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ODYSSEY SENIOR ORACLE



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REMEMBERING THE TURBULENT SIXTIES

Professor Craig Werner visited Odyssey Senior and shared excerpts from his new book on the 1960s and freedom. He also played pivotal protest songs from the decade. Odyssey Senior students were asked to write about a moment in their life from 1960-1969.

On April 4th, 1968, the day started out like many Thursdays during the school year. I woke and ate a bowl of dry cereal with milk that was delivered in glass bottles left daily each morning. After breakfast, I gathered my canvas book bag, laced up my PF flyers, and slid down the banister to the front door. My school was Saint Boniface, which was blocks from my home on 12th and Meineke above the Tip Top Tavern.

The school day was nothing memorable, but the walk home certainly was. On most days, my friends or feral neighborhood kids would go to their homes and grab a quick snack before heading to our large neighborhood playground a half a block from my home. We would play in large concrete tunnels and on swings until dinnertime at 6:30 pm.

As the dinner hour approached, the sounds of children's loud pipes and hollering screams were replaced by shrieks and blistering cries from the houses surrounding our playground. All the children began to flee the playground to spring home. As I entered the front door and ran up the flight of stairs, I could hear the TV turned up loud. As I rushed into the living room, my parents were in front of the TV. "They shot him! I knew they were going to get him," said my father. **(Brian Benford)**

So I remember the day John F. Kennedy was assassinated. It was a bright sunny day, and all seemed well. I was young, and my father and I were driving somewhere. It seemed like everywhere we went, the TV was showing this one event over and over. I couldn't get it clear in my young mind who this person was or why he was killed. He had a lady he was married to in the car with him and other people, but he was the only one killed.



Then at the funeral when his young son saluted him, I was like, 'this guy was really important.' But what made my mind wonder was how they shot only one person in a car full of people! And why. The event seemed cheerful, then suddenly things changed. The Black people in D.C. seemed at a loss. I lived in D.C. at that time, as well as at the time of the riots after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. **(Pam Bracey)**



My first event in my life that I remember during 1965 was my grandparents watching “The Ed Sullivan Show.” These young men with long hair were singing and being chased by hundreds of young girls, young teenagers, and they caused chaos everywhere they went. I watched in horror and awe at the scenes on TV. I remember thinking “What goes on in America??”



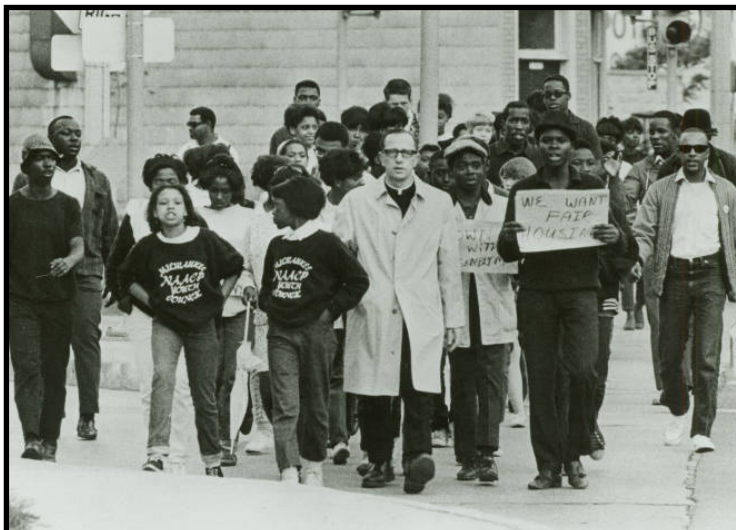
It took me years after arriving in America [from Puerto Rico] to connect the dots for the music scene, with the Beatles music and what the Beatles represented to the American teen. Times were changing in America, and this music changed how teens and parents interchanged feelings about everything. **(Socorro Lopez)**

I remember my aunt taking my sister and me to a religious festival in Spring Green, WI. There were so many people of different backgrounds. The music was amazing. I remember people being happy, singing, clapping. Oh, what a beautiful event. I remember looking up at the sky. It was so pretty, bright blue. **(Bea Chatman)**

I felt fearless at eight years of age. No kidding! I did not fear the devil, white supremacists, or the red-necked, fat Milwaukee Police officers that were a mixture of both. In 1964, I became indoctrinated to “Black is Beautiful” and “Soul Power.” Attending

a Franciscan Catholic school, I was taught that Jesus could kick the devil’s butt, and if I ever saw him, I could invoke the name of Christ, and I could whip that mean old Satan too. From the news and older adult commentary, I observed that white supremacists were a type of weak, cowardly adults that needed to be in a pack before they would whoop and holler insults because they were afraid to individually challenge a Black person to a physical fight. My father, grandfather, and a host of uncles were Milwaukee police officers that carried the same guns, ammunition, and badges as the “Pigs” that wrecked Black lives in my neighborhood, so I had no consternations around the police.

In my kindergarten year (1964) at Saint Boniface Church and School, Father James Groppi, nuns in habits, and the pretty, young, white women student teachers from Marquette University were so different from the other people in my orbit. They were part of the small cadre of white people that I knew, including our family doctor, dentist, milkman, and the Jewish store owners that dominated the inner city of Milwaukee where I lived on 12th and Meineke, above the Tip Top tavern. The tavern and attached restaurant served as one of the most popular social hubs of Milwaukee’s Black Bronzeville community. Everyone else that I knew or saw were Negroes, as we were called at that time and what is listed on my birth certificate. Saint Boniface was less than three blocks from my home.



St. Boniface Catholic Church was the center of the city's civil rights movement. In the 1960s, the church was located on North Eleventh Street, also known as the "inner core." The church was predominantly Black, yet many residents did not trust the priests and sisters, perhaps because some were raised as Southern Baptist or African Methodist Episcopal. However, countless Black parents like mine sent their children to St. Boniface because of the good teachers, believing that these teachers and nuns had a "higher calling" to education. It was in this church and school that I had an epiphany that everyone, regardless of the color of their skin, had a right to reach their full potential, and I was not going to be afraid to demand this, despite my age.

