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WOMEN OF COURAGE



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PONLE MATIZ

BY ANGELICA ALVAREZ VALENCIANO

Please open your heart and feel my words. If I could paint a canvas on “courage,” the splinters of broken hearts, cherished memories, and crippled dreams would be my paint brushes. With these words I wish to honor Denise Hanson in all her grace; she has quietly nourished and polished my ruby red heart to blossom with *matiz*. Like a noble lioness, she sashayed her way into my heart. Denise has been my teacher and my humble role model, and she has created a space to heal those whose voices aren’t being heard in our community or those who need that extra push to believe in themselves.

My dear friend Denise Hanson holds herself, her family, and her community with kaleidoscopic grace and a relentless force of tenderness. She is the only woman of five children. Her mother, Mrs. Alice Elizabeth Hanson, a loving, fearless, and uncompromising caring woman, and Mr. Lawrence Hanson, her father, emanated love to their children. Denise exemplifies a hard work ethic, persistence, and an ardent passion to empower her fellow women and men. She is now empowering future generations through her non-profit program Root 2 Rise. Root 2 Rise aims to place youth in leadership roles in the community and to place a delicate crystal of responsibility in their hands. In the Root 2 Rise program, high school students tutor and mentor future generations to re-engage them in learning at school. Denise said, “I feel there is a greater purpose in Root 2 Rise. We have provided our program to 334 high school students. What keeps me going is the thought that if I can somehow be a part of something that makes one human life better, then it is my calling to do that. I’m 59 years old. I want to build Root 2 Rise somehow in the next three to four years and be able to pass the leadership to people like you who are part of the organization.” Denise has not



ROOT 2 RISE

only empowered me, she inspired me and took it upon her heart to chisel away my insecurities, self-doubt, and cruel self-worth. I believe Denise’s courage is anything but a white and black nuance. Her courage extends rays of burning light to her values, personal care, and unyielding passion to tenderly mold, motivate, and make a difference in a world of indifference.



Why did I choose Denise Hanson for my woman of courage? As her daughter Celeste recently mentioned to me, Denise is a “woman of ideas.” To me, she holds the crown to that title. To say I am grateful is to be a star in a universe of supernovas. One of Maestra (teacher) Hanson’s ideas fostered a hidden gem with a brilliance. During my junior year, Denise created a space for students whose native language was Spanish. In a wormhole of darkness, unexpected embers began to spark in me. Spanish for Spanish Speakers filled the lacuna I believe my ancestors prayed for me to cultivate, honor, and bind to. At first, the one-hour class felt like I was in limbo, my home life riddled in chaos, my brothers in and out of the prison system, my mother working agonizing hours, my sisters suffering in silence... My home was a quiet place but my mind, heart, and spirit screamed with lifeless agony. I counted the hours, minutes, seconds at school, like the silence between heart beats...school was an abyss of hidden rejects and I had a comfy seat at the table. High school broke my heart...It might have

been the cutthroat sting of my first love, Gerardo, or the ruthless snake bites of high schoolers’ tongues, but my heart felt truly broken. The desolation and toxicity of family and school life kept me in silence. Although I did not know it at the time, Ms. Hanson inlaid me the same thing that Odyssey has begun to embroider at the soul of my being, *mi voz* (my voice). Denise tested my courage and challenged me to read in Spanish for the first time IN FRONT OF THE CLASS! It felt like there was a blood hungry cannibal trying to rip through my heart. I might not remember the names or faces of my peers, but I remember their eyes. Spanish for Spanish Speakers tested all her students in some way, I am sure; even the most articulate students in the class could not hide their fear of mispronouncing a word. Her warrior spirit and courage has lifted countless students and families in our community. This gift is one I will pass on to my child and my grandchildren. In the deepest truth, my voice was stolen, broken, and beaten, and under no circumstances did I imagine Denise, la “gringa” as she has mentioned herself in the past with a playful murmur of laughter, would become my rock and morning star as I strive for academic growth. In my eyes, she has been the moon that transcends quietly to let the sun rise. She has spoken words of wisdom, faith, and love. The one hour in Spanish class became a lifetime gift.



The words “chica” or “guapa” echo in my heart when I think of my dear Denise Hanson. I wish I could trace the lines on her palms, count the freckles on her charming age lines, and show those reading my essay how much beauty her roots carry and emanate. Nevertheless, her eyes carry throes of suffering, unspoken injustice, and unspoken words. As she answered my questions for my essay, I began to imagine my son’s favorite tree, the weeping willow. It was as if a honey bee stung my heart vessels and the venom was coursing through my veins. Each vine carried rivers of life; her Syrian grandmother’s sun-kissed skin made Madison tremble like a lost child in a sandstorm. Like her ancestor, she too has felt ostracized by her community. Nevertheless, Denise does not kneel, she challenges the alpha lion. Like a true lioness, Denise nurtures with fearlessness. Like the weeping willow tree that carries grief, beauty, resilience, and solace, she rose from the ashes and stands in all her grace. The trinity of courage includes her grandmother, her mother, and herself. Now mother to two courageous young women, Denise not only talks the talk, she finesses the walk to her melody.

As I read or write to my son in Spanish, or as I meticulously challenge myself to cherish every inch of my being, I have begun to picture myself teaching future generations the gifts of Maestra Hanson and the divine art of believing in oneself. I honor and strive to nourish the roots Denise Hanson has planted, and I pray to my ancestors to guide me so I may honor her with my appreciation and future accomplishments. I am not a quitter, and the women of courage in my life carry love, pain, and hate yet still emanate a luminous essence that no man’s God or oppressor can snuff out. Remember that women are not just motherly caregivers, or daughters who help, or lovers that pleasure your desires. We are restless, brutal, spiteful, ravaging spirits with daggers hot as the earth’s core. So yes, it was my beloved Denise Hanson, companion to my heart, and woman of courage who flourished my roots. It is the honey-colored curly-haired lioness, single momma warrior who is the architect of my humble aspirations. And to my beloved future women of courage, I hope that my words leave *matiz* (nuance) till the day we meet eternal peace.





STRENGTH IN A WOMAN

BY KYIANNA BAKER

Courage is defined as “the ability to do something that frightens one’s strength in the face of pain or grief.” When I think of courage, my built-in-sister Shey comes to mind. I have never really had a positive female role model in my life, and Shey was the one that stepped up. She has been in my life for quite a while now; she let me do her hair when I was a child, even though I was just putting a massive knot in her hair. She gave me my first beautiful niece, Amari, along with Akira and DJ. While supporting five kids as a single mother and taking others under her wing, she has taught me how to do a lot of things as a new young adult. She is a powerful woman, persistent and genuine.

Shey has known me for as long as I can remember; she watched me grow up basically. Memories of Shey come into mind when I was about five or six years old. She and my brother were dating, and she was like another big sister in the house. I would paint her nails, do her hair, and bug her all the time. At the age of 19, Shey and my brother had their first daughter, Amari; then a year later came Akira. By that time, everyone was living at the house on the corner of Oak and Berry. Unfortunately, my brother had always been in and out of jail and eventually ended up in prison. Shey was all alone at that point. She was taking care of the kids, putting food on the table, and putting a roof over their heads. No matter what, she consistently got the job done!

Shey does not surrender, always moving forward even when there is a struggle. Shey has battled with depression and anxiety all her life. The responsibility of taking care of five kids alone, feeding them all, and providing them with basic needs has been very difficult. She also takes in two young adult aunts as her own as well. She’s a single mom and a warrior. She has two jobs, just bought her first house, and put herself through college to get where she’s at today. Fighting with mental illness on her own, she still does the damn thing every day. I watched her set goals of getting a degree and buying a house by herself. I admire her commitment and I know it was so hard! I strive to have her will to do better every day.

She regularly thinks of others before thinking of herself. Once she sees you as family, you are family to her. Shey has always been the person I go to for life advice; she knew my traumatic upbringing and I trust her. She is the part of the reason I have not given up on my goals because she tells me I need to “get my s**t together.” She stepped up to be my role model because she knew I needed it. Despite everything she has been through—divorce, paying all the bills, bad relationships, and more—she puts others first before herself. She has an open spot at the dinner table for someone that’s not her blood, and she cooks some really good food, too.

When given this assignment I felt like I needed to pick someone that was blood related, but there wasn’t anyone that stuck out to me. I thought about a woman who has been courageous throughout her life and it was Shey. She is a strong, independent woman who does her own thing and takes care of her people. She’s my sister and I guess I love her.





POWER OF A WOMAN

BY TIFFANY BRENSTON

There are many women I can write about. Today I'm introducing to you a woman I've known all my life. This will be just a glimpse into her life. My smart and witty mother, Tracy, is without a doubt a woman with the strength of a lion, a creative artist, and most importantly a mother of faith. That's why she is my woman of courage. She has exuded it all my life. There are so many times she has read to me the Lord's Prayer.

My mom gives my family and everyone who crosses her path words of wisdom, love, and support. I find her courageous for her strength, her creative ways, and her faith.

My mom was born and raised on the southside of Chicago in the Englewood neighborhood. I like to think that the seventies and early eighties were easier times. Her father passed when she was five, so she had to gain strength. She married early at the age of 16 to my father, Leeautry. She raised her children to be wise, educated, and independent young adults. There were many times she fell on hard times, such as boiling water because the hot water tank was broken, waking up with the lights off, and having no car to get around in to run simple errands and grocery shop. Through it all, she never wavered in her strength.

As a young woman, she always was full of adventure and creativity. My mom always loves making up dances, sewing, drawing, and putting together great things, especially decorating for holidays like Christmas. She brought warmth to our home through her handmade creations. Anytime she didn't have enough money to buy us costumes for Halloween or clothes for church, she would sew us clothes. She would take us on field trips in Chicago though the forest preserves, where we always had fun and laughter and heard stories of her life. She knew her children could count on her for a happy, healthy time.

Growing up, I saw my mom's faith shine the brightest during raising eight kids and being a supportive wife. That required immense patience, love, and dedication. Her faith is rooted in the Lord's Prayer. I would always remember my mother quoting to us, "stick together, education is key, never take short cuts," and verses out of the Bible Psalms 23 and 27. With all her ups and downs, my mother has selfless love that shaped me today.

Tracy, my darling mother, is still happily married, for 40 years now. She is working in home care with the state of Illinois, and she still is raising generations with love. She is creating, laughing, and passing on her goodness and mercy. I'm so happy my woman of courage is my mommy! I wouldn't have it any other way.





BRAVE IN HER BLOOD

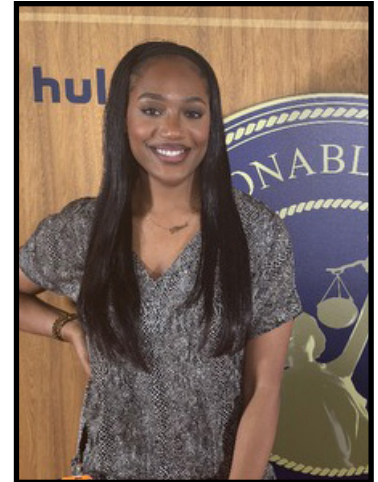
BY QUANNA CAFFEY

My sister is courage in my life because she's the example of brave to me. Her life to me is believing in yourself no matter who you are and what background you came from. She had a rough childhood, but she's traveled to places out of the country and outside of her hometown and overcome struggles to make achievements.



Her background growing up included struggles in her life: having an absent parent, helping take care of her siblings and her siblings getting taken away, and dealing with being the oldest so the role model for 10 siblings. Some other struggles she had was being a long distance from high school, determined to do her best, making a way for herself by waking up early to get on the bus or catch a ride to finish her high school. She bought her first vehicle and worked hard to get it, not having it very long because she didn't have a man figure to help her with things like that.

