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ODYSSEY SENIOR ORACLE



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COLOR OUR WORLD

With Halloween fast approaching, I am reminded of 1979 when I, along with my roommates, dressed up as crayons. In the basement of our apartment, we found expertly designed Crayola crayon costumes. I wore a coffee with cream shade of brown; another of my pals, who was a rather huge UW football player, squeezed into a pink or rose color tube to the delight of passersby.



My six pals and I must have been quite the sight as we rambled down State Street. I imagined that there were many altered folks who thought they were witnessing six-foot crayons that came to life or their magic mushroom trips were kicking; and not to be outdone, the following year I dressed as a Hershey Bar – milk chocolate. **(Brian Benford)**

Yellow

Big Yella was a young lady that was larger than the other females that roamed through the darkness of my Jr. High School hallways. She was proud with her confidence and walked with a graceful stride. Her feminine high yellow skin that she put in your eyes would stand out and be recognized. Big Yella didn't take no mess and never was seen in a dress, but you took notice before moving aside to let her pass with her confident stride. **(James Bester)**



Light blue is a favorite color, a memory of my middle daughter when she went to her father's wedding. That's the favorite color for her, for my mom, and for me. When they passed away, I made sure they wore blue. **(Tracey Cherry)**

Red is my favorite color. Red means joy, peace, and excitement to me. When I was a little girl, red meant everything to me. I wanted my bedroom red, my dress red, and my hair pieces and shoes to be red. The red of an ambulance meant safety to me. The red of a firetruck meant safety to me. I remember fainting in the summer heat and I could hardly see, but when the red light of the ambulance came I saw it clearly and knew help had arrived to save me. That's why red is my favorite color. That red light of that ambulance gave me peace from my fainting spell that hot summer day when I was a little girl in the nest of Mississippi playgrounds. **(Sherri Bester)**



The color **red** was my mom's favorite color scheme, so for her funeral, she was decked in red with her white casket. She looked so regal, all in her red glory. My mother loved the color red on her beautiful black shiny red flowers, the whole family of men and women and children. Shining bright like diamonds, only red diamond, red ruby earring ribbons in her ears, white limo with red trim. Red is bright and lively; my extended family all dressed in my mom's favorite color (red). Absolutely spectacular. People stopped outside the church where we stood, ogling the family in red! **(Roslyn Phillips)**



In our new home, my mother's room and the kitchen were two different shades of **orange**. My mother needed that orange in her life that I believed brought sunshine rising and setting. She even had orange flowered sheets. I loved the joy that her room brought her; it seemed to refresh her spirit from a past of hopelessness to hope. Her kitchen was also orange and had orange counters; that's where the family and friends gathered when they came to our home. Much joy and laughter was shared there as well as good food.

I never really wanted to associate myself with the color **black** because it seems like it was what we wore for solemn occasions, funerals, sadness, etc. Today I wear my black and embrace it... Happy or sad. **(Pam Bracey)**





Purple has always been an inspiration to me. I first noticed purple as a child when I visited my grandmother at work. She loved that color and wore it often. She would have an entire outfit with the color. A fabulous flowing purple hat with a wide brim with feathers and flowers; one of her many church hats. Purple shoes matching purse and, of course, white linen gloves.

Sometimes I would wear the color purple as a child. When I became an adult, I started wearing it all the time. I loved the idea of the color representing royalty, and it made me feel accomplished just like my grandmother. I enjoy the many hues of the color purple, light lavender or a dark deep purple like the color of grapes or jelly. **(Edith Hilliard)**



Growing up in Puerto Rico I was surrounded by color. Flowers of every color and certain trees that only grow in the tropics. As you drive around the island, all you see is color. The colors of houses on the island are spectacular. Everyone paints their homes in shades of blue, green, yellow that would look out of place in the United States. As the sun beats on these colorful homes, you can feel the excitement, the laughter, and the good times.



