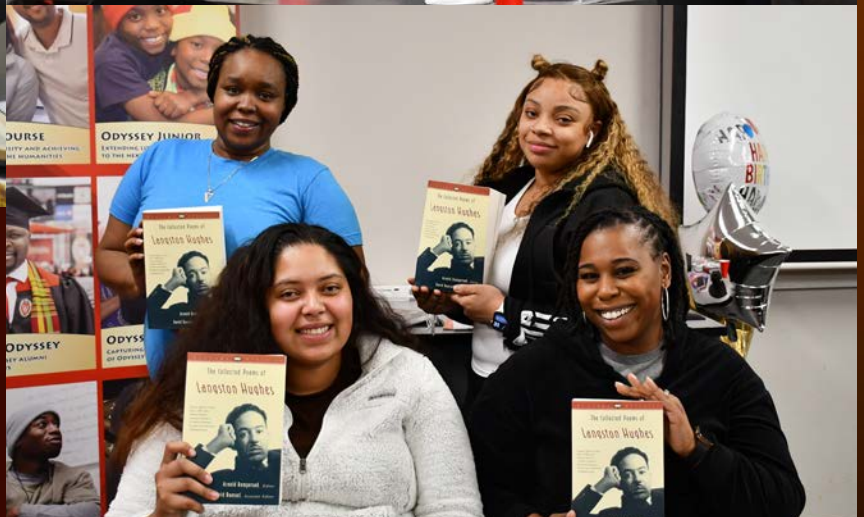


ODYSSEY



ORACLE

OURSELVES PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE



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SONGS OF OURSELVES

"I celebrate myself and sing myself," wrote Walt Whitman. After sampling Whitman's "Song of Myself" from Leaves of Grass, students created their own unique songs of themselves.

I am Alexis McClain.
 I am a mix of African American and Mexican.
 I am learning to speak up (volume wise, I hate being told to come in
 when in a drive-thru because my voice is "too low")
 I am an extrovert that loves to socialize with introverts and turn them
 into intro-extroverts
 I am uncertain about the future but can't wait to see how it unravels
 I am sweet, so my nickname is Sweet Pea
(Alexis McClain)



I am Sable
 I am a black Queen
 I am raised by black Queens
 I am a mother of a black Queen
 I am a grandmother of two black Kings and one black Princess
 I am resilient from the struggles I live through
 I am the Baby Queen of my family
 I am Sable
(Sable Wright)

I am Abby,
 Only child to a parent from here and one from many places.
 I am timid and observant, watching everyone around me,
 Learning as time goes on.
 I dream of being a teacher,
 Introducing new ideas and watching my students grow.
 I am Abby,
 I enjoy listening to music and having mini dance parties.
 I am creative, and I pick up on things quickly,
 I am Abby,
 Dancing through life—creating, exploring,
 And learning to use my voice,
 Becoming more sure of myself every day.
(Abby Wilson)



I am Alfusainey.
 I am African.
 I am happy, agile, and strong.
 I am meek but not weak.
 I am a loving and loved husband.
 I am a father to a beautiful girl and a gentle boy.
 I am a learner and devoted.
 I look shy but am lively.
 I am me, I am my song.
(Alfusainey Manjang)



I am Valvree Mosley.
 I am the daughter of Victoria.
 I am a sister, aunt, granddaughter, and most of all a mother.
 I am a caregiver.
 I am strong like the mountains.
 I am brave and my loyalty runs ocean deep.
 I am different but also the same.
 I am beautiful, I am brown, I am a queen.
 I am blessed and sometimes life can still be a mess.
 I am unique, I conquer all that is against me.
 I am still finding and paving my own way
 and riding my own wave and always believing in me.
 I am me, Valvree Mosley. **(Valvree Mosley)**

I am Ladella
 I used to be called Yella Della because my skin was
 bright.
 Though my skin complexion has changed, being
 bright is still in sight.
 Daughter of a strong father, a sibling of seven others
 from my mother,
 plus one sister and two brothers.
 A mother of three from me but over time me and my
 husband combined, us together we have nine.
 A big family is what I wished for and someone who
 adores me.
 With time all of this has come to me.
 A nurturer is me and I will use that to accomplish my
 dreams.
 Following my dreams will bring me to a degree and I
 decree,
 A Nurse, Mother, Wife will Always be Me!
(Ladella Wilson)