She achieved being the first college graduate in her family (UW-Madison). She was a black woman on a white campus, not having the support that a lot of other students had, not having family support but getting through and finding the help she needed to get through.



My sister has moved by herself to places out of the country and outside of her hometown. She lived in places like Madison, WI for most of her life but moved to places she wanted to check off her bucket list like Spain, Portugal, London, and Puerto Rico. By herself, she's moved to Washington D.C, Miami, Paris, and Atlanta. Not knowing anyone was a struggle, but meeting people was an achievement. She struggles with anxiety and depression dealing with the loss of her brother at a young age, dealing with planning a funeral too soon for someone that was so close to her. It was a very heartbreaking experience that she had and is still enduring. She has anxiety from the pressure of having to keep her siblings on the right track but also living her life just making sure her mental health is all right. Being in church again is a success for her because she's living her life through faith and trying to figure out what God's purpose is for her.



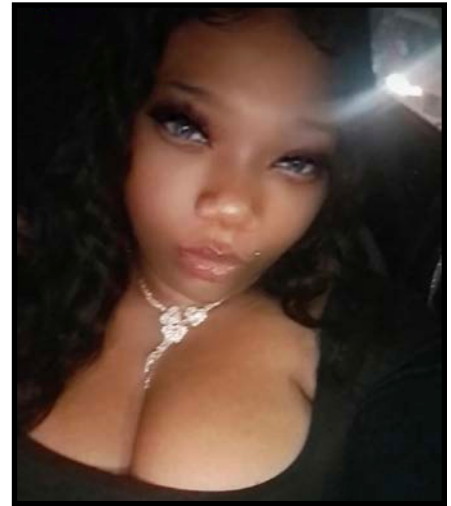
My sister has also achieved working with middle schoolers as a teacher. She worked in one of the poorest parts in Atlanta with students that endure trauma from home. She has an understanding of what it's like for some of her students to go through things. Some things she has not experienced, she has the knowledge that something isn't right and is brave enough to talk for some of her students. And then she had to leave her students because of a change of career. She had the courage of trying to start her online business, selling products and sponsoring herself with the right support, knowledge of growing her clientele, and being consistent.

My sister made the biggest decision in her life right now picking a long-term career choice and finding a different understanding in her life. She went back to look at her life and chose something she knows she is knowledgeable about and that is very maintainable. Courage to her is being brave enough to take that step that you believed was just a dream you had and turn it into your reality.



THE GLUE OF MY FAMILY BY ELEANOR CEASER

When I think of the word “courage,” my sister Angeline comes to mind. When I say this lady is the definition of courage, you will see why as you read more. On July 18, 1987, my sister Angeline was born. Since I was a very small baby, I’ve known my sister to be right by my side and with the family. A great way to explain is she is the glue to the family. For the holidays she always keeps the families together. She cooks and plans the events for the holidays to have everyone together, which is my favorite time because she makes the best caramel cakes alive from scratch with no cake mix. That’s just one of her baking skills that she has, from her strawberry crunch cake to her soft, warm peanut butter cookies.



Let’s talk about the mother she was to her children. She does whatever she needs to do. The bond they have together is amazing. She was like a second mother to me growing up as well. She’s the definition of “ride or die” for her children. One example is when my sister’s son got jumped by some boys, she went out in the streets and went to war for her son like she would have done for any of us.

My sister works from sun up to sun down, even on days when she has high blood pressure and migraines. Even when she is feeling terrible, she still gets up and goes to work every day. When I was growing up, there was nothing my sister couldn’t do. She was the first person I would always call on if I was in need of fixing a flat tire, needed money, needed help moving into my new place, etc., and she was always there to help me if she could. She is the type of woman who will figure out whatever it is she needs.



Lastly, I want to speak about her bravery and strong mind. She doesn’t give up and stays positive even when she feels everything in life is falling apart. Even when my sister is going through her own dark clouds, she is still willing to shine in others’ lives if she can with a big smile on her face at that. For example, there was a time when she lost her job and the car broke down. Basically, life was lifing. She still helped me move into my new place and got me a rental in her name to get back and forth. She handles her stress and emotions very well. From abusive relationships to everyday struggles, she stays afloat.

Throughout it all, my sister doesn’t drink or smoke anything. She faces her problems and fixes them. Having her as a role model to look up to growing up has helped me set goals, stay positive and focused, and remember that I can do anything I put my mind to. Thank you, sister, for being the best sister I could ask for.



TUDI'S REMARKABLE COURAGE

BY TIMOTHY COMER

Have you ever known a woman whose courage was magical? She faced challenges and uphill battles with glowing smiles. Her name is Tudi, and she is my mom! Tudi's valor exemplifies resilience, perseverance, and an eccentric fascination.

Tudi's character presented exceptional resilience. Having raised four children as a single parent, she displayed immense toughness. It is challenging raising one child in the ghettos of Chicago, let alone four. Tudi was able to withstand and thrive as a single mother.

Although confronted with demands of a mental disability, such as Bipolar, Tudi exhibited immeasurable perseverance in her push-back against the stigma placed on the disease. Born in an era when mental health illnesses were widely unacceptable among the African American communities, she sought out the necessary support and guidance her well-being needed. Tudi's staunch desire to raise her four children aided her in her courage to prevail.



Tudi was a fascinating woman! She wasn't a genie, yet she was magical! She had a unique way of presenting gifts to her children when there wasn't an obvious reason to do so. For instance, when I was seven, she presented me with three comic books: Batman, Superman, and the Marvel's Avengers, which sparked my comic book collections. Tudi was astounding. What made it all captivating was the gifts her children desired were the gifts they received.



Tudi's bravery is notable. Her boldness under arduous circumstances was distinguishing. Her adroit determination to hold firm her family while enduring unimaginable challenges was undoubtedly stellar, issues I still find difficult to expound upon. Finally, her enchanting mannerisms, such as teaching them etiquette, introducing them to theatre and Chinese food, these things she bestowed on her children were such a delight even to the most cynical heart. Tudi's display of courage was definitely one for the ages.



CONSISTENT COURAGE DESPITE HER CONDITION

BY DILLON DAHLK

How does that old saying go—with every decent man there’s usually a strong woman nearby to inspire and encourage him through the complexities of life. Although I am not claiming to be the most righteous or even a “good” man, I know that down to my core I strive to be at minimum a decent human being, and I would accredit that to having my mother as a role model. My mom, Victoria, is only about 4’10” tall and 120 pounds, but if you weighed her based on how she navigated life as well as the impact she had on others’ lives she might as well be a giant. Throughout her whole life she has embodied certain qualities such as selflessness, integrity, and positivity despite not having the most ideal of circumstances. And regardless of what life decided to throw at her, she never veered from her principles and always approached life with her head held high and a smile on her face, demonstrating in its purest form the idea of courage.

One of the main reasons I think of my mom as a woman of courage is her ability to always look out for others, regardless of her own situation at any given point. This selflessness was present long before I was born. Because she was the last of seven sisters to have children, she quickly became known as “Untie Vickie” to all of her nieces and nephews. Her open heart translated to an open-door policy where all of her sisters knew they had a safe and loving home to take their children, regardless of the situation. Whether it was the need for a date night or simply to run errands without the distractions of children, my mom was there with a pure heart and a smile on her face ready to help in any way she could. This genuine desire to have a positive impact on others’ lives definitely was not exclusive to just family members, though, and it ultimately influenced one of the best decisions of her life- her career.

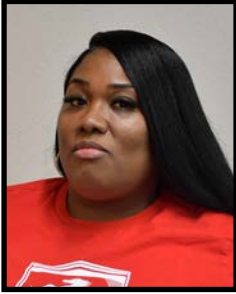
Throughout her whole twenties and into her early thirties, my mom worked at some local office doing data entry. But it wasn’t until she had her first child that she decided to make a drastic change that ultimately turned into one of her true callings in life. Quickly realizing how much she hated being away from her newborn son, she quit her safe and secure office job and decided to open up an in-home daycare center with the intentions to spend more time with her children and earn a living doing something she was passionate about. That open-door policy she had with her nieces and nephews continued on to the point her daycare felt more like a family than a business. Her big heart combined with her family-style approach gave her a signature texture that I know a lot of parents really appreciated. Although it felt a little hectic at times, I wouldn’t change how I grew up for the world. Since day one I’ve had the privilege of watching my mom run her business and live her life on her own terms, which is something I only appreciate more as I get older.



Given all the stories I've heard about my mom's selflessness, along with all the integrity I saw first-hand growing up, I thought I had a pretty defined understanding of what courage meant. But within the past couple years my mom has managed to shatter what I thought I knew and continues to redefine this idea of courage every day. Back in 2020 she was diagnosed with lung cancer, and her condition declined until she was unable to stand and was ultimately bedridden in 2022. Although the woman I regarded as my superhero hasn't been able to walk in over two years, I can't help but still associate her with strength because of the positivity and grace she has shown throughout these dark times. I ended up moving back home to help out with the caretaking needs, and I swear that woman has me smiling almost on a daily basis. It doesn't matter if I'm bringing her a meal or just checking how she's doing, her main concern is always how everybody else is doing, almost as if they're the ones with the cancer diagnosis. Whether she's sending her nieces and nephews a birthday text or letting me know how proud she is of me deciding to become a student again, she refuses to let this disease determine her outlook on life. Her attitude alone is what has made this whole ride manageable and, in the end, probably the biggest reason I consider her my woman of courage.

I've always known how strong and important of a role my mom has played in my life, but up until a couple days ago I hadn't given much thought to this idea of courage. Maybe it's because courage is often associated with a singular act and the courage my mom showed me was more of a lifelong, ever evolving presence. I honestly don't know...One thing I am sure about is that I don't think I will ever look at the word courage quite the same ever again. Being able to sit back and reflect, it's clear how influential my mom's courage was in shaping the way I view the world. I feel like from this day forward whenever somebody mentions the idea of courage and what it truly means, there's a good chance I'll be thinking of my mom.





WHATEVER YOU PUT YOUR MIND TO, YOU CAN DO!

BY GELA DOCKS

Whenever my grandmother wanted to encourage someone to do their best, she would first start by saying, “I didn’t make it past the sixth grade, but whatever you put your mind to, you can do, got dammit!”—

slamming her fists on the kitchen table with a stern look on her face. My grandmother fled the south at a young age, escaped an abusive marriage, and was the matriarch of our very large family.

My grandma was born in Arkansas, Mississippi. She grew up on a farm with her mother, her strict father, and five siblings during the times when Jim Crow laws were being enforced. My grandmother hated farm work, and she hated being faced with racial violence, segregation, limited access to education, discrimination, and inequality. She hated the south, so the first chance she got, she fled.



At the age of 12 my grandmother was married to a military man who was more than twice her age. They moved to Sacramento, CA, where life for her didn’t get much better. She became pregnant, giving birth to her first child at 14 years old, then giving birth to five more children. She cooked several meals per day, cleaned the house, washed and sewed clothes, and tended to the children. Having her own opinions or dressing in a certain way would often be frowned upon by her husband. One night my grandma snuck out of the house with her two baby children, leaving behind her abusive husband and her four other children.

My grandmother caught the first bus out of California to Chicago, IL in search of work and better opportunities. When she arrived in Chicago, she was reunited with her siblings, and she found work. My grandmother had a total of nine children, almost 30 grandchildren, a plethora of great and great-great-grandchildren. She loved to cook and feed everyone. She took care of her home, her children, her father until he passed, her siblings and their children, her cousins and their children, her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. My grandmother was a very hard worker. She worked all the time. On most days she would leave home early in the mornings and return late at night.