I remember when I moved to the States at the age of eight, I didn't see any color. The walls in the apartments were white. "How terrible," I thought. "Where are the colors?" I decided to paint my walls with posters, the more colorful, the better! I had to get my color on. **(Socorro Lopez)**

Pink

My mother always said yellow was her favorite color, but suddenly when she was in her 90s, she started to say that she wanted everything to be pink.

“Why?” I asked.

She explained it was because when she was a little girl, her mother always dressed her in pink and her sister, Eileen, in blue.

As she became more confined to the house and especially her bedroom, I decided to have her bedroom painted pink. We chose the paint



color together, “Pink Lemonade,” which (on the paint swatch at least) appeared to be a rather subdued and mellow pink. My friends painted her room, and when it was done, it was PINK, I mean shockingly pink with an unexpected touch of lavender: not quite Pepto Bismol pink, but close. I was afraid she was going to hate it, so before I showed it to her, I told her that I could have it repainted or lightened if she didn’t like it.

She took one look at it and said, “I LOVE it.”

“Are you sure?” I questioned.

“Oh, yes,” she emphatically replied.

Now, I know that it was not what she had imagined. But I also know that, especially later in life, she was determined to find the best in whatever happened. And of course, she didn’t want me to have to pay to have it repainted! In essence, she was the most grateful person I have ever known.

So that master bedroom remains pink three years after her death. That paint has never peeled, the walls in that room have never cracked, the color has never faded (unlike in every other room in my home).

And I LOVE it. **(Chris Wagner)**



EPIPHANIES

Epiphany: a moment when you suddenly feel that you understand or suddenly become conscious of something that is very important to you



Having been spoon-fed toxic masculinity for all of my life, it took prostate cancer to regurgitate past notions of what it means to be a man. My liberation began as I sat in my hospital room after surgery to remove cancer from my body. Not yet knowing if I was going to survive, I began to morbidly think of adjectives I would like on my tombstone: kind, caring, loving, funny, strong, nurturing, fearless, tenacious, and giving. As I sat in my bed at Meriter, I had an epiphany that these words had nothing to do with gender. It was in that moment I began to question what a “real man was.” **(Brian Benford)**



The neighborhood I live in is mixed—Asians, Africans, Hispanics, Caucasians, Blacks, etc. We are all hardworking classes of people. I thought after 18 years of residing in the neighborhood, hey, why don't we have a block party? Plenty of fun, different ethnic foods, music. I even envisioned a bouncy house for the kids. But, speaking with some of my neighbors, they found my idea “preposterous,



unheard of.” I questioned my neighbors why. Language barriers. I said, “Nonsense, we all communicate very well.” Even the landlord was in agreement with my idea. Guess what, yes it happened. We had our celebration of neighbors: food, drinks, music, dancing African dances, salsa, hip hop, laughter, and joy. We made a change, and we are still talking about it today. **(Roslyn Phillips)**



While I was watching a commercial on TV about a lady who was on oxygen, she was advising people on how to prepare for Thanksgiving dinner in advance. She said she would make things days ahead because she might not be able if she waited too long, due to her dependence on oxygen. Year 2 I was preparing for Thanksgiving, planning my dinner menu. I woke up the next year, January, after a coma in the hospital after finding out I had been on life support. So, plan ahead! **(Alice McDaniel)**



Growing up in a Latino neighborhood, we were isolated within the streets of Chicago. We played together, ran around the neighborhood together, but we never played “outside” our streets with other kids from nearby neighborhoods. We listened to our parents talk about Blacks, Polish, and white people like they were “not normal” and couldn't be trusted. I grew up with prejudices that were ingrained in me by Latinos who never made an effort to meet and greet others. When I went away, I was the first Latina in our neighborhood who lived on campus. What a culture shock! I felt like an outsider. As the months went by, I realized most of my college roommates laughed, cried, and worried like me. Those emotions changed my 18 years of growing up Latina in a closed neighborhood. **(Socorro Lopez)**



One evening while I was getting gas at Woodman's, I heard this loud music. I looked around and a man across the way had a speaker microphone and a little toddler in a stroller. He was talking about his life in prison and on drugs and how God had saved him. I didn't notice if he was asking for money, but my thoughts were, "This Black man is making a fool of himself and has the nerve to tag his infant son along."