Father James Groppi served at St. Boniface from 1963 to 1970 and advised the NAACP Youth Council. The Youth Council played a significant role in the city's desegregation efforts. The Youth Council was made up of mostly poor and working-class Black youth (including my siblings and older cousins), as well as a handful of white members. In 1965, when I was six, St. Boniface was slated to be the site of a Freedom School offering lessons on Black history and activism. This plan was prohibited by Milwaukee's Catholic Diocese, leading to protests by the Youth Council and its allies. Prominent national civil rights leaders, including Fannie Lou Hamer, Hosea Williams, Jesse Jackson, Dick Gregory, and Roy Wilkins, visited St. Boniface

to attend rallies, marches, and strategy sessions.

St. Boniface served as a hub during the 200 consecutive days of open housing marches from fall 1967 to spring 1968. Strategies and routes for marches were organized in the church's basement by the NAACP Youth Council Commandos Direct Action Committee. Marches started and ended at the church. St. Boniface supplied food, lodging, medical attention, and transportation to the movement (Saint Boniface Historical Plaque, 2023). Before the marches, the adults, parents with their children, teenagers, and unchaperoned children that had permission would gather on the playground where Father Groppi would offer inspirational remarks and pray over the crowd before we headed off to the south side.

One march that is etched in my mind and soul took place during the summer of 1967. In August, the Youth Council issued a "Declaration of Open Housing" and staged the first of a long series of daily marches across the 16th Street Viaduct to the all-white South Side of Milwaukee. As roughly two hundred people gathered at Saint Boniface's playground, the crowd was warned that there could be violence, and all the young children, such as myself, were instructed to stay shielded in the middle of the procession. The Young Commandos, some wearing black berets and red shirts, formed the outside of the line of marchers. I recall being filled with hope, conviction, and joy. Those feelings

soon were challenged. As we reached the 16th Street Viaduct Bridge, we could see and hear a massive crowd (later the news media reported over five thousand) of white people on the other end of the bridge.

As we crossed the bridge, I remember hearing chants of "We want slaves" and "Niggers back to the jungle." To my horror and complete dismay, my preconceived notion of grandmothers being cookie-offering, loving women was shattered as I saw red-faced older white women foaming spittle at the mouth, waving signs, and screaming



horrible racial epithets at us. As bottles begin to crash and burst on the ground around us and flying overhead, a handful of white protestors broke through the meager police lines that offered no protection to us marchers, only to get punched by members of the Young Commandos, causing them to cower back to their swarm. Despite the ensuing chaos, I strangely felt no fear because I knew that “right” was on our side. My third-grade consciousness rationalized that because Cassius Clay was World Champion, meaning that all us Negroes were obviously the best fighters, the Young Commandos and Black Panthers with us would certainly keep me safe.

We retreated across the bridge and made our way back to Saint Boniface. That evening, Father Groppi in a rousing speech promised that we would return every day until our goals were met. And for 200 days the marchers returned, despite the firebombing of the Freedom House the night after the first march, and in spite of the antics of the hideously racist Mayor Henry Meier and Police Chief Harold Breier. The Commandos, who were not originally armed, began to carry weapons, adopting a policy of “Not Violent,” meaning that they would not initiate violence but would defend themselves if attacked. My father taught inexperienced Commandos how to use guns. Groppi called this Christian self-defense. After the initial confrontation, there were community leaders as well as Milwaukee’s major news outlets that condemned the behavior of the South Siders but suggested that the demonstrators had made their point, and the marches should stop.

The marches and counter-protests peaked in early September with two nights of rioting. On Sunday, September 10, 1967, 2,300 activists (I was there wearing my new PF Flyers sneakers) marched from St. Boniface across the 16th Street Viaduct, along a fifteen-mile route through the South Side.

Speeches by Dick Gregory, Vel Phillips, and others were given before the march. I felt exhilarated hearing their words—words that

I can still hear decades later. After the march and after we retreated across the bridge on our way home, the news showed white South Siders fighting police for six hours before being prevented from crossing the viaduct to reach St. Boniface. My oldest brother and his friends were saying “let them come,” hoping that the racism would show as they gathered their rifles and moxie.

During the fall, both fair housing advocates and their opponents adopted new tactics. The Youth Council augmented their marches with a boycott of Milwaukee’s major breweries and a “Black Christmas” protest to discourage holiday shopping, contributing to the loss of up to thirty percent of retail business. Everyone in my family participated in these actions despite the adults loving Blatz and Schlitz beer. We were told that we would celebrate Christmas in July to hurt the white business owners and because Jesus was not born in December. These tactics worked to some degree, but Milwaukee is still struggling.

As a child, I distinctly remember that we marched for better education, better homes, better jobs, against police violence, so that everyone could be free. During the summer of social unrest after Mr. Floyd’s murder, I took immense pride and joy looking at all the young people marching in the streets of Madison. Sadly, over fifty years later, we are still seeking and demanding these rights.

(Brian Benford)





My brother, William Edward Smith aka Mr. Bill, died due to complications attributed to the War in Vietnam. Bill enlisted at the tender age of 19, so proud to serve his country. Two years later at 21 he returned a broken man. He returned to a country where the people who greeted him were angry and hostile. They blamed him, cursed him, and made him feel unwelcome.

In the VA Hospital, he regaled me with stories so horrible it was hard to listen. As he lay there with 1/8 of a stomach and more injured than any one body could account for, he felt hopeless. Once out of the hospital he insisted we see *The Killing Field* and *Apocalypse Now* many times. My eyes were closed to the horror I was watching. He said it was even worse in person.

He told me of one of the worst days of his life. He was lying in a foxhole for three days wounded with two other soldiers all believed to be dead. They were surrounded by the absolutely unimaginable Khmer Rouge. Once rescued he was the only one of the three alive.