My grandma was the hardest working, meanest, most loving, down to earth and most beautiful woman I know. She would often help anyone who needed help, but not without having a firm talk about how they could “do anything they put their minds to.” When I was growing up, my grandmother instilled in me, my family, neighbors, and friends many of her great qualities. She has faced and overcome many obstacles in her life, while managing to always live in her truth and not take b.s. from anyone. I’m a reflection of my grandmother, and I’m so proud of the woman I am because of her.



THE COYOTE GOES HOME

BY BRIANNA ESPANOL

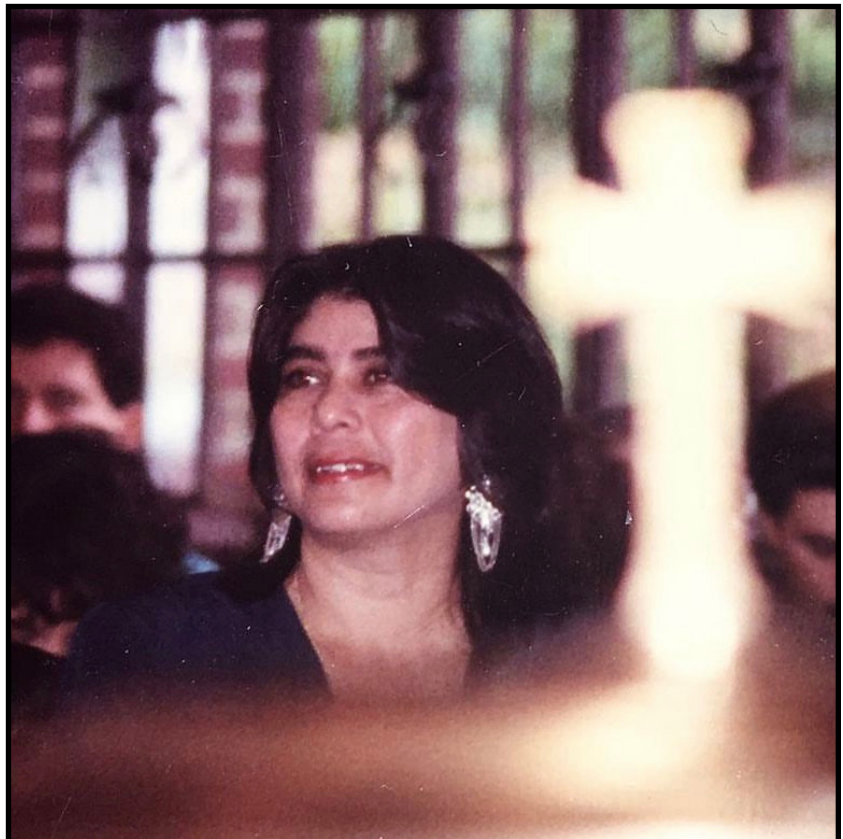
Like any immigrant, there's courage in acknowledging it's time to leave your country: political corruption, violence, poverty, or just wanting a different life. My grandma had all these reasons to leave El Salvador. She had these desires for change not just for herself but for her three children.

Colonia Magaña, San Salvador, 1980s – I imagine the night was warm and the air had weight; at this time my grandma had my mom and tia (Aunt) Anamaria, but she left alone. She had paid a coyote to get her out and come back for my mom and aunt once she had a house/apartment ready. In the meantime, they stayed with their grandma while my grandma, Ana Cristina Magaña, was staring at the under carriage of a truck on her way to New York.

A few pages turned – The United States, 2000s – When I was growing up, my mom was always working or dealing with the next catastrophe. I remember when I was small, small enough to be wrapped in a Disney princess blanket, I'd wake up sometimes in the middle of the night in the car my mom was driving, and I'd be at my grandma's house not long after waking. She'd be there waiting for me with something to snack on, whether it was a pupusa, nucita, or a plain tortilla. I learned years later that my mom would drive me there so I wouldn't see my dad acting bonkers – that's a story for another time. She would continue to care for me in a similar fashion until she died in 2019 while having cancer and lupus – it's not clear when she was actually diagnosed because when she was initially told, she didn't tell anyone – she didn't want to worry anyone.

Actions of courage make sense like leaving El Salvador, or letting the air out of her husband's tires so she could leave his abusive treatment (with now three children) – but you'd think it impossible for someone having so much happen to still enjoy life. Nothing kept her from going thrifting with her grandchildren, having her Corona Lite with lime when visiting Tia Ann in Florida, or mall walking then having lunch at Panera (she always brought her own cream cheese for 50 cents off and her own Panera cup for a "free refill," and that is pretty brave).

My grandma Ana is gone. It still hurts that she can't speak back when I'm talking into the void. I'm not a religious person, but I know she sees me, she hears me, and she walks with me. She passed fairly young, but I hope to be remembered as beautifully as she.



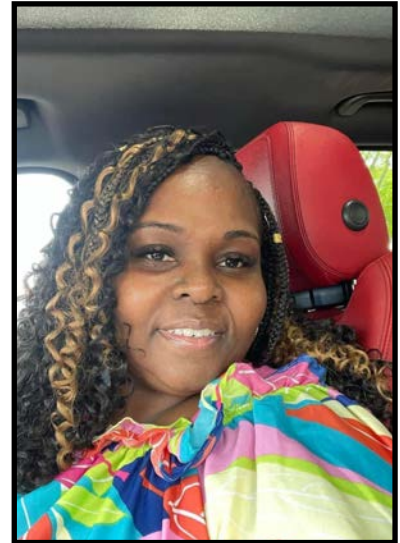


LATRINA
BY ADRIANNE FARROW

Writing about such an amazing person seems impossible. Making words amount to this person's greatness feels unrealistic, but who better than her daughter to try to articulate parts of her courageous life? When thinking of who to write about, I instantly thought I have to write about my mom. She has

demonstrated courage in so many ways in her life. If I were to define the word courage in the most simplistic of ways, I would define it as "the essence of my mother." My mom showed courage in many ways in her life: moving to Wisconsin with a toddler, starting a black-owned business in a predominantly white field, and facing her fear of surgery.

My mother was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois. She had a very loving family and was an amazing dancer. As she grew up, she became such a charismatic and graceful young woman. Everyone in our family would always describe my mom as "a sweetheart" and "extremely loving." My mom decided at 16 to get her first job at KFC, and that is where she met the love of her life, my dad. My parents were young but knew they wanted to do everything they could to give me a better life. They packed up what little they had and courageously moved to a new place in the hope of a better upbringing for me.



After getting financially stable and working on her dreams and education, she opened her first business with my father, Small Wonders Preschool. At this time, it was rare for African Americans to own a daycare in the Madison area. When I say daycare centers, I mean buildings that would take care of up to 120 children. I can only imagine how much courage that must have taken. It was cool to see my mom going after her dreams and making them a reality. I remember when she watched four kids from our home. So to see the evolution of the things she was doing in her life was very eye-opening as well as inspirational.

My mom does everything for everyone else and nothing for herself, dancing around frantically for everyone but herself. This year that changed and her body has unfortunately done the same. The doctors told her that her knee was bone on bone and surgery was needed. She kept pushing it off for the fear that she wouldn't be able to help her family and friends. She made the hard decision to be vulnerable and let us take care of her, which to her is a very unnatural thing. Now, she is home healing and being taken care of like the queen she is. But in the back of my head, I can't wait to see her dance again.



This courageous woman has always been a light to anyone she comes in contact with. Throughout her life, she illustrated courage in many ways, like moving to a new state with hopes of giving her child a better life. She also demonstrates courage by opening a business in a predominantly white field. Lastly, she got over her fear of surgery. Letting go of control can be hard, but it seemed like she did it with ease. In conclusion, I would like to say that this paper is a true reflection of how amazing black women are, as well as the impact that black women make in society, their homes, and honestly the world as a whole. As this writing clearly indicates, my mom is the most courageous person I know.



MY MOTHER'S ENCOURAGEMENT BY JAMAL JACKSON

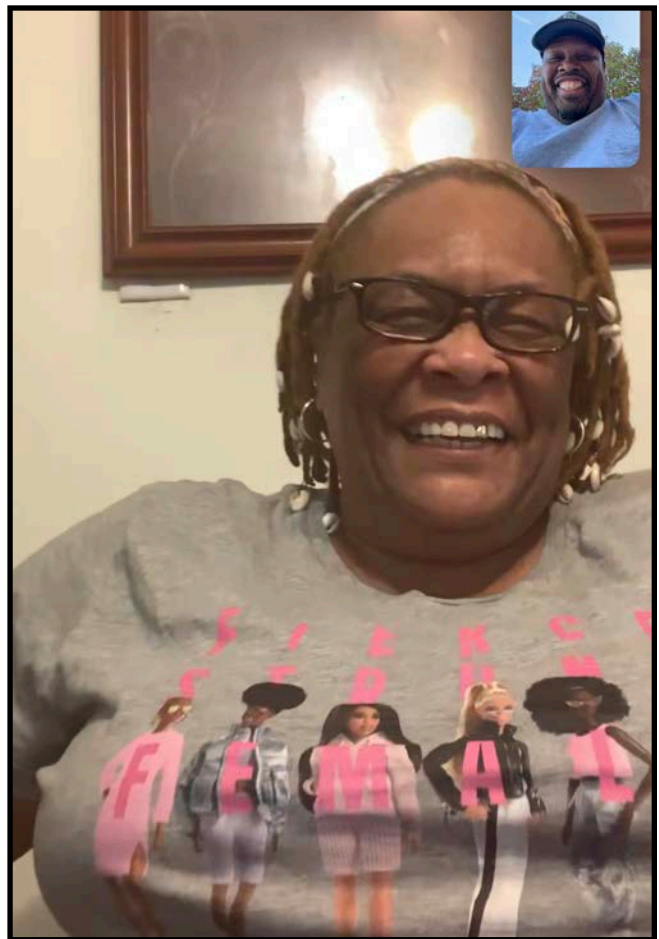
A single mother of five starts her day off with a simple prayer. Lights off, Bible near, knees on floor, toes on ground, elbows to the bed, and fingertips to the forehead as she begins to pray to the head of her household, the one and only Jesus Christ. My mother is not hard to get along with. She shows her love and compassion to everyone. Her door is always open to family and friends until you cross the line.

Respect her space and her house. That's all she asks.

She may be old-fashioned, but I believe old-fashioned is where most of her strength comes from. I've never seen her back down from anyone or anything. I've seen her look fear in the eyes, like the time someone tried to rob us on our way home from the store. My mom pulled out her knife and told the bad guy, "Come on so I can make you roke like okra." Whatever that meant, he ran off.

After prayer her day starts, and she brushes her teeth, slips into her garments of the day, and wakes my siblings up. My mother comes from a time when racism still existed. Well, let me just say things were segregated in Rosedale, Mississippi. People would call her bad names and spit on her on her way home from very hard work making 25 cents an hour. One day she told us a story of a white man shooting a black man down in the middle of the street and walking off as if nothing happened. She'd also tell stories about pickin' cotton. She would say the day was long and hot, not wanting to go into detail. She would say, "You should never have to worry about that. Y'all got it easy these days, so don't take it for granted."

She moved from Mississippi to Madison, Wisconsin without any money or a place to live. We took a bus. I remember watching the rows of cornfields passing by, thinking what kind of friends would I have or are things gonna be better when we get there? My mom knew some of her older siblings were living there, so starting from scratch could be just a little easier by using family as a compass. My mom found shelter at the YMCA, pulled out the yellow pages, and started looking for jobs. Then she learned the bus route to navigate through the city.