Then my thought of acceptance shifted. He had a story to tell, he chose his platform, he was loud and clear that his life had been changed by God, and he kept repeating the same thing. Just in case you missed it, my judgement stopped because it was his story, so how could I be the one uncomfortable about his story, the place that he chose to tell it, and how he wanted to display himself in public?

(Pam Bracey)



That moment for me was when my son came for breakfast just last year. He was 42 and I was 74. He said, "Mom, I have been upset with you all my life because you divorced Dad,

my wonderful father who you named me after." He went on to explain he felt cheated by not having his dad in the home. Even though we had our own home, there was no dad all those years growing up. He was one at the time. He had no idea of all that was happening in his parents' lives. He didn't know about the drug abuse, the unpaid bills, the dad who stayed out all night looking for drugs and missing work. He had no information of the mortgage company almost foreclosing on our home. He was only one. There was no need for me to tell him.

He grew, and our lives seemed okay. But it hit me at that moment that all his life he had been holding this in, feeling I was the villain who put his dad out. The epiphany now was me telling him the story. **(Edith Hilliard)**



My son told me that he was gay. I am very proud of my son. He has made many great accomplishments. I, however, thought that two people of the same gender loving each other was very wrong. I felt very sad and very troubled about what my son had told me about himself. I felt this way because I was always taught and told that two people of the same gender loving each other was very wrong.

Suddenly after deep thinking and reflecting, I thought that there was nothing wrong with two people of the same gender loving each other because I realized my son was a very great person with great character. But I always worry about him and what others think about two people of the same gender loving each other. To this day it bothers me and makes me nervous about him being gay. I don't know exactly why I just can't remain with my thoughts about it when I reflected very deeply and thought it wasn't wrong after all. It was just what I was always taught, and that is the only reason I thought that it was wrong.

(Sherri Bester)



FACING FEARS



The greatest fear I have ever felt was on Wednesday, March 4th, 2015. The family was driving out to North Carolina to see a grandson play his last college basketball game at NCCU. We were in Jackson,

Ohio in the worst ice storm I have ever been in. The highway was glare ice; it looked like a mirror reflecting over the road. Large semi-trucks were on their sides and some completely upside down. The trees were ice covered and glistening like sparkling lights.

We slowed our speed as the van slid over the icy patches, some snow covered. The atmosphere in the van was total silence. You could hear the crunch of the snow, ice hitting the tires, and the crackling of the glazed trees covered in ice and illuminating as the van lights and other vehicles

passed. I called my pastor and asked for a prayer chain for our safety. He said he was watching the news as it broadcast the major ice storm with vivid pictures and warning to stay off the highway on the Ohio turnpike.

We made it to a Red Root Inn as darkness draped the road in total darkness. We were now safe for the night, However, in the morning the terror and fear continued as the state patrol informed us the highway was closed. It was a Level 3 emergency. No cars were permitted on the road and would be subject to arrest. At 10 am the news came that one lane on the highway was open at 30 miles an hour, still with glare ice and major snow. We headed out still gripped with fear and sheer determination to make it to the 6 pm game. We made it with no time to spare. To date, I have never experienced this much fear. **(Edith Hilliard)**



My father and stepmom took me and one of my younger brothers on a long car ride. Until we got there, we never knew where we were going, never knew

we would be staying. These people were her people, her sister and her kids. We got dropped off at the door and they left. One boy came up to me and threw sand or dirt in my eyes. I ran inside to wash them out only to find out that the lights and electricity had been cut off. My scared self went into survival mode.