Bill, now a disabled veteran at 103 pounds, was never the same. He married, had children, and even worked. Bill died at age 50 in 2002. The torment and mental anguish of Vietnam haunted him for over 30 years. **(Edith Hilliard)**

Vietnam War, raging wild and loud

People were fighting each other

People were dying in the war

People were hurting

People were mad at each other

People were confused and lost

People were killing each other

People were sad they were losing

family members dying in the war

I was afraid and young at heart

I was confused and lost in wonder

I was sad and crying tears of sorrow

I was praying, praying, praying to God

I was asking questions all the time

I was not sleeping well at night

I was letting my imagination

run wild with wonder and madness **(Sherri Bester)**



A PLACE CALLED HOME

My grandmother's house was a place I felt loved, cared for, secure, and comfortable: 607 Conklin Court in Madison. I lived with my grandparents from 9 months to 12 years old. I loved my bedroom with the attached front porch on which I slept in rarely. I loved the smells of my grandmother's cooking, which was a regular occurrence. I can visualize us sitting at the yellow Formica kitchen table.

We lived on the second floor, and going down the back stairway made me fearful, I always thought something bad was down those dark stairs. My grandmother's house was always in perfect order. Nothing was ever out of place until her daughter came to visit my aunt. The minute she stepped in

the house, her belongings were everywhere, and she was messy.

We had an unusual bathroom with a front and back door. One side was for Grandma and the other for our boarders, Mr. Carpenter, a porter, and Mr. Elle, a chef. They worked for the Chicago and Northwest Railroad and lived with us between trips. Every Friday night they would bring shrimp home for dinner as we all sat at the kitchen table. They would talk about all the different people who boarded the train and the fancy eating car. I had the privilege of riding the train to Chicago to visit relatives with them. I remember eating in the dining car with white linen table cloths and napkins, sterling silverware, China dishes, and

cream on my cereal. On my ride in the evening, Mr. Elle taught me how to use the different silverware and how a proper little girl would drape the linen napkin on her lap.

Across the alleyway was the back entrance to Frank's Grocery Store. The front of Frank's faced University Ave. I remember all the delivery trucks coming and going early Monday morning. It was a busy place and a wonderful full-service grocery store.

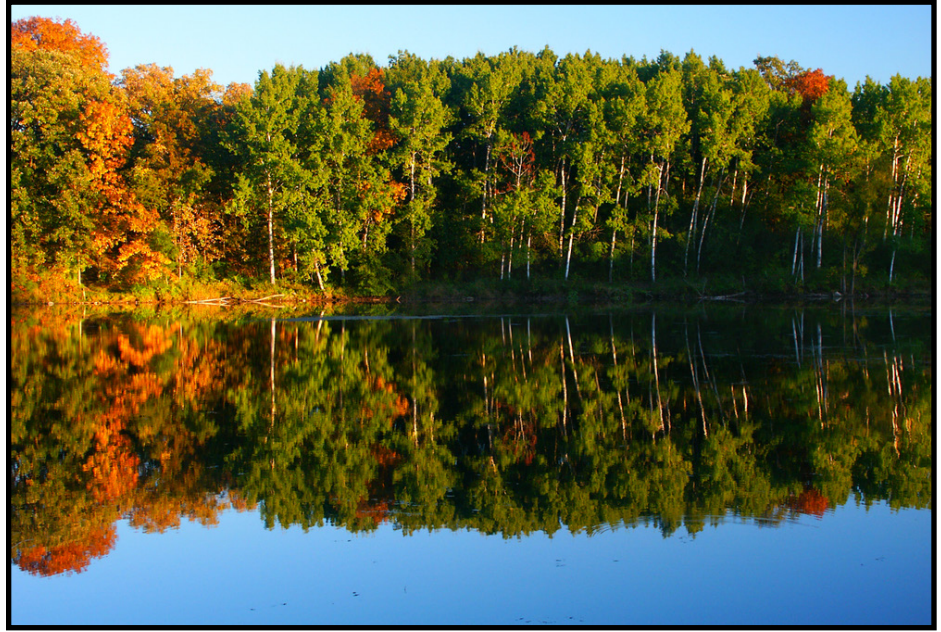
All these memories were my favorite place growing up. **(Edith Hilliard)**

I enjoyed playing with my sisters and the neighborhood children in my big backyard. I was safely surrounded by a wire fence. My grandmother had the most beautiful garden of flowers to look at there in the yard. The yard was covered with soft green grass everywhere. We had family picnics on the picnic bench in the backyard. Delicious food we would especially eat on the holidays. My backyard was an odyssey of memories untold. **(Sherri Bester)**



Ope! This place is beautiful. This is the HOME that I ache for. Peace comes to me in pine scented with floral highlights, undertones of decaying plants. The wind serenades my soul as trees rubbing and leaves rustling melodies bring me grounded bliss.

In this landscape of varying degrees of heaven, I drink clear refreshing water and eat smoke-tinged foods. A kaleidoscope of shadows induced by the sun gives me this place of sanctuary. Balance. **(Brian Benford)**



I am going to write about the home my sister Janelle (who lives in Florida) and I grew up with our mother in Madison, WI. Our mother was very loving to us. There was always peace, love, happiness, and kindness in our home. Religion played a very important role in our lives. We attended church every Sunday. We also attended

other church events, Bible study, prayer meetings, and revivals.

I remember the smell of my mother cooking fried chicken. My mother never cooked enough. Everyone in the family and also friends that came over loved her fried chicken. There was never enough because it was so good. Another favorite of my mother was greens. I remember my mother getting the greens ready for her Sunday dinner. On Saturday, my sister and I would pick the stems off the greens, and Mother would clean and cook the greens to be ready for Sunday dinner. Everyone loved her greens. I didn't like greens. I tried to eat them. Back then, you ate whatever was put on your plate. You could smell different aromas.