I am Adrianne
 I am the first-born daughter of a legacy (The Farrows)
 which in our home means built for war
 I am a mother to Adore
 I am a writer and I find joy in expressing myself
 I am a proud African American woman
 I am every friend's problem solver and shoulder to cry on
 I am everything my younger self wanted to be
 Simply put, I am unapologetically me
(Adrianne Farrow)

I am Eleanor. I am the baby girl of four sisters and two brothers.
 I was the last child but given my grandmother's first name...
 Eleanor.

I am the mother to a 10½-year-old boy named Jayceon who I
 love so much

I am a certified medication tech/flight attendant at the Dane
 County Airport

I am a daughter who retired her mom at the age of 20

I am strong

I am fierce

I am loving.

(Eleanor Ceaser)



Born Brianna Alyssa Español

My name an homage of strong women, Sabrina and Ana.

A healer to things living – plants, animals, people.

An artist in the way of drawing, painting, photography, the mind.

Eccentric in the way of my style, my soul, my wit.

A sponge for knowledge in all things of the earth

A need to teach and pass on the interest of God's creations.

(Brianna Español)

I am Gela
 I am a mother
 and grandmother
 I am of Indigenous descent
 I am powerful
 In a world full of hate, I am love
 I am a starrer of the stars
 A lover of the earth's beauty
 I am the strength of my family
 Ethereal and sturdy
(Gela Docks)





I am Crystal
 I am a proud mother of two 🧒🧒
 I am a CNA 🧑‍⚕️
 I am a Well Black Woman 🏡
 I am Determined 💪
 I was Lonely 😞
 I was Depressed 📉
 I was not Motivated 📉
 I was in a Toxic Situation 🚫
 I was not dependable or determined 📉
 I WILL BE AT GRADUATION IN MAY 🎓
 I WILL COMPLETE NURSING SCHOOL 🧑‍⚕️
 I WILL BECOME AN OB/GYN 🧑‍⚕️
 I WILL OWN MY HOUSE AND LAND 🏡
 I WILL CREATE GENERATIONAL WEALTH 💰
(Crystal Lee)

I am Ashli
 I am a strong, independent young black woman
 I am the daughter of a strong, educated black man who
 instilled wisdom into me
 I am a mother who made a commitment to never give up
 I am strong willed and overcoming everything that can
 possibly bring me down
 I am a child of God
(Ashli Smith)



I am Janessa
 I am a mother
 I am a hard worker
 I am caring and devoted
 I am a medical assistant
 I am an Odyssey student
 I am free from domestic violence
 I am at peace
 I am happy
 I am ME!
(Janessa Weichmann)

I am Tiffany
 I am a strong Black woman
 I am a smart woman
 I am a mother
 I am the best aunty
 I am that blessed woman
 I'm loved everywhere and by many
(Tiffany Brenston)





I am Vanessa
 I like flowers and sunshine
 I love music and wine
 I am a mother and a lover
 I like to cook from my heart
 I like appreciating and creating art
 I am Vanessa, like the butterfly,
 from my cocoon I start.
(Vanessa Martinez)

I am Corrie
 I am a mother of three, two daughters and a son
 I am an open-heart surgery survivor
 I am a stroke survivor
 I am the middle child of my siblings
 I am unstoppable, driven, and ready
 I am **C**lever, **O**utgoing, **R**are, **R**adiant, **I**ntelligent, **E**motional
 I am a Thomas
 I am Corrie
(Corrie Thomas)



I am Angelica Alvarez Valenciano.
 I am the cosmos in human form.
 I am my ancestors' star dust and ashes, with my homeland's Mexican
 soil dancing through my veins.
 I am the moon that luminates my nights and the sun that brightens
 my day.
 I am the shade of amber onyx in my iris.
 I am the melody that sings lullabies to my beloved child under the
 heavenly stars.
 I am the winds of change in my own destiny.
 I am the seven-pointed star in the morning horizon.
 I am a humble, tender oblation of love, light, and lucid spirit to this
 time in earth's history.
 I am who I am because I am perfect at being who I am.
(Angelica Alvarez Valenciano)