I believe my mother is one of a kind, in order to go through the obstacles she went through and still make it out. It's a different kind of strong, different kind of wisdom, different kind of knowledge. Five kids all completing high school and living on our own is a testimony in itself. She impacted my life in so many ways. I'm proud to have a superhero like her in my life and thank her.

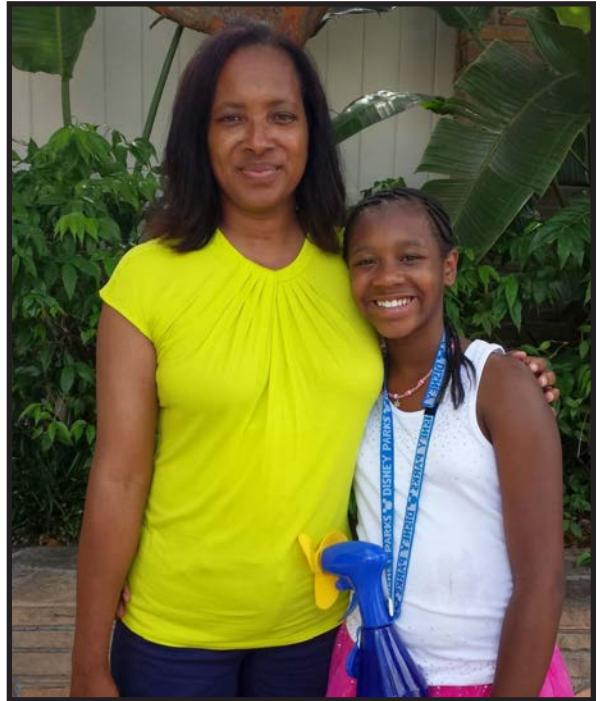


PERSISTENCE AND PERSEVERANCE BY AANIYAH JEFFERSON

My Nana is courageous because everything she has, she's earned it, she's worked for it, she's fought for it, she deserves it. My Nana is my woman of courage because she

survived marriage to an alcoholic husband, endured the death of her sister, and took on great responsibilities as a mother and grandmother.

My Nana has been married to my grandfather for the last 30+ years. For years she had to put up with his constant drinking. He was an alcoholic. She seemed sad and she felt like she was doing everything on her own. She worked at the Post Office to support the family. She was courageous because she didn't give up. She came home from work and cleaned and cooked. Now my grandfather has been sober for three years, and they are still together. My grandfather recently remodeled part of their house as a surprise for my grandmother.



My Nana is my woman of courage because she endured the loss of a sister and didn't let her death stop her from being happy. She cared for her sister before she passed of lung cancer. I've seen my Nana face many trials and permanent scars of pain, pain that no one should ever have to endure. I was there with her the night she came home from the hospital after my aunt passed and she told me. She had the most hurt and lost look in her eyes but no tears. I know it was hurting her because my nana and my aunt Nichelle were like best friends. That is the one sister she was closest with. No tears, but I still knew my nana was in pain. One thing about her is she will fight through the pain and the hurt and carry the weight of it all on her own. She's strong in that way.

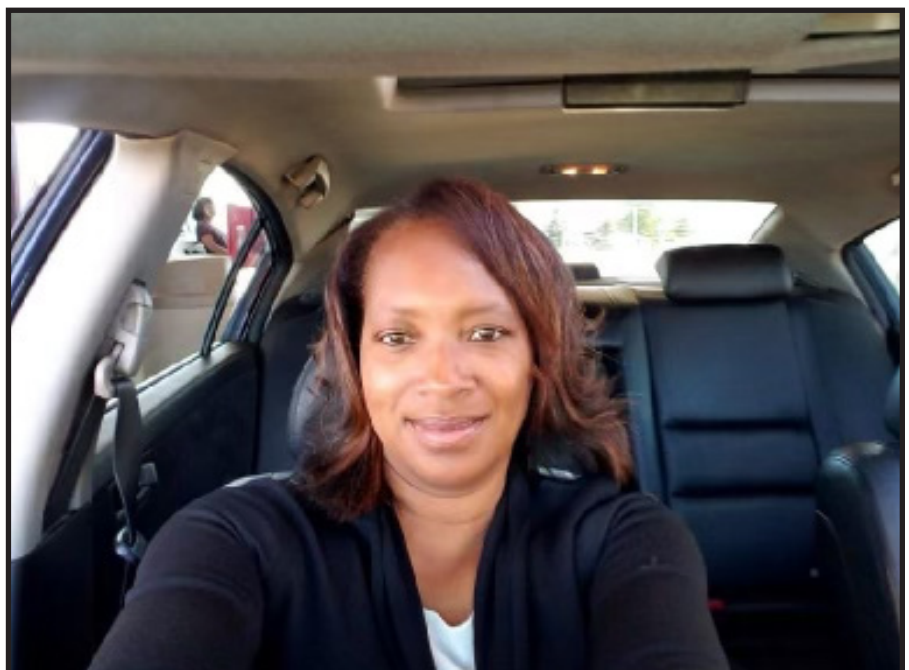
My Nana is my woman of courage because she is a resilient and loving mother and grandmother. She cares for her daughter who struggles with brain cancer. She cares for her son who has schizophrenia and other



borderline mental health issues and who has a child he is unable to care for properly. My Nana is so generous and courageous. I remember when I was younger seeing my uncle in a mental hospital due to a schizophrenic episode. After that, everything changed. Later on, he ended up having a daughter, my little cousin, but obviously wasn't in the mental state to care for her. Before he completely lost his mind, he left a wonderful gift, at least that's how my Nana acted when

that time. She ended up adopting my little cousin. She's been raising her all her life, and she's known as "Mom" to my little cousin. She's definitely earned that title. She has been raising her and giving her a better life than she would've had.

With all of these different responsibilities dropped on her and put in her life, she's had little to no time for self-care. Her emotions and needs are neglected for the betterment of her family. She does everything for everyone and some. My nana's house is a safe place for me and for so many others. We all love going to her house because she creates a wonderful, warm, and welcoming environment for us to be in. My Nana gives me a sense of peace and a perspective on a different life I could have. She was persistent with her goals and persevered through everything.





THE UNWAVERING COURAGE OF A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN

BY GLORIA KNIGHT

The word courage could mean “bravery,” “fearlessness,” and “boldness.” When asked to write about a woman of courage that you know personally, most people may view their mothers, grandmothers, or sisters as a woman of courage. Not me!! My woman of courage is a woman

who has grown with me and stood by me in my toughest times. She cried with me and helped me through many battles. She is my best friend, Sandra B.!! I view her as my sister and a courageous woman for many reasons. The reasons are endless, but my favorite top three are her confidence, her resilience, and her selflessness. After 23 years of friendship, she has never wavered to be anything less than courageous, and that is why I admire her.

The level of confidence she exudes daily just with her walk, talk, and energy is unwavering. She walks with a purpose to inspire people she loves to be their greater self, and she carries this with grace. She had the confidence to start her own small business and did not let any level of doubt deter her from following her dream. She is not afraid to speak her mind and has no problem telling people exactly what they need to hear, versus what they want to hear. I love the confidence that she had to break generational curses off her children and focus on being an amazing mother. When I need a reminder of my awesomeness and a boost of confidence, she is my go-to person.



When I say that my friend is resilient, she is just that in every sense of that word. She has fought so many health battles, but I have never seen her give up and waver. Even when the battles seemed impossible and she almost felt defeated, she kept fighting. Seeing her battle through kidney failure and watching the hardship of dialysis, I saw she continuously pushed through. She is now going on 12 years into having a wonderful healthy kidney. She is now an advocate for many patients that are currently going through what she has gone through. She even accomplished a 100-pound weight loss goal. Her recovery from hard situations is astounding and remarkable.

Her selflessness is one of the things I love most about her. She has given me and my children a place to lay our head when my family turned their back on us when I was homeless, helped me figure out solutions when all hope seemed lost, helped me with babysitting my children while I worked to provide for them, and even helped me out of a domestic abuse situation. She has even thrown events to celebrate people when they’ve had no one else to celebrate them. This is just a short list of all the remarkable things that I witnessed of her selflessness, but she has left a mark on many people’s lives.



Being her friend over these 23 years has taught me so much. Her confidence has taught me to believe in myself and learn to view myself for the awesome person that I truly am. Her resilience has taught me to never give up even when things seem unfair and impossible, knowing that troubles don’t last and to “pick myself up by the bootstraps” keeping it moving. Her selflessness makes me want to continue to touch so many lives in a positive way and to always want to make people smile and feel good about themselves. She is the definition of a true friend, and I am utterly blessed to have her as my sister.



BIG MEGAN, NOT THE LITTLE ONE

BY CRYSTAL LEE

"You're the only person who looks out for yourself. Don't wait for someone to take care of you, take care of yourself like you would other people." Megan was a mentor, tutor, and teacher to a lot of the children she worked with at the Boys and Girls Club, including me. Megan is a hardworking woman with two beautiful children of her own. I am so grateful that I got to become her bonus daughter and that she treats me no different from her own.

Megan was always happy and bubbly. She has the biggest smile that will brighten up a room and even on hard days she still smiles. Megan has great energy and was very involved with her college club students making sure we got our work done before we had fun. She made sure if we needed support, it was there. I remember waiting outside of her door for her to open and let us in so I could comfortably sit on a bean bag, cover up, and be safe. Not only was it a space for learning but they did everything they could to make sure we stayed on it, especially Megan, who never missed a day.

When it comes to her children, she is the best and most supportive mom I've ever seen. She is motivating to them, sweet, and always there to help them learn new things. Her kids are literally tiny geniuses. Her son could probably help me with my school work right now. He is so educated and well spoken. She gives great advice and rewards when needed and gives them a safe place to cry, be happy or sad, and be comfortable in their home. I've known her for over 10 years and she has always done anything she can to help or make the situation better with her kids and in general. She gives great advice on how to calm down, restart and try again, to never give up because you are worth it and things will work in the end.

"I love you" was said to me by a woman that met me in the Boys and Girls Club at a young age. At the time, I was in the college club program for homework. I always asked myself how I got so lucky meeting a woman like Megan—a woman that's never been through what I have but will still cry and grieve with me as if it was her. Over time she became so much more than a tutor, mentor, and teacher. Anytime someone asks me who she is, I cry because she is so much to me. I was blessed with a woman like her, my favorite woman of all time and the mother I've always wanted... Mom Megan.



When it comes to me this is my favorite part, and this is the reason the title is what it is because Megan always does her big one for me! And what I mean by that is she didn't outgrow me. I didn't get too old and I wasn't EVER thrown to the side. Megan helped and supported me in the college club and on the outside. She gave me food and would personally bring food for me and my little sister, as well as coats, hats, gloves, boots, literally anything I needed. She never once judged me for my mistakes but tried to make sure I didn't do it again. Megan was my super woman with no question, always supporting me.



ONE COURAGEOUS WOMAN BY MARIYA LUCAS

Mothers are many people's superheroes; I know my mom is mine. My mother epitomizes the definition of courage in many ways. She was an extremely phenomenal woman and took pride in her children. Her selflessness did not go unnoticed by those around her, and the strength she had was inspiring. Her laugh was contagious; sometimes I think of her outrageous cackle and laugh out loud myself. Mikaela Rueter was born April 17, 1979, and passed away September 12, 2022.

Since she was a child, my mom had to have courage because she lived with her mother, who was an alcoholic and extremely abusive verbally and physically. My mom was in and out of foster homes until she became pregnant with me at the age of 17. Having a child while she was still a child was very valorous and took a lot of strength.