As the time went on, these kids would tease an old man that used to walk around, like maybe the town bum? We would walk to see whose body was at the funeral parlor. When we went in, there was a little boy who had got hit by a car. I wanted to go home. I didn't connect with any of them, not even my brother. I don't even remember seeing him anymore, but he was there. Every time we saw this man, we

laughed at him and teased him. One morning early we were playing and looked out the window and there he was walking by. We yelled and screamed and laughed at him. And today was not the day. He broke into the back door. All of us scattered and ran into the front where the mother was and two blind men (don't know who they were but they were there a lot). Anyway, he came through there throwing kids around. They ran to their mom, who was in bed. Then he started beating her up and she had a gun. I hid in the portable closet, the kind that you can move around. I hid in that and closed the doors peeking out sometimes. He saw me. I was so close and the chest was right by the bed. He pointed the gun at me and I just screamed. Everyone looked, I was so scared. But he just got up and left, I don't know when we left there, but it wasn't much longer after that happened. I shiver now as I remember that day... his name was "Old Man Shady." Mr. Shady, thanks for sparing my life.
(Pam Bracey)



I was at the amusement park going from ride to ride. I got on the Ferris wheel ride with my big sister. I was so nervous when it went so high in the air. One of the times it went so high in the air to the top and it suddenly stopped. I was so afraid and I didn't know what was happening. I closed my eyes so that I didn't have to look so far down from being so far up in the air. The seat kept moving from side to side. People down below started running all around the ground shouting at each other to call the manager over to the Ferris wheel right away. I held myself tight with my arms going around myself.

The manager shouted out from below and told us to stay calm as he promised he would help us as best as he could to get out of the situation as fast as he could. The wind felt like it was blowing harder than it had ever blown before in my lifetime. I kept my eyes closed and breathed out slowly in

and out of my mouth and my nostrils. I heard sirens from a fire truck blow out loudly. I finally opened my eyes from me hearing the loud sirens going off. When I looked down, I felt like I was looking down from on top of the world. I couldn't breathe and I felt like I was going to faint. My heart was beating loudly and fast within my entire being.

After what seemed like hours and hours and hours and hours, the Ferris wheel finally started moving again. It seemed like it took forever to be my turn to get off and be helped to the ground again. After that day I never ever got on a Ferris wheel to ride again in my life.

(Sherri Bester)



FACING FAILURES



For the most part, when I fix my mind to accomplish something I usually succeed, with few exceptions. Back in 2020, I ran unsuccessfully for the Wisconsin State Senate while the odds were against yours truly. Grassroots campaign, I felt that after Mr. Floyd's murder, votes would look to elect a nontraditional candidate. Refusing to raise or spend huge amounts of money, we lost to a very traditional candidate that outspent us 100 to 1. I found solace that we raised important issues – but I hate losing. **(Brian Benford)**



I failed in learning to speak Spanish. I desired to learn to speak Spanish so badly, so I took a Spanish class in high school. I was so excited. Once the class started, I just couldn't get myself together. I pronounced the words incorrectly and I forgot the words when we took the paper away to speak the language. So I accidentally learned to speak one sentence in Spanish; it was "bésame el c***." I will not say what this meant [Editor's note: kiss my bottom]. I apologize for these words. **(Sherri Bester)**



Swimming was an epic fail. I tried to get this anxiety of water behind me, but I would sink into it and embrace and panic my way out of its grasp. I tried to ease my way into the waters and glide on my way like the others, but I would be better at sinking. **(James Bester)**



At one point in my journey, young at life, I think I failed at planning out my future life, the house with the white picket fence, the husband to take care of me and our children. Somehow, I didn't plan right so I failed. I didn't think it through: would any husband do? Were they giving away houses with picket fences for the asking? Fail to plan (early), plan to fail. **(Pam Bracey)**



When my ex-husband taught me how to drive, I made a wide turn, him yelling at me to put my foot on the brakes. I pushed the gas pedal and ran into a pole, so after that my husband said, "You on your own." **(Tracey Cherry)**



I never wanted to take Home Economics in high school. "That's for sissies. Why do I need to learn how to sew?"

Years later with five screaming children, my failure of not learning how to sew and feeling too old to learn, hit me. While shopping at fabric stores, I would look at fabrics and wish I could sew.