After church on Sundays, we all ate together, and oh what a beautiful time we had! We always had love and happiness. Mother had a beautiful yard and a large garden. She grew green beans, greens, onions, potatoes, tomatoes, and watermelon. She also had fruit trees (apples, peaches, plums, strawberries, raspberries, and blackberries) and grew plants and flowers. Walking in the yard, you felt so calm and relaxed. I saw true beauty. My mother had the most beautiful yard and garden in the neighborhood. It was very immaculate.

(Bea Chatman)



My grandparents' home is on a dead-end street, the only house and one apartment building that they own. Across from their home in the middle of the street is a railroad track where a train travels at least once a day; it's a freight train. On the other side, there is an elementary school where my mother and some of her siblings went.

My grandmother's house is the best place in the world. There I had no real fears or worries. My uncles were close by, and I felt protected by them. Best examples of true men ever. They were the same always. They laughed and talked with us about life. One uncle showed me how to wiggle my ears. My grandmother also made time for us in her business of cooking and sewing. She talked and laughed with us. My grandfather was there also but he worked a lot. When he came home, he had a chair he would sit in and put his feet up and fall asleep. He built this home for my grandmother and added a basement and upstairs. The fireplace in the basement was an escape to peace when there was a lot of visiting upstairs.



I actually came home from the hospital when I was born and we lived there for maybe a year. When I spent the night, I would always wake up to the smell of fresh coffee and toast and the radio playing quietly in the background. My grandmother woke up early. Sometimes we would catch the bus to the mall, and she would buy a pack of sewing machine needles. We would have lunch and head back home. That was so fun and special to me. She was the best grandmother ever, my mom's mom. She stayed the same forever, a good example for me. I love her into forever. **(Pam Bracey)**



A MIXTURE OF MEMORIES

We know that adrenaline promotes memory, so we tend to remember moments that are the most terrifying or the most joyful. Sometimes it can be hard to know if an early memory we have comes from hearing stories told to us, seeing photos, or actually remembering something ourselves from when we were young. In the pages that follow, Odyssey Senior students recount memories big and small, traumatic and triumphant, ordinary and extraordinary, long ago or recent.

I remember a time, July 4th, when we had been at my grandparents' house all day. The adults were in the yard, and we children were playing out in the street, a street I loved because the only house on that street was my grandparents' home and the four-unit apartment building that my grandfather built. So, we were lighting snakes and sparkles and firecrackers, and my cousin threw a firecracker in my hair. I had a lot of hair, and it was a big afro. I panicked. Everyone around just looked at me trying to get that firecracker out of my hair before it exploded. I was pulling and hitting my hair, with no help, for what seemed like hours. I finally got it out, and it exploded. Everyone laughed, but I was so scared. My cousin was such a hateful person, and he liked attention. **(Pam Bracey)**

I never remember getting into the car driving to this house, only after getting there and sitting in the car looking at this big house among the trees. On this particular day it was snowing, the car was running, and I believe that my mother had gone in. I think my dad was driving. I just remember wondering whose house this was and why we did not go in.

We sat in the car a lot when we went places, the store mainly, but I was so young and this house amazed me for some reason that day. That memory stuck with me, and it seems like after going in at another time, that house was so big and had so many rooms. So many people that did not feel like strangers were there, all the time. The upstairs and downstairs and basement were beautiful, and the rooms were huge to me.

That was the home I went to when I left the hospital. I don't know how long we lived there, maybe less than a year, but that day just sitting there in the car seemed like I was the only one around looking at that house and wondering where we were and why we didn't go in and who lived there. Finally, I got the chance to go in and see the big house. Walking through the tree path that always had spider webs, my short self always had to wipe my face. Then the people inside, Grandma and Grandpa, uncles, aunts, cousins. We gathered there often, and it was always a good memory of being loved and having fun. **(Pam Bracey)**



I grew up in Chicago, the oldest of seven children. Money was tight and so was the food in our cupboards. We didn't have many extras in our lives. Extras would be considered going out to eat, the movies, or even extra money for lunch to get a cookie or extra cheese on our dried hamburgers. We were poor but we didn't know we were poor because our neighbors and classmates had the same lifestyles.



My earliest memories are of my dog Duchess—her musky, earth-scented short hair radiating warmth, security, and love. Her body working--soft heart beats, as she breathed rhythmically--back curled against me--never once letting her 70-pound liver and white spotted German Short-Hair Pointer mass to squish my 10-pound baby being.

In the wee hours of the night, if I ever felt lonely, sought comfort, or craved love, Duchess would tenderly lick me (not too much slobber)

We didn't get many Christmas presents, so we took care of the ones we got. One thing we did have was competitiveness and the joy of beating each other at board games. Those were our happy times between school and prime time TV.

We played cards, we took our little disks around the Monopoly board, and we sank many battleships.

We included our maternal grandmother in our board games. But she hated losing and she would cheat. We learned to let her think she won and just have a great time watching her cheat.

I can close my eyes as memories flood through my head of the many games and how we screamed and laughed together. We bonded over those board games. It was a norm at our house to defend our properties from the bank or to get our little marbles from one side of the board to the other while playing Chinese Checkers. Dominoes became a game of who can figure out who had the important game pieces. **(Socorro Lopez)**

Dang, there are a lot of dogs in my hood... every other person is walking past my place with a lasso of some fashion in one hand, a poop bag in the other; all while juggling cell phones or coffee. Got me thinking...

and snuggle in closer, grunting in whispers. As my mother and father lay in the next room, Duchess would ever so gently lift her girth over the rails, climb into my crib, and nestle in with me. Years later my mother said they were amazed in how I, being less than two months old, slept through the night and never cried--until they discovered why.

You see, Duchess had a litter of 12 puppies around the time I was born. We lived in this cool old house



on 19th Street in Milwaukee, WI. The year was 1959, the month, July. My father was a Milwaukee police detective, and my mother was a former jazz singer and now a new mom. Also living in the house at times were my big sister, 12 years older, and a big brother 11 years older. Three years later, my younger brother would join us on this ride.