My mother was the strongest woman I ever met. She was forced to raise my sister and me alone because my father became abusive and started using drugs. Even though we didn't have it all, we always had enough. I thank my mom for pouring her all into her children because she raised us right. My sister is a graduate of UW-Madison with a master's degree in social work. Even though I'm still a work in progress, the morals and beliefs she installed in my head are astounding, and my intrepidity and strength comes from watching my mother never give up.



My mother's life was no walk in the park. When I was three or four, a drunk driver crashed into our car. That day altered her life forever in the worse way. Her back pain was unbearable, and unfortunately the doctors prescribed her a high dosage of narcotics, oxycodone to be exact. After years of abusing her medication, it led her to heroin.

I'm telling you all of this because battling a drug addiction can't be easy, but I never saw my mom give up. I never saw her choose drugs over her children, and I never saw drugs turn her into a bad person. Even through her addiction, she would give you the shirt off her back if you needed it. To me, fighting until she couldn't anymore was the most valiant thing she ever did.



MY SHIELD MAIDEN BY ALFUSAINEY MANJANG

My woman of courage is no other person than the woman who raised me and seven other siblings. This woman happens to be my mother, Jarra, married in an extended family of over 32 members, where food isn't only insufficient but oftentimes a dream that we'd never wake up from. Though we had a very hard working and supporting dad (based on a third world level of support and availability), my woman of courage complements his support through her hard work, shows empathy and compassion, and gives hope.



Shortly after the demise of our dad, she shouldered the responsibilities of our immediate family, including the three square meals that we scrambled and hustled in eating due to its volume, which wasn't normally enough for two people. Clothing, health, and welfare rested on the shoulders of this magnanimous woman. She'd wake up in the early hours of the morning, feed us all, and give us money for school. Then she'd go to water crops in the garden before going to the seaside to get fish and sell it to the fish market. From those proceeds came our welfare.

Another thing about this shield maiden is her compassion and empathy. She would always put herself in people's shoes just to understand their problems, and she would solve them when she could.



Ultimately, she is hopeful of the good in her children and how they can positively impact society. This is what we recognize; thus, she is a guiding light that so far signs our path. My siblings and I know from there what we owe to humanity is to make it better.

In conclusion, my shield maiden, Jarra Manjang, is truly an embodiment of the characteristics I posit of her and more. If one truly understands African society and the role of women in it, then look to that which my mother does for her children and you'll come to know how great and courageous she is. She's an inspiration and a giant amongst women. Very rarely women are that resilient and strong. I am forever grateful to my woman of courage.





THE GLUE THAT HOLDS US TOGETHER

BY VANESSA MARTINEZ

My mother is a woman of courage because her childhood was tough due to an abusive mother with mental health issues. My mother is a domestic abuse survivor who fled Texas for a new beginning in Wisconsin. This woman always provided for me through all her own personal hardships and managed to balance a full-time job, putting herself through school to become a veterinary technician, and raising a wild teenager.



Her name is Juana Magana Freeman, born to Juanita and Leopold Magana in southern Texas, Christmas Day, 1951. Her parent's personalities were as opposite as night and day. Her father was a quiet, gentle soul, and her mother was a volatile, abusive woman. Though her childhood was impoverished and filled with physical and mental abuse, she can still remember the small things that made it endurable. She loved to fish with her father, the warm Texas air, and catching fireflies in her backyard at twilight.

Even though she had every reason to grow into an angry, hardened person, my mother is a loving, empathetic, patient woman. My mother met a young house painter named Juan Martinez. They had a daughter in the summer of 1977. My father had many "personal demons" and often was physically and mentally abusive to my mother. He was a very jealous and controlling man. Alcohol and drug abuse contributed to his horrific behaviors, though not an excuse. Eventually my mother gathered her courage and left Texas for Wisconsin, fleeing with her infant daughter to escape the abuse and start over in an unfamiliar Northern state.

When I was growing up, my mother married a man named Sam. Although I forgive him, he was abusive towards me physically, barely worked, and was not the provider/family man my mother had hoped for. My mother always worked since she was a young girl in Texas. She was often gone working long hours to support everyone. After the divorce she continued to be the sole provider previously balancing school at MATC, raising me, and work. One thing about my mother is that she always strived for a better life for us, always stressed to me the importance of an education. As an adult I feel bad for being such a difficult child. I wish I had been more insightful and had understood the stress she must have been under. Attending school, keeping up her grades, and working long hours at low paying jobs to pay the bills, she had to on top of all that try to keep tabs on a rebellious teenager who often skipped school, ran away from home, and got in trouble with the law.

I have the deepest respect and appreciation for my mother's many struggles and hardships. I feel ashamed of the times I was angry at my mother because I grew up without a lot of things my peers had. As an adult parent I can now fully appreciate the sacrifice and strong heart of this woman. I think of all the tears she must have shed, especially when visiting me in all the various out of home placements I was in through most of my teenage years, such as group homes, foster homes, and finally juvenile corrections. The strength it takes to keep going when things are tough and you have no close-by family or a supportive partner to fall back on or vent to is out of a lot of people's reach. Four grandchildren, four great grandchildren, one daughter, and a supportive, loving husband later, she is the glue that holds our family together. Even though our lives are going in different directions, we all have the same thing in common: the love and respect for my mother.





AUNTIE SHEENA **BY ALEXUS MCCLAIN**

Throughout the years, days, minutes, and even seconds of our lives we meet so many people. In the tapestry of our lives, certain individuals remain with us through first impressions and unforgettable memories; they emerge as vibrant vessels, leaving indelible marks on not only our hearts but our minds too. For me that person is my Aunt Sheena (Rosheena), a woman of remarkable courage whose life inspires me to this day. Her life is a narrative of resilience against adversity and is a constant reminder to me to keep persevering through whatever life produces. My Aunt Sheena graduated at the age of 30, became a childcare director because she believes in the future generation, and last but not least brings the family together.



My aunt was the first of several kids to receive a degree. With that said, as much as she believed in herself, she believes in enriching the future generations to come. She has been a full-time children's preschool director for over five years. Furthermore, I can't forget how she brings the family together by hosting multiple family events throughout the years.

Being one out of seven kids meant my aunt had to share food and clothes, and when the time came, she would have to put herself through school if she wanted to further her education.

At the tender age of just 30, she graduated from UWM despite having a child in her twenties and having to drive from Madison to UWM (while being a preschool director) to attend in-person classes two days out of the week.

While having time to get a college degree and raise part of the future, she always made sure to have time for family. My aunt organizes the majority of the family events, from baby showers and birthdays to barbecues.

In conclusion, courage manifests in myriad forms. For me one of the most profound illustrations of this virtue resides in my beautiful Aunt Sheena. From her unwavering spirit to her undying will, she epitomizes what it means to be a woman of courage.





RECUERDAM (REMEMBER ME) BY MICKEY MESTIZA

What does it take to be an undocumented Mexican immigrant woman in the United States of America? My mama's journey began by moving 2,000 miles away from her

family, knowing she may never again see the people she loves most. While being isolated from the community and navigating language barriers, she experienced a heavy emotional toll along the way from assimilation. I believe destiny and her rooted determination manifested a world of new creations where our ancestors belong. Mexican immigrant women like my mama are legacies in rewriting the history of colonization by being mujeres with the courage to create.

According to the *U.S. Customs and Border Protection Deaths by Fiscal Year Report*, an estimated 340 people died attempting to cross the Southwest Border in 2001. This was the year when my mama and I attempted to cross the border into the United States of America when our migrating group was stopped by Border Patrol Agents. A United States citizen in the group attempted to convince my mama to separate from me. "We can get your child across now, and you can meet up with them later." My mama, who did not speak English then, simply said, "No." At that moment, she recalled her mama's departing words: "Do not let that child out of your sight." In the face of uncertainty, my mama upheld loyalty in the paradox of letting go of the past, holding on in the moment, remembering my abuelita's words, and choosing to stay by my side.



I was by my mama's side dancing to old Mexican music when my papa said, "If you want to listen to that music, you should go back to Mexico." *Machismo* is defined as *strong or aggressive masculine pride*, and on the North side of the border, it becomes amplified by cultural assimilation. On a bad day at work, my mama heard similar remarks from community members. "Speak better English or go back to Mexico." Despite the echo chamber of isolation and humiliation from others, my mama held onto the beauty of our culture. If you hold onto what you know to be true with perseverance, it will become your reality in the face of adversity.

I watched my mama live through her greatest fear. In 2021, her mama was diagnosed with COVID-19 and intubated across the border. My mama knew that if she left the United States undocumented to say goodbye to her mama, she might also be saying her final goodbye to her two children and husband. Although she wanted to return, perhaps not for the first time, she honored my Abuelita's departing words from 20 years prior and chose to stay with her family in the United States. We grieved Abuelita's funeral on a pixelated phone screen as the audio signal of our familia weeping in Mexico 2,000 miles away echoed on our kitchen table. This became the year our family reconnected with the *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) tradition and began transcending borders.



My mama's grief and love of culture manifested in our lives as meeting the Mexican Folk Art Collective during the year my Abuelita passed; she would come to host their Second Annual *Día de los Muertos* Celebration. That year, music, art, and culture would suddenly spark collective healing in our community



alongside 400 celebration attendees. Three years later, this collective of women and allies, including my mama, would gather 800 participants for the Fourth Annual *Día de los Muertos* Celebration. Believing in our culture, we learned how to welcome our loved ones who have passed each year and come closer to reconnecting with them. My mama is creating a legacy that overcomes oppression through art and connects our collective roots to create spaces where others can learn and appreciate the value of Mexican arts. Although through periods of her life she was rejected by others for her love of Mexican culture, through *El Día de los Muertos* and collective ancestral love, today she is admired by many and will be remembered for her perseverance to create a community without borders.



MY COURAGEOUS LOVING CARING MEMA

BY VALVREE MOSLEY

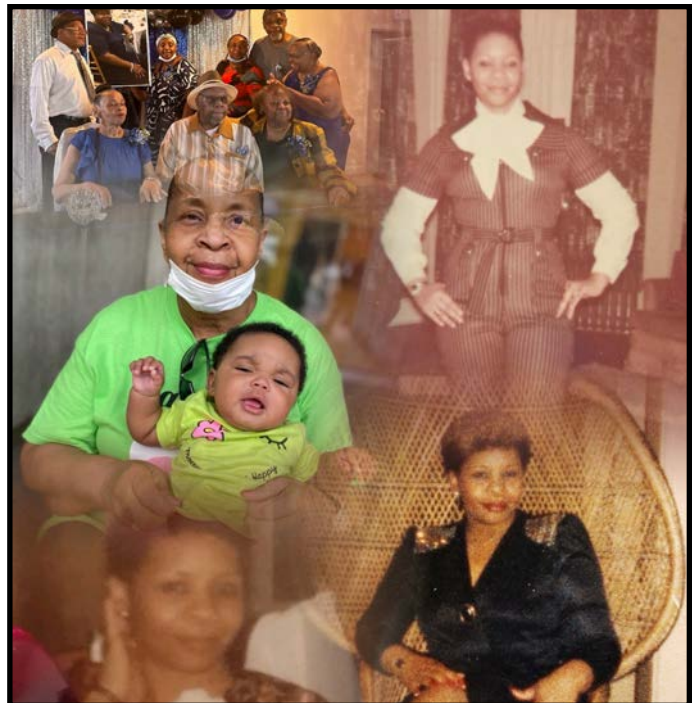
Everybody calls my grandmother, Georgia Ree Mosley, “Mema.” She got that name from her first granddaughter. She was trying to get her to call her “Grandma,” but she said “Mema” instead. I believe that was the perfect name for her courageous, loving, and caring ways, such as being born into poverty, growing up in a large family, having and raising her own family, and taking in and raising her grandchildren. More than anything, Mema’s always been a caretaker: helping with raising her siblings, then raising her own children and even grandchildren, and also being a caretaker for others.