About 20 years ago I took a sewing class at a local Madison shop. That class did not end well. I didn't learn anything. My sewing instructor finished my project. How humiliating! I still wander through Walmart fabrics and still want to make a blouse or a pillowcase. **(Socorro Lopez)**



In my early thirties, I went for my first driving test at the DMV to get my license. I studied, I bragged, I boasted, "I'm gonna ace this no problem." I sailed through the written exam, all answers correct. Hey, I thought to myself, this is a piece of cake. I scheduled the driving test. Sticking my chest out as I arrived at the DMV, I thought I'm set, let's go.

Well, I made one mistake after another: failure to use my signals, failure to slow down in 25 mph street, failure to change lanes properly, etc. We got back to the DMV. Heck, I'm thinking to myself, I got this, I know I passed. She looked at me and shook her head. "Sorry, you didn't pass." I had tears in my eyes. "What did I do wrong?" I asked?

Humiliated, I went back home and faced my peers. I failed. I went back two weeks later and aced it. **(Roslyn Phillips)**

HOLDING ON TO HUMOR



My granddaughter and daughter-in-law decided to carve a pumpkin and put my one-year-old grandson Adonis Anthony Washington inside of it. They scooped

out all the seeds and slimy, stringy insides and tossed it aside. Now, they are trying to fit Adonis inside the pumpkin. He isn't happy about this and is moving like a little inchworm to get away. The pumpkin is a bit chilly and the baby is naked. Mother and daughter are now using a heating pad to warm up the pumpkin. Now they are fitting the heating pad inside the pumpkin like a fitted sheet. They slip Adonis back in with the warm pad on his bottom and his backside. I am laughing so hard as they are too as Adonis slips and slides inside the pumpkin. He is smiling and wiggling his little feet, with his toes flashing in the wind. The deed is done and we are cracking up. **(Edith Hilliard)**



Having a sense of humor is a great gift. It allows a person to relax with others and bond with them. It puts a smile in your heart when you think about particular people in your life. Sometimes you reach out to these people when you are sad, going through a rough patch in your life, or when your heart is so broken you don't feel like you will be normal again.

The last couple of weeks have been rough because of my mom passing away. Lots of family drama and betrayals. I reach out to my family members who have a great sense of humor. When I get together with my sisters and brother, we have a great time. We tell jokes, laugh about different experiences, and poke fun at life and childhood laughs. Recently while our mom was in hospice we stayed at Airbnb, and we told jokes and laughed until it hurt. Laughter was a great way to deal with our mom getting ready to die and the fact that our lives were going to change. **(Socorro Lopez)**



When my dad passed away in July 2001, my mom, myself, and my younger brother and sister were lost. For me, it was the first funeral at home with family. With my mom grieving, everything down to writing my dad's obituary was on me. My mom was in a zombie state. With the help of aunts and cousins, I did his funeral (military style because he was in the Air Force in the Korean war). I picked his casket, flowers, clothes, etc. We had the funeral, and what did I forget? The Repass: food, beverages, utensils, plates, the whole Repass. I had my uncle walk up to me and ask, "Niece, people are hungry and thirsty."

Oh, my goodness, I was devastated. I got on the mike and had my family in stitches making jokes about my blunder. There were restaurants everywhere, I had \$\$, we catered that meal, and it turned out wonderful I laughed the night away, even got a chuckle from my mom.

To this day, my cousins say to me, "Cuzzo, you fixed that blunder with quickness and entertained everyone until the food arrived." My wit, quick thinking, smile, and humor saved what could have been a family disaster. **(Roslyn Phillips)**



My great-nephew died at the age of 20 in a car accident. The day of the funeral, our family huddled together in unbearable sadness, surrounded by over a hundred grieving young people. As we made our way past the many floral tributes, my sister (his grandmother) whispered, "The flowers I ordered aren't here!" We made a quick inquiry with the funeral home staff, and they were able to contact the florist and get a bouquet delivered in record time.

However, when the bouquet arrived it was not only rather sparse, a little wilted, and unremarkable (my sister had paid a hefty sum for a special tribute bouquet), but it was IDENTICAL to one already there! For some odd reason, the staff placed it right next to the identical one. Realizing this had all been done in haste, my sister glanced at the card and saw that it said it was from "Nona." Well, my sister was "Nana," not "Nona" and by then she was even more upset about her last chance to show her love for her grandson.