Back to Duchess—I was told that my father got up from bed to go to the bathroom one night. As he walked past my room, he saw Duchess spooning me. First, I am quite sure that he must have been completely bewildered in how this big-ass dog got into my crib. Next—in an instant—he must have been like--oh hell no--I am going to kick this dog's ass through a wall the minute she gets out of that crib. He walked into the room to forcibly shoo her away (translate--grabbing her by the scruff and throwing her in the hall) without wanting to wake me. He loved dogs (in a utilitarian way) but let us just say not enough to see his prized bird dog snuggling with his infant son.

The story goes as told by my dad—she bared her teeth at him—and in a low, penetrating growl, said, “get the f**k out of here.” My father approved. At that magical moment, I became one of Duchess's puppies. Duchess was granted extraordinary full and complete privileges to sleep with me at her full and undisputed discretion until that fateful day she disappeared.

Over the course of the next eight months, Duchess would help me learn to walk, develop a keen sense of smell, and offer my first experiences with loss—as her puppies were sent to other homes. Most importantly, Duchess gave me a deep love and profound connection to dogs.

Being born into a pack of puppies had its rewards. As I began to achieve physical milestones, like rolling over, sitting, pushing up, I learned to crawl at warp speed trying to keep up with my litter mates and the fun that they offered. Duchess would lie next to me and position her collar for me to grasp with my little grubby, stubby baby hands,



and then she would ease slowly and methodically uplifting me to a standing position. I would hold on and she would take baby steps with me until I let go of her collar and landed safely on my diaper-padded baby arse. My dad would say, “Duchess, bring me Brian”—and the dog would guide me along my first successions of steps--right to waiting loving arms and hugs.

Between being tenderized by tiny, needle-sharp puppy teeth and claws and being nose to nose with all the other puppies (with their funky, cute, little, nasty puppy breath), I was never bored or without playmates. I sniffed everything, yes—everything that the other puppies did—and began storing and referencing a vocabulary of scents. We shared my teething biscuits and new food offerings (so OK, I ate milk bones... big deal!!) as time was accentuated by the dwindling litter: as each puppy found a new home. In the end, a few weeks before Duchess went missing. it was just Duchess and her son, Duke, that gave me canine company.

That horrible day—the day that Duchess vanished—I saw my father sob for the first time. As customary, we had let her out to pee alone in the yard, and a few minutes later she was gone.

There were stories around that there was a dog napping ring in Milwaukee who stole dogs to sell to laboratories for experiments. My father, being a police officer, tried to find her with all his resources but to no avail.

I know many dog owners can attest to this, but my dogs have allowed me to embrace and appreciate all diverse life forms—even cats and fruit flies—with the belief that all living things have value. As I continue this journey of life, I carry Duchess and all my ancestral dogs in my heart. Over the years I have had many dogs, and I have developed this spirituality around our connection. As I type this, my trusty co-worker, Duke Ellington, sits at my feet. In addition to being one of the best bird dogs I have ever seen, Duke has a flair for loving everyone and occasionally singing to his coworkers when they arrive at the office.

So, if you ever catch me sniffin' the air or licking my chops—please accept my eccentricities and feel free to pat me on the back or rub my tummy and say “good boy.” **(Brian Benford)**



My earliest memory is me lying all loved, safe, and warm, wrapped up in a clean, soft, warm blanket within my grandmother's arms as she rocked me back and forth in her old rocking chair reading the precious bible to me and singing beautiful gospel songs to me until I fell asleep at night.

I remember my grandmother's kitchen in her beautiful, clean, southern home overflowing with love. Her kitchen was overflowing with that deep love, good smells, and endless recipes of tasteful foods galore. My grandmother cooked all her food with love, love, love, and if you tasted it you could definitely experience that unique taste of love, love, love.

My grandmother was the most significant person in the earliest years of my life. It is as if I could remember her from the very first moment that I was born. It was as if she was the reason my heart was beating and I was breathing life because of her love, love, love.

When I was an innocent, curious, little girl from my birth until my early years of school age, I lived in a big, beautiful, bountiful southern home in Greenville, Mississippi with my grandmother, my mother, and my father. I had two older sisters in my family who lived there also.

I remember one day when we were happy, joyful, and cheerful. Our lives were extremely carefree as we lived out this day together. It was the holiday of the Fourth of July Independence Day celebrations. My birthday was on the fifth of July, so we as a family always celebrated my birthday each fourth of July, which made me very happy, happy, happy each and every year. We had an awesome picnic in our big, beautiful, bountiful backyard. My father was on the barbecue grill cooking all kinds of tasty barbecued meats. His secret ingredient he cooked with was love, love, love. Yes, he was cooking like my grandmother always cooked with her secret, unique, awesome ingredient of love, love, love. My grandmother had cooked all the other special foods for the meal early in the morning so she could enjoy her time with my sisters and me as my father barbecued the rest of the meal in our backyard with manly sweat and tears. My grandmother made my birthday cake, which was a dream come true, too pretty and good to eat.

As we gathered together as a family around our picnic bench in our backyard to serve and eat our meal, we were suddenly stopped. Neighbors had gathered in the streets crying out and screaming to alert everybody to go safely within their homes. Some angry, hateful, racist white people had gathered in numbers throughout the neighborhood shouting and threatening that “niggers should not own homes.” That was the end of our joy, peace, and celebration of our Independence Day and my birthday that year in the southern growing hateful, prejudiced, and racist days of Greenville, Mississippi. **(Sherri Bester)**

We lived in a house that my father bought while my mother was in the hospital having one of my siblings. She never liked the house because it didn't have enough windows. It was like a row house and only had windows in the front and back. I had a room at the top of the stairs, first to be seen when you come up. It was a small room with a small closet that was so dark and scary looking. I made it a point to close that door every night. Still to this day I check my bedroom door every night.
(Pam Bracey)



I remember walking to Franklin Elementary School on Lakeside St. in Madison, WI. My sister and I lived on the corner of Fisher St. and Center St. This was approximately three miles from the school. At that time, Franklin School went from kindergarten to 8th grade. There were no school busses and no school lunches. My sister and I had to walk everyday (three miles each way) to school, home for lunch (which mostly was a peanut butter and jelly sandwich), walk back to school, and then walk back home when school ended for the day. Schools didn't close when the weather was bad (rain, sleet, snow). We walked in all kinds of weather. I remember while walking to school, sometimes we took the high tracks even though we weren't supposed to because of the trains coming. Walking the tracks got us to school faster.