My grandmother was born on April 12, 1945, in Clarkdale, Mississippi. She is the third oldest of 14 children, and her parents had little to no education. They relocated to the south side of Chicago when my grandmother was three. She had eight sisters and five brothers, so at an early age she already had such big responsibility with caring for her siblings and helping around the house.

By the age of 18 she had already moved out with child and was married, having two kids in the same year. Mema had four children and was married for 10 years before becoming a single mother. With little to no education, she worked as many jobs as she could to provide for her family. On her own, one job she took on was being a caretaker for the elderly. I can still remember the times she would take me with her to work with some of her clients, and they all would just love little old me. Being a caregiver as one job and still working other jobs, she now was about to take on parenting again.

My three siblings and I have stayed with my Mema for as long as I can remember. My mom battled with being on drugs and in the streets, and that resulted in my grandmother stepping up to raise and care for us. My mom would come and go as she pleased, while all the responsibility was left off, on, and for Mema. So, I’ve watched my grandmother struggle tremendously with still working multiple jobs trying to provide for us even while still seeing about my mom from time to time, too. I remember me having to stay with a neighbor or friend so that she can make it to work because I was the baby out of my siblings and the only one to not be in school yet. She could not afford to miss a minute off her paycheck.

While doing this paper reflecting back on timelines throughout my grandmother’s life, I know that she’s been a caretaker for what seems like her whole life. The fact that she took us in showed us nothing but love. She cared for us as best as she could and knew how, when in fact she never had to. It took for me to become an adult and a parent to understand a lot of things that my grandmother was so strong, determined, and independent for enduring and doing. I do not think words can tell how grateful I am for her. I am who I am because of her and the greatness and caring ways she’s instilled in me. This is why she is the best definition that I know of a woman of courage.





A MOTHER

BY DAIJA PIGRAM

My mother is a woman of courage. The love I have for her is indescribable. Her strength is what I strive for and to take what she has taught me to be an even better mother to my son. Growing up we were not close but as I've grown older our relationship has gotten stronger. Her empathy for those in her life makes her one of my biggest supporters, she is always there for me in my time of need, and I know I could always rely on my mother to come to my rescue.

Sometimes all it takes is the small stuff to feel heard but that can be difficult to display, but when it truly matters she is always there to pick up the pieces. Despite all the painful things my mother has gone through, it has never stopped her from being a helpful and caring woman for all those in need. Her heart is so big it can sometimes come off too strong, but as I've grown I have come to understand why. Being the middle child of eight kids you can be overlooked, and her love comes from making sure you are supported in times of need.

One thing I take away from my mother is the love and care she pours into people around her. My mother and I haven't always been close. Communication is a struggle in my family, but she shows her heart through acts of service and dropping everything to be there for you. Her perseverance and devotion have shaped me into the person I am today.

I see that being a young grandmother of three, she makes all the effort she can to give them the things she wasn't able to give my siblings and me as kids. Working together though our childhood traumas and growing closer as a family, we break generational curses and save years of emotional suffering for them!

My mom had me at a young age, and raising three girls in the middle class it was hard to be there for us between her busy work schedule and school. My father was there during the day sleeping because he worked third shift, so me being the oldest child, I had to watch my siblings and really parent myself. Writing this paper has made me want to thank my mother and show her appreciation more than I currently do. Reminding myself that this is both our first time going through life, I've learned to embrace forgiveness and more understanding. Her influence has taught me invaluable lessons about love, support, and selflessness. I aspire to emulate her strength and compassion.





COURAGE: FROM THE FIRST BREATH TO THE LAST **BY LAILAINI REED**

Growing up, I had no choice but to witness courageous women. My mother, aunts, grandmothers, and cousins were all very strong women. One always did and always will stick out to me because she demonstrated courage her whole life. My grandma showed courage through surviving foster care, finding her birth family and heritage, and battling cancer.



My grandma was born and immediately became a child of the system. She grew up going through different foster care homes until she was adopted. It wasn't a good experience and as she said, "I wouldn't wish that on anybody." There was a lot of abuse. Her childhood consisted solely of oatmeal and school food to eat, dark closets, and wooden spoons. My mom vividly remembers when she first tried oatmeal; she loved it! She brought some home to show her mom, and she was met with horror! "Get that out of my house!" my grandma screamed. It brought her back to the time when she was starving. After that situation with that controlling, sadistic household, she moved to a family that was aware of the situation, and they loved her and adopted her. She finally had a family, siblings, and love. Now she wanted history.

I remember when my grandma first got interested in finding our family and heritage. Her adopted family made her feel so much love that she actually felt that she might have family looking for her as well. She spent a lot of time on 23AndMe and Ancestry.com. She was able to find her siblings, cousins, and more. She looks just like them, and so do I. My grandma, Christie, always said "my family" instead of "our family," even though we all came from them. She'd lost her brother while they were younger, and her sister about ten years prior. I think finding her family was therapeutic for her. She took trips to meet them. It was very good for her. They loved each other very much.

The last thing my grandma did to amaze me was plan her own funeral while battling cancer. In August 2023, my sister and her husband and my cousin came to Wisconsin to celebrate the birthday of my younger sister, Reignah. I guess since everybody was home, my grandma thought it was a good time to announce that she had stage 4 cancer. She'd already been sick for a while, but she got her diagnosis in June. The doctors were way off for a long time and kept blaming diabetes. She fought for a long time, suffering chemo and radiation therapy, and it was too rough for her. She decided to stop the treatment and enjoy the end of her life. She knew how loved she was and how hurt we were, so she wanted to plan her funeral while she had the ability. She chose the music, food, some décor, and the location. My sisters, my mom, my grandpa, and I finished planning. I was working for a hospice company, Agrace, when all of this was going on. I took some time off to help my grandmother with the help of family, some of whom she met online through DNA testing, and a few staff members from Agrace. This was to keep her comfy at home in her bed. This was also to be available 24/7. In nursing facilities, you oftentimes have to wait for other residents before you can get help, and that is vital. She got to know the other staff and they got to know her well before her mind went. Everybody was so amazed how long grandma lived because of signs that she was



showing, and I knew she was waiting for something. It was an hour and a half before my grandparents' wedding anniversary. My grandpa went to get her water for medicine, and my grandma just stopped breathing. She was waiting to have one more anniversary, and she also didn't want us to see her dying. It was the perfect time for her, but very hard for us. – That is courage.

At the end of the day, everybody faces tough battles, has their patience tested, and has to make terrifying choices. That is life. Things get tough, but your legacy and your imprint on society is determined by how you react in those impossible situations. You need to love who loves you, then love even more. You need to be passionate. You need to be confident. You need to be humble. You need to be courageous. Most of all, you need to be nice to yourself.



THE LIFE OF LILLIE BY TIANA RICHMOND-LEE

This woman showed courage so many times throughout her life. She raised a family while managing to deal with very serious health issues. She has never been the type to give up!

In Hawaiian, "OHANA" means family; nobody gets left behind or forgotten. Every weekend and all summer long, I knew what it felt like to have a family. And trust me there is no place like home except my great-grandmother's house. My great-grandmother taught me how to be a woman of strength and courage and how to set boundaries as a young black woman. She always made it clear it was ok to be different and to put yourself first.



"GG" is what we called her...Ms Lillie Richmond, one of the world's greatest women on earth before life and after life. From birth to 18, I had the best times of my life with her at her home. The most caring person I have ever met, she had a heart of gold for sure. This is 100% my person, my backbone, my listening ear, my number 1 supporter. I was always taught to never show my heart on my sleeve, but about this one I'm going to have to for life! GG was born and raised down in Mark, Mississippi. She loved her hometown for sure. GG was not your normal down south girl; she enjoyed spending time with her father working on cars. But she decided to take some courage, leave the nest, and start her new journey with her husband, who we called "Pops," in Wisconsin. My GG raised six kids of her own without finishing the formal schooling, but she was able to teach herself to read, write, and do mathematics.

Every Sunday GG attended church at Mt. Zion Baptist on the southside of Madison. She sang in the choir and always helped volunteer at Sunday school. She spent a lot of time at the Boys and Girls Club doing whatever people in the community needed. Weekends and summers were reserved for her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. There was never a summer I missed at my GG's house. My cousins and I would sit on the porch with our GG, and she would tell us stories about her life in Mississippi and how her family judged her for moving away and getting pregnant at a young age. It took a lot of courage for her to make these decisions, but she always told us, follow your heart and your gut will never steer you wrong.

2017 was supposed to be the best year of my life because I was graduating high school but turned out to be the worst of my life. I began to notice a big change with GG, and something wasn't sitting right with me. GG always kept her hair and nails done and was always up at 5 am every day. But now she was more tired and didn't care about her appearance. I then found out that she was suffering from stomach cancer and had kept it a secret from the family. She showed so much courage by doing chemo alone with no support from family and still attending church and her daily life activities while in pain. She was given three to six months to live and showed a different type of courage by following her own heart and deciding at that point she would no longer receive chemo treatments. Capital Lakes nursing home had become my new second home as I spent the last days with her. I was upset for a while because I didn't understand how she was willing to give up so easily, but it made more sense to me as the days went by. I saw the type of courage she built up to even make it this far.

This project was to write an essay about a woman of courage, and I can go on and on about my GG. I learned from GG how to be a strong black woman and to stand my ground no matter what. She showed me what it was like to be a strong, independent woman and control my emotions. She always said there's a time and place for everything but to never hide who you are and how you feel. She let me know that family was the most important thing in the world and to never lose focus on it. Someday she said I will grow into a strong woman and raise my own kids, but she told me to take my time and to never let anyone else control my path. I think all of the time what would my GG do and say, but I feel like she gave me the tools and the courage to be myself and live the life she knew I was capable of. I will make sure I will do everything we ever discussed.



BENT BUT NEVER BROKEN

BY ASHLI SMITH

My sister is the perfect example of a woman who is very courageous. Being courageous started at a very young age for her as she is also the eldest of all her siblings. Her childhood was not ideal having to live with an abusive stepparent. Can you imagine having to live and think like an adult at the age of 10? Although everything wasn't bad, she grew as an adult to fight yet another battle that would surely be won— breast cancer. Along this journey she has also reached milestones and goals that she set for herself and her future. Overcoming child abuse, battling breast cancer, and achieving a higher education are all reasons why my sister is the epitome of a woman of courage.

In 1992 my sister was the first child of her mother and our father. My sister and I were extremely close from the time I was born when she was seven and continued to be so throughout childhood and becoming young adults. We've shared so many memories and secrets both good and bad. As a child certain things were very hard to understand like when my sister would come visit us on weekends at my dad's house but every Sunday night she would dreadfully have to return home. Throughout the years my sister would explain to me why she dreaded those times so much. Upon returning home she would have to periodically endure being thrown down the stairs, hit, choked and mentally/ verbally abused throughout the years with her stepdad— someone who may not be biological but is still looked to be a loving and nurturing caregiver of a child. Although this affected my sister in many ways, thankfully these years came to an end as her stepfather received treatment which allowed her to return to more of a normal childhood.