Just then my mischievous great-niece piped up, "Who is this Nona and why is she sending such a crappy bouquet and not even bothering to show up for the funeral?" We all burst out laughing (please remember, we were in the front row of this very somber affair). Heads turned and people wondered, I am sure, what is so funny??? We composed ourselves and stifled our laughter, but to this day if things get somber in our family, someone says, "Who is this Nona and why is she sending such a crappy bouquet and not even bothering to show up for the funeral?" And we all laugh and hug. **(Chris Wagner)**



James was very sick in the hospital. It was very serious what was going on with his heart health. He had already had a severe heart attack a year ago. The doctor was very concerned about his heart health.

James looked very weak and sick lying in the hospital bed.

I was very worried and very sad trying to be patient and strong in front of him as he lay there in his hospital bed. I talked with the doctor alone and with James present. They said what was going on with his heart was very serious and that I should contact family to come see him right away. They said that they might have to do surgery soon if things didn't improve shortly.

They told James to take it easy and to rest in his hospital bed. The nurses and doctors were coming in and out of the room all day and all night. It was early the next morning when things finally calmed down. Finally, after the nurse brought James breakfast and he ate it, then we had some time alone to spend together.

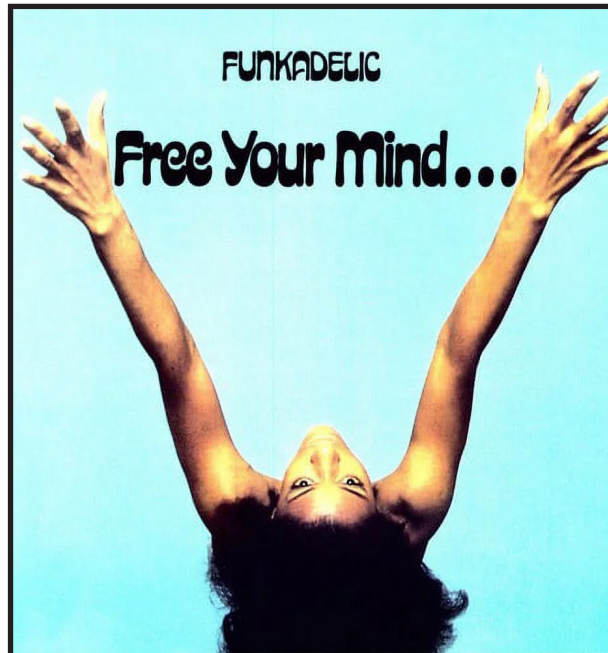
I asked James how did he feel. James said in a humorous and poetic way these words: "I am just an old, old, old man with a plan trying to stand the best that I can in the living land." We both burst out laughing and crying at the same time. I said back to James, "You are not an old, old, old man. You are a wise, beautiful, blessed man of God aging in the grace of God as he gives you courage and strength to fight on." To this day when James gets frustrated and says he is just an old, old, old man, I say these words back to him in love with all my heart. **(Sherri Bester)**



MUSIC MEMORIES

"FREE YOUR MIND.....
AND YOU'RE A**
WILL FOLLOW" by
Funkadelic, album
released July 1970

This Funkadelic song came to mind today as Craig Werner thoughtfully and carefully explained the quotes of Ralph Ellison, Mahalia Jackson, and Yusef Brown on their views of Jazz, Blues, and Gospel music; as well as how music transcends over time.