Since 1984, Franklin Elementary School has been a partner school with Randall Elementary, a unique arrangement in that children from two school attendance areas join for pre-kindergarten through second grades at Franklin and third through fifth grades at Randall.

Franklin served families in the Bay Creek, Bram Addition, Vilas, Bay View, Dudgeon-Monroe, Greenbush, South Campus, Regent, and Brittingham neighborhoods. **(Bea Chatman)**

I remember my first day of school. I was dressed up in my pretty pink lacy dress and had pretty pink lace bows on my two ponytails all curled up so sweet. I was practically walking on the tips of my toes with my pretty pink lace socks and white patent leather shoes on my feet.

I remember my first home we lived in my childhood with my family all together. Throughout my early childhood we lived there so peacefully. Our home was painted white with a red roof and a red door to enter in. We had a wire fence going all around our beautiful home.

I remember going to church every Sunday when I was a young child so happy and free. The choir sang songs so encouraging and sweet. Then after they sang the preacher preached the truth so powerfully and sacred to God. I enjoyed myself each and every Sunday throughout my childhood.

I remember walking with my two sisters to the neighborhood store every Friday after school. The store was on the corner of the street. We would laugh and play all the way there and all the way back home with our bags of candy and treats.

I remember riding the bus from Milwaukee back to Mississippi to visit my grandmother for the whole summer until school started again. We lived together as a family in Milwaukee after my parents divorced—my mother, my stepfather, and my two sisters and me.

I remember dancing a dance to the song “The Greatest Love of All” at the neighborhood park. I won first place. All the people were clapping for me and standing to their feet as I walked back on the stage that I had danced to get my reward. I was smiling with great joy all over my face.
(Sherri Bester)



One of my favorite memories was traveling on two occasions with my children. One day we left Wisconsin to go to Washington D.C. Not telling my husband, we packed and took a train, sixteen hours, not knowing where we were going to stay or if we had enough money. That should have been a scary time. I never did that before with three

children, Malcolm a toddler, Maya may have just learned to walk, and Corey may have been twelve.

It all worked out. We stayed with my cousin and her two children. We piled into one room with bunk beds and were there a week. My children met my father, toured D.C., and went home like we had left for the day. What a time that was, and they enjoyed the train ride.

The next time we went to Minnesota with Mary Wells and her family. We had a picnic, met new people. Hubby did not know, and we were back home that night. It gave me insight and happiness through the storms of life. **(Pam Bracey)**



My brother Carlton V. Rogers passed away after a long battle with cancer and other illness on March 4, 2024. He never told us of the seriousness of his illness. "How you doing?" "I am fine, just a little cough, just a little tired."

He was the baby, and maybe Mama's favorite, but he was the birthday present to my five-year-old self. You see, I remember when he was born because my mother was in the hospital on my birthday and I wanted her to come home. We had spoken to her on the phone at Grandma's house, but I didn't know where she was. From what I can remember, I didn't even know she was pregnant!

So as the years went by, my baby brother lived a life of trauma and confusion for a little guy. My mother said, "He always had that cough," so we ignored it. He spoke about his cancer treatment but said it was over two years ago. He did not say he had stopped his treatments. So the cancer came back, and it came back in a rage, only stopping upon completion. His answer to the questions in the hospital and Agrace hospice was always 5-7 when they asked about his pain. I always saw 10, again and again. We wanted to see him recover but realized God's will was something other. I could not go back to visiting him when I knew he was being strong for my mother. The family wished him well and told him it's okay, we will be all right, and he died five days later.

The last five days he just looked up at the sky. God had his full attention, letting him know about the sacrifice he made for his life. All his sins were being forgiven, and he won't have to suffer anymore. We welcomed him on July 2, 1964, and God welcomed him on March 4, 2024. We will miss him and continue to love him, but God was able to help him best. **(Pamela Bracey)**



We were a close, happy, loving family who had our ups and our downs but mostly we had our ups in our lives as a family. We always seemed to be so peaceful, and we always seemed to work things out in the down times in our lives as a family. I remember one of the most traumatic times in my childhood was when my father and mother announced that they were getting a divorce.

My grandmother was the head of our family and the head of our home. She did everything in love, love, love. I remember how I used to think that she was my mother, and my mother was my big sister who loved me very much. My father was very loving as a father even though he had his ways about him. He listened to and respected my grandmother very much as the head of our home and the head of the family.

I remember how traumatic it was for me to watch our family seemingly disappear before my very eyes as my father began to disrespect my grandmother and not listen to her anymore. I remember the fights that broke out before my innocent little childhood eyes and ears, so quickly and suddenly everything seemed so unreal to me, so suddenly as I cried, cried, cried what seemed like all day and all night continuously in our once peaceful family and once peaceful home of love, love, love now shattered with hopelessness and confusion.

Yes, everything seemed so hopeless and overflowing with endless confusion, but that's when I really, really, really as that little innocent girl began to pray, pray, pray. Both my grandmother and my mother taught me to simply remain positive and to call on the name of Jesus and to pray, pray, pray ... So through all my pain and all my tears, that is exactly what I did - I called on the name of Jesus and I prayed, prayed, prayed. I learned in the hardest of times to call on the name of Jesus and to pray, pray, pray. That is one of many great lessons that my grandmother and my mother taught me well.