Throughout the childhood years we also had many good memories like going to visit family and friends out of town, having some of the most exciting birthday parties, and our favorite-- going to the beach! We never noticed how fast time flew by until we became adults reminiscing on all our childhood memories. At age 32 my sister was diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer that shortly after turned into stage 4. This diagnosis devastated our family almost like being hit with 130 mph hurricane winds. With having such a God-fearing family, we knew that this could not be the end of her story. Everyone immediately began to pray and change their relationships with her that had been damaged throughout the years. She has begun to undergo 13 rounds of chemotherapy as well as radiation after chemo has been completed. I've sat through many of the 5 ½ hour chemotherapy appointments and have witnessed firsthand how stressful and tiring the therapy can be receiving as many as seven medications with many of them administered through an IV. I have watched her be stuck with needles so many times that she has had to get ultrasounds to find untouched veins that wouldn't collapse and would

be strong enough to endure the harsh chemotherapy medication. During these appointments my sister expressed to me how she wants everything to remain as normal as possible so no matter what there is no crying! Although I didn't think it was possible, we have gotten much closer than before, sharing so much laughter and even praying together when our spirits start to get low! I am so grateful to God because he is allowing my sister to get through this journey faster than normal with her tumor shrinking each time it is checked at the following appointment. No matter what things look or feel like, we remind each other that it's not about what you go through, it's about how you get through it.

Despite everything, that has not stopped my sister one bit! After 11 years being out of high school, she enrolled herself at Herzing University to get a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing, which is her dream job. Knocking down goals one by one this past summer, she reached a goal that was well deserved and would bring her one step closer to being a nurse-- becoming a certified medical assistant! She has told me about all the late nights and studying for tests while also working full time but also how it was so rewarding and reassuring to see her hard work paying off. She graduated with a 4.0, which gave us every reason to celebrate even more knowing how hard school had been in the past. This has opened up the door for her to become a medical assistant at the UW Health Breast Center Clinic, which was such a coincidence because she was offered the job two weeks before her breast cancer diagnosis! As my sister and I always say, each challenge in life will either be a blessing or lesson, if not both!

With all of this in mind, my sister's life in just 32 years has been a testimony of what happens when you don't give up! Through the ups and downs in our family's life together, we always look at the situation at hand with the question of "how can I learn from this?" or "what is this trying to teach me?" We also remember that no matter what you are going through, things could always be worse, and that gives us every reason to be grateful for the things we do have and even the things we don't as it may not be the right time or place in life for it. Ultimately, these are some of the reasons in a nutshell of how I have grown to know my sister as one of the most courageous women in my life. As they say in the commercials, she is truly built Ford Tough!





Tt-TAN
BY CORRIE THOMAS

Have you ever met someone that battles the world in silence, health in silence, struggles in silence, pain in silence, love in silence? Let me bring you into part of Patanne Coffey's life. She is my backbone, my world, my tt tan, and most importantly my mom's best friend. My aunt Patanne was born in Madison and raised in Deerfield; she was the second to last child of six. One of her siblings passing at birth was very tough. Around the age of eight her mother and father decided to split and get a divorce. The divorce ended up taking a toll on the family in different ways no one could ever describe and is still a very touchy subject till this day.

While going to Deerfield High School, my aunt played in multiple sports: ballet, volleyball, basketball, and softball; she even got to pitch for the softball team. Oh, and we can't forget a cheerleader: she did it all. First day of Junior year she and her family decided to move to Madison. Moving to Madison from Deerfield was devastating for Patanne. With only two more years left of high school, who would want to start over, with new friends, new teachers, different classes? Now attending East High School where it had just been too much and too tough for her, she was not able to succeed the way she wanted to. Now getting transferred to Shabazz alternative school, she started falling off harder, acting up, doing things she knew she shouldn't, like smoking and drinking, Shabazz decided to kick her out and transfer her to Omega, an alternative school through East. While attending Omega my aunt found out that she was pregnant with her daughter, Ariannea. She ended up turning it around and got the credits she needed to graduate.



Patanne walked across the stage in 2003 with my cousin in her arms. SHE DID IT!!! On to the next journey my aunt decided to pursue her dreams by attending MATC for OBGYN. While my aunt was pursuing this dream, a caseworker that she was working with told her she should take some time and college wasn't the best thing for her as of right now. Shortly before her counselor said that, my aunt found out that my cousin was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. It was tough but something she was not going to give up on. The words of her counselor pierced her soul almost as if a bullet hit her and pierced her chest. She decided to drop out of college and focus on her and her daughter.

Patanne moved out of her mom's at twenty-one, moving into an apartment that was not accessible and lacked the features or amenities to keep them comfortable and also get my cousin to and from easily. Shortly after, Patanne was diagnosed with M.S., having to now do two times the appointments, two times the medicine, two

three four times the care of taking care of herself, her daughter, her siblings, and mom at times. She always helps everyone, at least every single person I can think of: family, friends, etc. She has a heart bigger than Earth. The year of 2009 my mother passed away and that was probably the hardest time in my life. I could tell it took a toll on my aunt. Losing one of your best friends had to be so hard, but my aunt made sure to always watch after us, always made sure we were ok, made sure we knew we were loved, never missed a beat with holidays or birthdays, and was super supportive. Eight years later, her sister Keri was diagnosed with bone cancer. The two of them have always been my biggest supporters, and my aunt Keri passing took me through another whole loop of not wanting to be here. Imagining the way my aunt felt left a hole in my heart. She got so sick so fast. All I could ask is why put my aunt through this yet again? The years were tough, long, and hard, but she overcame. The hurt never left, but she learned to bear with life and keep pushing.



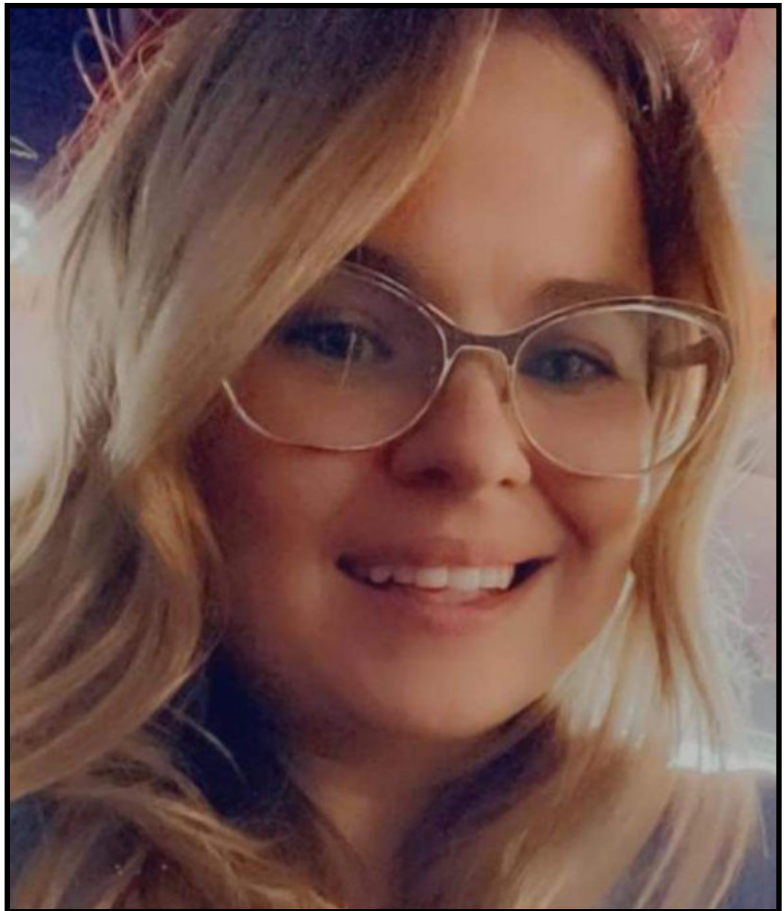
My aunt Patanne is my woman of courage for overcoming obstacles most wouldn't think about, always staying strong, being kind, always putting her best foot forward, and most importantly standing up for what she believes in and being the best mother, sibling, and daughter she can be. After all her struggles, everything she has provided, everything she's overcome, she is NOW a proud homeowner of her house of fifteen years, an extremely blessed mother of a twenty-one-year-old adult daughter who is now enrolled in the D.A.I.S Center and has an active job in the community. And for that I look up to her, for that is the reason she is my woman of courage. I promise to push and try just as hard no matter the circumstance, no matter the obstacle. Thank you for being my role model. I love you forever and always.



A HEART THE SIZE OF TEXAS BY DAN THOMAS

Have you ever met a person who manages to pick themselves up and smile through adversity, someone who always has just enough to spare and then some, that one person whose honesty and wisdom shows in their impeccable humor? In 2011 I was introduced to a new employee while working at Taco Cabana. “Hiiii, I’m Christina.” “Sup, name’s Dan.” Dropping the pitch in her voice to mock my ‘cool’ demeanor: “Sup name’s Dan... whoa, tough guy over here.” I was delightfully irritated. From there a friendship of after work drinking and smoking over workplace gossip was forged. I came to learn that there is a great depth to Christina’s personality, a character I would learn to cherish and appreciate forever.

Christina showed me on several first-hand occasions what it meant to truly be selfless. While sparing details (“Don’t be tellin’ my bidness,” as Christina would always say), when I met Christina, she was in the process of taking care of her two nephews while their respective parents were sorting things out. She provides them with love, care, and, most importantly, a sense of nurturing guidance. She has been able to provide these baby boys with the tutelage and experiences necessary to shape them into refined young men. Much like the puppies she fosters to re-home, Christina’s door is always open if you are in need of help. Hell, there have been a few times when Christina gave me a place to crash while ‘couch surfing.’ She has provided home-cooked meals to break up the monotony that comes with bringing home the free workplace concoctions. Anything from a ride to work, or a couple bucks for Pampers and formula, “Tini” had your back, and she never really asked for anything in return. She just did what was needed and necessary.



Now with all of this ‘selflessness’ I’ve been going on about, I want to make it very clear that Christina will not bite her tongue for anybody, especially when propositioned for advice. She is not mean in the least bit, but she will not hesitate to tell you what you need to hear rather than what you want to hear, and she has a way of making you laugh while she lays down the truth. Christina, feeling like my ‘big sis’ even though I’m older than her by a few years, would often give me dating advice: “something about her ain’t right, Dandan.” She would give me financial advice: “Alright you ain’t got money like that, we are ballin’ on a budget so get the cheap bottle.” There was that one time when we were partying a little too hard on 6th Street. Christina was the first person to yank me by the collar to tell me, “HE IS WAY BIGGER THAN YOU! SIMMER DOWN, BUBBAH!” Thanks to her swift thinking, I made it home with my jaw intact.

Christina's most admirable trait, in my opinion, as I've mentioned before is her ability to smile through her hardships, hardships I'm not even sure I would be able to overcome. I am happy to say that while I had nothing to do with it, I had the chance to witness someone close to me overcome their demons in nicotine and alcohol abuse to better herself for those she cares about the most. I watched her become a pillar of inspiration that resonates more than any uplifting piece of advice she has ever given me. "Not only can you do it, but I am proof that you can do it. Whatever it is!" were the words she sent me in a Facebook message when I told her I had made it into Odyssey. She has shown me what it means to take accountability for your actions without it deterring your progress. These traits remind me to stay centered, to stay determined and focused on the end goal rather than holding on to the past.

They say, "Trust that God puts the right people in your life, at the right time, for the right reasons." I feel Christina is that person The Divine felt I needed at that time because she helped me grow as a person. She is someone I am confident I can turn to for advice. She is someone I know who has either gone through it herself or someone who can help you through it. Throughout many years of friendship, no matter the distance, we know we are cheering each other on. "Let's get'r done!"





THE LAWYER SISTER BY JANESEA WEICHMANN

Imagine a dream of becoming a lawyer as a child to bring home your incarcerated father and living up to just that even with all odds against you..... Coming from a family of no college graduates, I would assume it's hard to envision yourself going to college. My sister Teeanna has so much courage to me for making that possible for herself. She went off to college right after the summer of graduating high school. She had eight years straight of school with no breaks or giving up even when she wanted to.