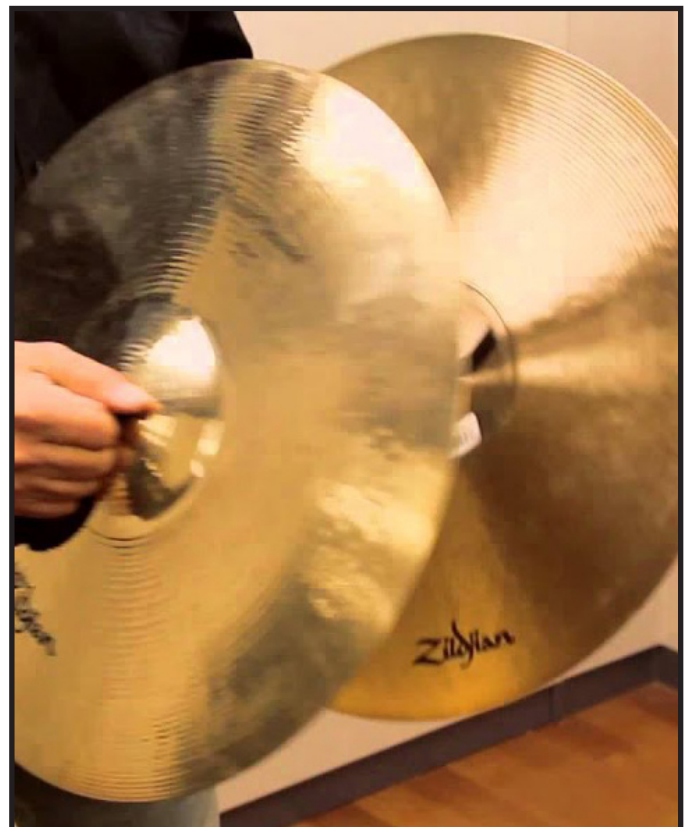
My story is the Blues. I think about the amazing life I had from birth to twelve with my grandmother. I had her unconditional love, support, devotion, caring, and always positive environment in every single aspect of my life. Then at age twelve when my grandmother passed away, it all fell apart. For seven years, I experienced no love, no support, and constant belittling of what a worthless person I was. The fact was tossed in my face that my parents didn't even want me. All the negative talk rang in my ears like a cymbal clashing in my head.

This song reminds me of a time long ago when I was around 11 years old, and my oldest brother played music all the time. There was one particular song that he ONLY played when my parents WERE NOT at home because he knew he would be in trouble and have to face consequences if our parents heard the profane language.

I would replay the sounds of my grandmother's positive words, praying it would override the negativity, and it did. **(Edith Hilliard)**

Ironically, as time went by, I had children of my own; and I experienced the same feelings of not wanting my children to listen to music with profanity. My children learned quickly that if they put a CD in the CD player while we were driving in the car, that their CD was subject to go OUT THE WINDOW if profanity were in the lyrics.

Today, I confess that I too as a teenager used profane language, but as I got older and wiser, I cleaned up my vocabulary and I do not use profane language. My grown sons do not use profane language (at least not while in my presence). If they happen to be on the phone with their friends and I am in close proximity, and they do allow profane words to "slip out" of their mouths, they apologize right away and carry on with their call.
(Mary Wells)



BECOMING METAPHORS

I am a wide-open door waiting for growth and change to come in. I am ready and excited for new things of life to come visit through my wide-open doors of complete ready entrance. **(Sherri Bester)**



I was planted deep into the ground.

Only the roots knew where I could be found.

There was no time to be messing around.

I had a spring date in a garden where love could be found. **(Pam Bracey)**

When it comes to the community, I am the internet of Madison, connected to everything and everyone.

I have been a docent at Monona Terrace for 26 years and President of Friends of Monona Terrace Fundraising to keep many events at the Terrace free. I volunteer at the Goodman Community Center connecting older adults to thrive and grow while keeping lines of communication open to the public. I volunteer for Care Center for Aging Research Education. I volunteer for UW's School of Geriatric Nursing students representing an older adult perspective. Olbrich Botanical Gardens has a wealth of programs and activities open to the public, many of which I have a hand in. I belong to an African American Retired Professional Women's group that meets monthly to share ideas and fellowship. I am a 36-year member of Women in Focus Inc., a group financially supporting high school seniors going off to college. I am part of a Literacy Program at the YWCA and Salvation Army teaching moms the importance of reading. I recently became involved in a quilting group called Memory Collectors putting together a history quilt.