So to this day from that little innocent girl to this now wise woman, I follow that lesson well through all hard times of life. I love my grandmother and mother so very, very, very much. **(Sherri Bester)**

I am my mother's namesake, Alice. We were Big Alice and Little Alice. In the photo, I'm nine months old and we were living in Milwaukee. My parents came from Arkansas. My mom and I had a very close relationship, mother-daughter and also friend. When you saw my mom somewhere, you would see me—I went with her to most events, like fashion fairs, plays, going to the mall. We did a lot of things together.

I have good memories of sitting with her at the table. She made salmon croquettes. We would sit there talking and eating, and before you knew it, they were down to two. When I was younger, that was one of the favorite dishes. A Simon croquette or pink Simons would be in a can and you'd mix it with cornmeal, flour, onions, fry it with grease in a cast iron skillet. It would get crispy. You could eat it hot or cold. It would melt in your mouth. You could eat them right out of the refrigerator. Before you knew it, you could eat many of them. She would make them decent sized, too, like a hamburger patty.

While we ate, we would talk about everything from the Bible to the Oprah Winfrey show. I even had my dad do a video of me interviewing my mom. My mom was the guest and I did my imitation of Oprah interviewing and asking her questions about her life. She talked about the way the Lord had blessed her and how she was overjoyed with what she was doing in life. She was on the Mother Board at church, in charge of the pantry—she just did multiple things. She became a surrogate daughter to a number of elderly mothers at the time.

I lost my mother in 2013. I miss her every day and think about her words of wisdom. She could crack you up with something humorous or make you cry with a certain look. When she was in a nursing home with Alzheimer's, I could read her looks when she was no longer verbal. I made sure there were pictures of her at all stages with different



loved ones, and I put them up in her room so the staff at the nursing home would see she is a human being. We wanted her to be treated with the dignity and love she deserved.

People tell me I have a lot of my mother's personality. She was very shy as a young child, but as she became an adult, she had such a way about her. She was intelligent, quick, caught on to things that most people would have to go to college for. She was wise, kind, and loving. She shared herself and gave up herself. Many people at church would call her Mom. She never stopped being a person of some kind of service to others. **(Alice McDaniel)**

I was at work in the Department of Corrections (Human Resources) working on my computer, developing a new exam for a position in DOC.

BREAKING NEWS FLASH

Planes had crashed into the World Trade Center (both Towers) in New York, at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and also terrorist attacks in Pennsylvania.



There was so much chaos, horror, confusion, and drama going on that the airlines put a halt on all planes flying in the U.S.

At that time, I knew my aunt and brother-in-law were supposed to be flying from California to Wisconsin. I laid my head down on my desk and just bawled until I found out where my aunt and brother-in-law were. The plane they were on was directed to Salt

Lake City, Utah. The pilot explained that the plane was experiencing problems. The passengers didn't know the seriousness of the delay.

The airlines bussed all the passengers from Salt Lake City, Utah to Las Vegas where they spent a few days. All expenses were paid by the airlines. My aunt and brother-in-law were at the casino, having fun (drinking, gambling, etc.).

As it turns out, everything went OK for my aunt and brother-in-law. They arrived back in Madison, WI safely.

All of the events that happened on September 11, 2001 not only affected me but also affected the whole world. **(Bea Chatman)**

One of my earliest memories is sitting on my father's lap during a thunderstorm in our darkened living room shivering in terror from the sound of a thunderstorm raging outdoors. I ran to my mother for everything else, but when the storm hit, I went straight to my father's lap. Because I remember the setting so vividly as being in our apartment with the worn flowered carpeting and dark window blinds, I must have been around three or four years old. (When I was five, we moved to our first house.) My dad would hug me close and tell me that the thunder was "just the sound of Grandpa's horses going across Grandpa's bridge." I would close my eyes and imagine a thunderous herd stampeding across the bridge and making the whole room shake and rumble. In my mind's eye they were somehow both on Grandpa's bridge and up in the sky above.

Despite the fact that I knew quite well that Grandpa had only one horse name Brownie left on the farm and the bridge that my father spoke of was barely more than a few boards of wood across a little creek on the dirt road leading to Grandpa's farm that tended to flood in the early spring or when there was a downpour, I never doubted my father's words about where the sound of thunder came from. After all, when our old Ford went over that bridge, it would bellow, creak, and rumble, and my mother would

say, "Why doesn't your dad fix that thing so we don't have to go through this every time we come here?" Barump-ump-ump-rumble-rumble. One more barump and over! It was the most exciting moment on the way to and from the farm, and when the creek rushed below, it was downright terrifying for us kids crouched in the backseat. **(Chris Wagner)**

It's 1997, the 50th anniversary of Air Force Major Robert H. Lawrence Jr.'s death. I have the honor along with 29 other family members to be present in Cape Canaveral FL at the Kennedy Space Center. Also in attendance are NASA dignitaries, other astronauts, Omega Psi Phi fraternity members, and many others. We are here to commemorate Robert as the first African American astronaut in the nation. Robert was part of a classified space program called MOL (Manned Orbital Laboratory).

Robert would have gone into space if he had not died at the young age of 32. He was the youngest in the program and the only one with a PhD. At the two-hour ceremony, Robert's name was etched into the Astronaut Memorial Foundation Space Mirror following a 30-year bureaucratic struggle. What a JOY to sit a witness the amazing accomplishment of this young astronaut. Given the time and climate in the USA, this was yet another example of Black History being hidden. Robert was my cousin and a trailblazer who paved the way for other African American Astronauts. **(Edith Hilliard)**



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose or any other name would smell just as sweet."—William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet

Edith is an old English name. The dictionary definition is wealthy and prosperous. My maiden name is Lawrence and I often use it. My cousin was Robert H. Lawrence Jr. He was the first African American astronaut in the nation, and I am proud of that name. *[See the story about Robert Lawrence in the Memories section.]*



drunk at the time of registering me at the local registrar's office, forgot Carmen as my first name.

I have no middle name, but I will on occasion say X to confuse folks.