We are from a family of 11 children on our dad's side, who had been away in jail most of our life. Teeanna is an only child on her mom's side. She's the first on both sides of her family to have gone off to college and graduate. Hopefully not the last, she has paved the way for her family showing it's possible. Even with no one to have experienced what all she had to face, no one to ask questions to or relate to, she is now a lawyer and graduated from Howard University in 2022.



Teeanna and I are the same age, born one month apart. We graduated from high school the same year, 2015. She left for college in Illinois right after the summer. I know that must have been exciting but scary to up and move away and start in a new place, finding a job, paying bills, and finding new friends plus more. With no break from high school, she was so determined to head to college and start her career towards being a lawyer. I remember her going away party like it was yesterday: we had a good time, and I was so proud of her. We weren't super close growing up, but once I had my daughter in 2014, Teeanna and I got close, so it was sad having her leave after we had just grown a close bond.



I remember after she finished her four years at NIU, she asked me if I thought she should take a break. At that time, I could tell she was stressed somewhat, and she wanted to come home for a bit. I knew she wanted to work a job and save up some money before heading off to law school. She got accepted to a couple of different law schools; one was closer to home and the other was far. After hard thought, she decided to pick Howard Law School, which is in Washington, DC. She chose not to take a break, and I applaud her for that.

School is not easy, let alone full time college, and then I can only imagine how hard law school is. I am so proud of my sister for going eight years strong, no breaks, and finishing school. She made it look easy for sure by staying positive and still finding time to travel the world. For those who don't know, since we were about four years old, our father was serving a life in prison for nonviolent drug crimes. In 2022 when Teeanna was in her last months of law school and having some connections, she was able to help our father in the process of getting his time sentence reduced with some laws changing in the last few years. He came home and was able to attend her graduation from law school. She always said as a kid she wanted to grow up and be a lawyer to bring our father home, and that she did. She won her first case as a lawyer helping an innocent man sue the state where he spent years in prison for something he didn't do. She is such a beautiful, outgoing person. I love what she has accomplished herself. She is such a great sister and aunt to my children, and I know she will continue to do great things.



DISABLED BUT NOT DISCOURAGED BY LADELLA WILSON

Why is it that some of the kindest people have some of the toughest battles in life? My aunt Cynthia is one of the strongest, kindest, and most caring women that I know. My aunt survived homelessness and instability as a child, was diagnosed with Multiple sclerosis (MS) before being incarcerated, and now attends school to obtain her GED.



My aunt grew up as the youngest of six siblings in Chicago, IL. Due to her mother raising six children alone while living in poverty, my aunt Cynthia faced many challenges in her childhood. Some of the challenges included being in foster care and often having very little or nothing at all to eat. Due to the circumstances she and her siblings were in, they were homeless many times throughout their childhood. This left them sleeping in parks on benches, or if lucky they would spend the night riding the Chicago trains because it was better than having to sleep outside. With her siblings and herself facing poverty, they often were not able to attend school, and this led her to not being able to complete high school.

Though my aunt is such a kind-spirited woman, she is human and has made mistakes in her life. My aunt made the detrimental decision to drive while under the influence of alcohol, and because of that decision, she made a man lose his life. Due to the choice she made, she ended up having to go to prison and being away from her husband and children for years. Before serving her sentence, she was diagnosed with the disease Multiple sclerosis (MS), and unfortunately the disease only progressed while she was incarcerated.



Despite my aunt having faced such obstacles in life, she has reclaimed her life by never giving up. Cynthia has managed to lose over 60 pounds to help her mobility and health since being diagnosed with MS. Not only has she taken charge of her health but she has also decided to go back to school to get her G.E.D. Once done with obtaining that, she would like to continue her education in hopes of finding a career that will be accommodating to her disability.

With all that being said, my aunt is an amazingly strong, beautiful woman that has shown and continues to show that despite what one goes through in life, anything is possible. Never let your past determine your future because anything is possible. Cynthia has shown that she may be disabled but she is not discouraged!



MY GUIDING HAND BY ABIGAIL WILSON

It was February 3rd, 2006, when Granny got a call from an agency saying they had a woman with a baby she wanted to keep, but she had nowhere to go. “Will you please take them in?” they asked. Granny thought about it and said, “Bring them here.” As soon as she saw me, she fell in love and said it would only be for a little while. Eighteen years later, here I am, still a Granny’s girl. Throughout my life, she has overcome her fears to let me grow up, supported my mom in her battle with cancer, and taught me to face challenges with honesty and resilience.

As I began to grow up, Granny struggled with separation anxiety. One of the times that tested her the most was when I went to Upham Woods in the Wisconsin Dells. It was a big adventure—we stayed in a cabin, went canoeing, and hiked through the woods. Granny was terrified I might hurt myself somehow, constantly imagining the worst. But, with reassurance that I had my Papa there and my friend’s mom, she let me go, though with some hesitation. When I came back perfectly fine and full of stories about how much fun I had, Granny was relieved. Seeing me return safely from that trip reassured her, and little by little, Granny began to let go. She allowed me to have sleepovers with friends, and I even went to Great America. It wasn’t easy for her, but step by step, she learned to trust that I was okay and that I had to grow up and experience these things.

When my mom was diagnosed with cancer, everything felt uncertain. I didn’t know what was going to happen, but Granny told me to have hope. The day after one of Mom’s radiation therapy sessions, I



watched Granny help her walk into the house. Mom was weak, leaning on Granny for support, and I could see how much she was struggling. Granny’s voice was calm but encouraging as she said, “It’s going to be hard, but you’ve got this. Just one step at a time.” The night before my mom’s surgery, Granny took me to the store to get snacks. At the time, I didn’t realize how much she was carrying on her shoulders, but she

made it a point to check on me. She told me, “Everything will work itself out. Just keep holding on.” On the day of the surgery, Granny’s strength was quiet but steady. After a few hours, she sent me a text saying, “She’s out of surgery and doing okay.” Those simple words were enough to bring me relief. She never let her own emotions overwhelm her—she was there for both of us every step of the way.

While Granny tried to keep things positive when we talked about my mom and her cancer, there were moments when her vulnerability showed. I remember one conversation where she admitted, “I don’t know what’s going to happen,” and told me I needed to be prepared for anything. Hearing her say that made me realize how much she was carrying—not just for my mom but for all of us. Granny was always open about how things were going with my mom and made sure to listen to my thoughts and advice. She never dismissed what I had to say, even when I felt unsure of myself. Those conversations weren’t always easy, but they reminded me how much she valued my input and wanted us to face these challenges together.



Granny has been my constant anchor, a source of strength and love in every phase of my life. Through her kindness and courage, she taught me what it means to be strong yet gentle, to face life’s hardships with hope, and to hold on to faith when things feel uncertain. She has guided me through my mother’s illness, encouraged my growth and independence, and showed me the importance of vulnerability and resilience. Thanks to her, I know what it means to love unconditionally, to support others without hesitation, and to keep moving forward one step at a time. Granny’s love and wisdom are woven into who I am, and I will carry her guiding hand with me always, knowing it has shaped me into the person I am today and will continue to guide me into the future.





A FIGHTER OF MANY STRUGGLES BY SABLE WRIGHT

Trudy Harris (my grandmother) was born on April 16, 1921, in Little Rock, Arkansas. She married early to her husband, who was born August 24, 1921. She picked cotton and she cleaned white

people's houses for a living. It was hard back in the 1920s for black people. She had little to no education at all. She fought hard for a better way to get ahead with little money and food. She soon had a little girl who was born August 7th, 1938. She worked hard throughout her pregnancy until she gave birth. She fought hard for a better life for her family. She took care of generations of family, and she developed a passion for learning new things even with her struggles.



While Trudy was taking care of a white family, her own daughter was struggling and losing her children (grandkids) to the state. Her daughter had 12 children: 6 lived and 6 died. Trudy fought hard for her daughter and grandkids. Back in those days, welfare didn't give very much money to support a family of that size. Her daughter was in her twenties with six kids. The grandmother fought tooth and nail to get her grandkids back home to their mother. One was adopted to a family member, but the others grew up together. They have kids of their own (great grandkids) some in college and working.



Outside of her own struggles coming from childhood to adulthood, she developed a soft spot for reading, reciting poems, quilting, and embroidering. She had a passion for the church and a strong faith in the lord. She loved baking and cooking. Trudy was a resilient, caring, beautiful, and strong black Queen.

My grandmother, Trudy Harris, still has a strong impact on my life. She raised me to be the woman I am today. She made sure I was raised with strong structure in my life. She made sure all her grandkids got an education and got their homework done, especially reading and writing, and she taught them respect for self and others.

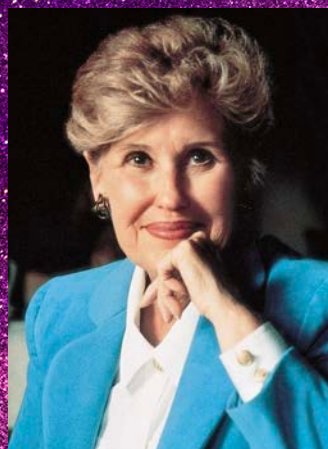
My grandmother was the most courageous, God-fearing woman with a loving, kind-hearted, beautiful soul. I am so proud to call her my woman of courage, and it is a blessing to call her my grandmother. Trudy Harris was truly a fighter of courage.

FAMOUS WOMEN WITH THE COURAGE TO WRITE



"There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others. My courage always rises at every attempt to intimidate me." — Jane Austen

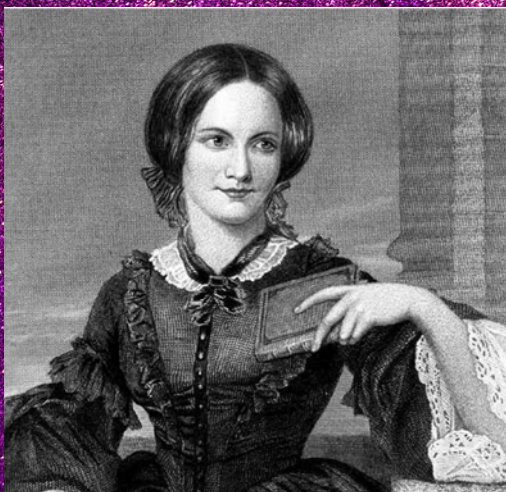
"Courage is the most important of all the virtues because without courage you can't practice any other virtue consistently. . . . I believe that the most important single thing, beyond discipline and creativity, is daring to dare." —Maya Angelou



"It takes a lot of courage to show your dreams to someone else." —Erma Bombeck



"I took my Power in my Hand
And went against the World." —Emily Dickinson



"I remembered that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had the courage to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils." —Charlotte Brontë



"You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, 'I have lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.' You must do the thing you think you cannot do." —Eleanor Roosevelt



"I told myself, Malala, you have already faced death. This is your second life. Don't be afraid—if you are afraid, you can't move forward." —Malala Yousafzai, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*

"I know what I want, I have a goal, an opinion, I have a religion and love. Let me be myself and then I am satisfied. I know that I'm a woman, a woman with inward strength and plenty of courage."

—Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl*



"You get in life what you have the courage to ask for." —Oprah Winfrey



"I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It's when you know you're licked before you begin, but you begin anyway and see it through no matter what." —Harper Lee



"Above all, be the heroine of your life, not the victim." —Nora Ephron



"When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid." —Audre Lorde



"Risk anything! Care no more for the opinion of others. Do the hardest thing on earth for you. Act for yourself. Face the truth." —Katherine Mansfield