for us all. We partied and laughed and met more people. It was an awesome night – one I will never forget. What an awesome homecoming that was. **(Sanford Jones)**

When I left the military, because of the circumstances surrounding my discharge, there were a lot of uncertainties, but mostly I had a lot of feelings of shame and blame for what had happened while I was enlisted.

As I knew that I would have to hide everything about my enlistment for years, I would never tell anyone that I was a veteran because I felt that it was an honorable word for someone who fought in a war. Eventually over time, and with the help from other veterans, I realized I had taken that oath just like all veterans do, and I became much more comfortable with identifying as a veteran. **(Erik Huelsbeck)**

I was lying under a treeline in Platteville Wisconsin right across the WalMart parking lot contemplating my next life steps in this crazy and bizarre adventure I was living. I had been there for approximately eighteen days. I actually had lost count after the first ten days. I was destitute, homeless, and alone, yet still in good spirits. Little did I know that on that fateful day my life was about to change.

The night before I had called the Veterans Suicide Hotline and a fair-voiced young lady talked to me about my situation until nine o'clock at night. She promised me that help was on its way but not until the morning, and I had to assure her that I was not going to do anything drastic that evening.

The next morning came and just like she promised, I started to receive phone calls from local, regional, state and federal Veteran agency managers to address my situation.

A Lyft was arranged for me to take me from Platteville to Madison. The mission failed due to a lack of Lyfts or Ubers being available in such a small town.

I was down to my last dollar and bought a senior citizen coffee from the local

McDonalds. I savored that coffee as if it was the last one in my life.

Mrs. Vicky, the Wisconsin Southwest Consortium manager, called me and told me that due to all resources expended she was personally going to pick me up and take me to Dodgeville, where her office was, to process me and then get me Lyfted to Madison.

She showed up in her pickup at the McDonalds and as I opened up her passenger door she exclaimed, "Oh, wow, You're not going to kill me are you!?"

I must have looked pretty rough coming out of the McDonalds and the woodline. I assured her not to worry – that I was harmless and thanked her for her professionalism and compassion.

Thanks to Mrs Vicky I was able to arrive at my Madison home, where I am living permanently in a five-star apartment at the Madisonian Senior Apartments and attending the Madison College Human Services Associate Program and the UW-Madison Odyssey Beyond Wars Program as a full time student. Thank you everybody, and a special thanks to Professor Erin. **(Juan Ramirez)**