My nickname is Soky, pronounced So-key. All Socorro individuals have Soky as a nickname; however, the spelling is different. I grew up with Zoqui as a spelling, but I changed it to Soky. My family and some close friends call me by my nickname. **(Socorro Lopez)**

Hilliard is my married name, and after my divorce I kept it so my children wouldn't have the stigma of two parents with different names. As a child growing up, I hated the name Edith because it was old fashioned and no one else had it. Now as an adult I love the name because it's old fashioned and no one else has it. **(Edith Hilliard)**

I have never confirmed this with my parents, but I suspect that I was named Brian after some lame B actor named Brian Keefe. I was the only Black Brian in my reality until many years later. I would have been thrilled if I was named after the movie "Life of Brian," but sadly, this film came out years after I was born. I find solace that my nickname is BB. This was bestowed on me when I was five.

When the Spanish conquered Puerto Rico, they decided that the Indians needed the Catholic religion in their lives. The Indians who lived peacefully with their customs and religious beliefs were happy. The Spanish conquistadors included Christopher Columbus, who wanted all the natives on the island to be baptized.

Not being wedded to my "slave" name Benford, I have always wanted to change my name to BB. Perhaps when my children completely leave the nest, I will make this change as a way to shed a name that I hold no stock in. **(Brian Benford)**

In the Catholic religion, the saint holding baby Jesus is called "The Virgin of Perpetual Help." That is the meaning of my name, Socorro. Socorro means help. It's usually a middle name, but my dad, who was



My mother's brother named me Pamela. My father gave me my middle name, which came from his middle name, Latrail. I am one of two La-trailvettes. I am supposed to have a sister somewhere with the same middle name. I was always called "Pam." A neighbor used to call me Pam-e-pod, but she was the only one. Pamela means "honey" or "sweet." I love my name Pamela. It has made me humble.
(Pamela Bracey)



name is Genell, named after my favorite aunt. She was a wise, kind, and gentle woman. My last name is Bester, given to me after I married beautiful, strong, kind, gentle, wise, intelligent James Bester. The Bester family is a wonderful family, and I am so happy to be a part of the Bester family.
(Sherri Bester)

Sherri Genell Bester. My Grandmother said I was named Sherri after a sweet ice cream dessert called the cherry cup. She said I was such a sweet little girl and that I reminded her of the pure sweetness of the cherry cup ice cream dessert. My middle

middle name (Marie) is handed down from my mom. My sister, daughter, niece, youngest five-year-old granddaughter, and I all have the middle name of Marie. I'm so honored by my name.
(Roslyn Phillips)



WORDS THAT PACK A PUNCH

FOUR-WORD MESSAGES TO THE FUTURE

Activist, filmmaker, and writer Marlon Hall visited our core Odyssey class this spring and shared a film he created called "Dear Black Future." The film is set in Tulsa, Oklahoma, site of a terrible massacre attacking Black Wall Street. Rather than focusing on the past, Marlon Hall concentrated on the children of Tulsa now and how they might use the past to propel them forward to a better future. He asked local leaders to create four-word messages using the form Verb-Noun-Preposition-Noun. Here are four-word messages from Odyssey Seniors using that pattern"



Fight bullying with love. **(Socorro Lopez)**

Teach children through love. **(Pam Bracey)**

Treat happiness with love. **(Bea Chatman)**

Love stories from Grandma. **(Edith Hilliard)**

Choose happiness over wealth. **(Brian Benford)**

SEVEN-WORD POEMS

In the seven-word "Little Lyric of Great Importance," Langston Hughes writes, "I wish the rent/ was heaven sent." Here are seven-word poems from Odyssey Seniors:

Love spreads good will, be the one! **(Socorro Lopez)**

Grandchildren give a chance for new memories. **(Socorro Lopez)**

Sometimes the best peace is valued least. **(Pam Bracey)**

Hugs, grace, kindness help win the race. **(Alice McDaniel)**

Haters will hate and lovers will love. **(Bea Chatman)**

Wishing the weather continues to be pleasant. **(Bea Chatman)**

Winter doldrums behind us, summer is ahead. **(Brian Benford)**

Color purple pulsates pleasure, happy thoughts forever. **(Edith Hilliard)**

CELEBRATING MS SARAH WELLS, LIFELONG LEARNER



We miss having Mary Wells '07 and her mother, Ms. Sarah Wells, with us for Odyssey Senior but are so proud of the reason they've been absent. Here is Mary's Facebook post:

Returning to school after a 76-year hiatus is no small feat! It takes immense courage, determination, and a strong belief in oneself. My mom is 92 years old right now!

Last year, my mother and I had an opportunity to participate

in the UW Odyssey Senior class, led by UW Professor Emily Auerbach. This class truly opened the door to Mom taking the next steps in a long-awaited goal of returning to school. To make a long story short, my mom NOT ONLY completed all coursework to receive her HSED [High School Equivalency Degree] but over the last 12 months she simultaneously fought through several health issues. She never missed turning in her homework assignments. Her determination truly paved the way for her to be able to receive her HSED, and she also received an EXEMPLARY LEARNER OF THE YEAR award from Madison College!

Age is no barrier to achieving one's educational goals, and it is NEVER TOO LATE. My mom feels so good about achieving her goal, and she wants to thank everyone who made it possible. She says, "IT'S NEVER TOO LATE," "BE ENCOURAGED," "NEVER GIVE UP, AND DON'T LET GO OF YOUR DREAMS!"

All of us at Odyssey congratulate Ms. Wells on her inspirational achievement, commend Mary for her devotion to her mother, and invite all Seniors to a party on Wednesday, May 22nd, 5:30-7:30 PM, at our Odyssey Community room, as well as to a graduation ceremony the next evening at 7 PM at Madison College's Truax campus.



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YOU ARE INVITED

**HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION
CEREMONY & PARTY
FOR
SARAH D. WELLS**

GRADUATION-23 MAY, 2024
★ AT 7PM ★
MADISON COLLEGE-TRUAX
1701 WRIGHT ST

PARTY-22 MAY, 2024
AT 5:30-7:30 PM
ODYSSEY CLASS ROOM
2300 S. PARK ST.