Giving back to the community is important to me as it was to my grandmother, making the community a better place whenever you can. It's like a coleus growing. As you clip it back, more shoots open and multiply. **(Edith Hilliard)**

AGING GRACEFULLY

I thank God that I am a blessed woman of God aging gracefully each and every day with His mighty strength and wisdom to guide me along the way each and every day. And that is one of the greatest things that I appreciate and enjoy about aging - wisdom. I have grown so much in wisdom since the foolishness of my youth. I enjoy so very much basking in the days and times of my aging wisdom.

I understand so much more about life now that I am older and aging. I now understand that I can see on the world news and even in my world right before my eyes such sorrow and desperation going on, yet I can pray to God and hope and believe for better days and times to come. I don't have to get so lost in these things happening in the world all around me with the wisdom of God given to me with the wisdom of aging. Like I said before, I have a wisdom of greater understanding now that I am older and wiser. **(Sherri Bester)**

As I type this assignment, peering through my tri-focal glasses, the smile lines on my face are cavernous. I really like getting older. Bring on those "senior discounts" as young adult salesclerks address me as "Sir." Finally, the shackles of toxic masculinity have been forever tossed off. I could never fathom dyeing my grey hairs for vanity—or to try to impress someone younger from the opposite sex.

As a kid, I have come to grips that the Earth is billions of years old, and my time on this beautiful floating rock is just a blip on any timeline. Believing in reincarnation, I have been frustrated that I sometimes forget that I will get many cracks at getting life right. It took cancer to remind me that I should never have regrets about the past. My illness suggested that while goals can be okay, there is no guarantee for the future, yet alone tomorrow.

As I get older, I am learning to soak in the present, smell the roses, enjoy the moments in front of me at any given time. Despite losing my ability to dominate basketball games, I find joy that I can still walk miles with—going on—my sixth generation of bird dogs. **(Brian Benford)**

As I age, I'm letting things go and emptying my suitcase of other people's stuff. I enjoy my life more. I care but I let go. That's YOUR mess, so fix it. I used to take on so much that I thought I needed to be a "supershero." But believe it or not, this change has only been in the last year. My thoughts were that someone else is using my life's time, and I don't know how much time that is. So I took back my time, or as much as I could.

I still have a lot of work to do, but I'm not where I was. I can say "No!" today. I can be alone and not

be lonely. I buy myself flowers, I cook when I want. My home stays clean, my dishes done, bed made, my toilet seat down. I come and go as I please. I've learned to process my thoughts and what to speak about and what to stay quiet about. I let the other person tell their own story, so gossip is not in me (as much). It's been a greater journey than ever before. I wish I had this life when I thought I knew MORE! **(Pamela Bracey)**



CREATIVE CORNER



MY BEAUTIFUL COUSIN BY MARCIA BROWN

Rochelle was a beautiful person and my cousin friend
We will always have a bond that will never end
She had a sparkle in her eyes that lit up the skies
She had a spirit filled with fire and always did what her heart desired

I loved her with all my heart even though we were miles apart
Wisconsin is where I'd be, Rochelle in Minnesota with her family
Whatever the time would be, she always had time to talk to me
We would talk for hours at a time, never once did I hear her whine

Rochelle was flamboyant and sassy a little bougie but always classy
She made sure her make-up and outfit were always tight
before she stepped out for a fun-filled night

She introduced me to the best clubs in Chicago: Reynolds East of the Ryan
The Family Den, The Dating Game, and many more
Because of her, I'm the "Turn up Queen," now that's for sho!

Her time on earth was drawing near, she left this place without fear
She knew her spirit would rise above filled with The Heavenly Father's Love
Rochelle is in heaven on her roller skates, skating all over that sacred place
With a big kool-aid smile on her face

She's with God and all HIS Glory, her soul is saved so don't dare worry
I'll miss my cousin but will remember her smile
We will be together again after a while

Rochelle was a daughter, sister, mother, grandmother, aunt and friend
When our time comes, we will get to see, kiss, and hug her again