I AM STRONG
 I AM A STRONG PERSON
 I AM A MOM OF TWO HANDSOME BLACK SONS
 I AM A CONFIDENT WOMAN
 I AM A CHALLENGE
 I AM SUCCESSFUL
 I AM SMART
 I AM WISE
 I AM A BEAUTIFUL BLACK WOMAN
(Quanna Caffey)





I am Daija
 I am the first granddaughter, daughter, niece
 I come from Kings and Queens
 Their innovative minds speak to me
 My passion for learning is deep rooted
 I thank them for the will to push forward
 Just like my ancestors I will succeed
(Daija Pigram)

In an attempt to gain introspection, I've turned my back to the river's reflection.

A man who has always veiled his insecurities as strength, only to be revealed an exhausted coward.

A boy who measured his self-worth with the burdens of vanity, only to lose sight of what he truly values.

It is within this moment I've come to embrace nothingness, and it's deafening silence.

I have buried my lofty dreams of grandeur, as they only exist in a dead-eyed gander.

I have no notion of who I am, for it has nothing to do with who I will become. **(Daniel Thomas)**



My name is Aaniyah
 I am the walking living spirit of my ancestors
 I hold the sun inside my heart and it shines through my melanin skin
 I create light in the fields of grey and black
 My home is earth and it was created just for me
 I am unapologetically black and I get to decide what that looks like thanks to my ancestry.
 My name is Aaniyah
(Aaniyah Jefferson)

I am Jamal
 I am strong
 I am African American
 I am strength
 I am in
 I am out
 I am better
 I am good
 I am with whatever you with
 I am blessed
 I am a student
 I am in it to win it
 I am Dad
 I am dynasty determined to win
(Jamal Jackson)





I am Lailaini
 I am black
 I am Jamaican
 I am Native
 I am heavenly
 I am pink
 I am educated
 I am wise
 I am shy
 I am autistic
 I am myself
 I am free

(Lailaini Reed)

I am Tiana
 I am Aretha and Eugen's first daughter
 I am a strong black woman
 I am a roaring Leo
 I am a mother of two
 I am a college student
 I am a CNA
 I am an outgoing person
(Tiana Richmond-Lee)



I am a woman, who yearns to bask in her femininity
 I am a mother, who adores to be the nurturer
 I am a daughter, who forgives her parents for their ignorant bliss
 I am strong willed, knowing that whatever I set out to do will be done
 I am a learner, who yearns to be taught
 I am not a singer, but my song is beautiful and will be heard
 I am Gloria,
 I am unshackled from the trauma that once bounded me
 I am awakened from the sleep that kept me in darkness and blinded
 I am Gloria, and I will not be silent
 I will sing my song

(Gloria Knight)

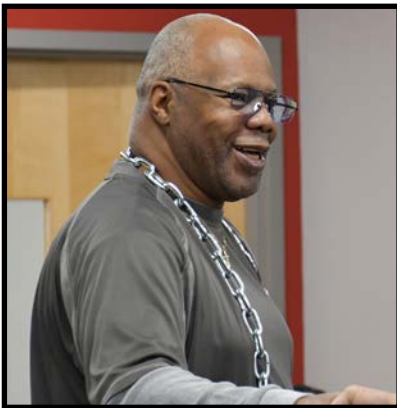
I am Kyianna Baker
 I am a strong, independent, and hardworking woman
 a descendant from Ghana and Europe,
 from a little town with a big mind.
 I am a pet mom of ZB and Deuce
 an aunt to Amari, Akira, Maddox, DJ, Layla, Avery, Davis, and Thea
 I am a little sister of four,
 a woman with big dreams.
 A woman who finally understands what she deserves.
(Kyianna Baker)





I am Mariya
I am bold
I am beautiful
I am a nurturer and a healer
I am a child of God
I was once afraid but now I am fearless
(Mariya Lucas)

I am Mickey
I told my mama who I really am
She looked at me and said you better be strong for that-
Child this world plays wicked games—with people like you, they
don't understand
But Mama, I know who I really am
That's worth all the trouble
it's worth all the pain
She just said
Child be strong
God forbid they cause you harm
You gotta be stronger than that
You gotta believe-- it is worth it in the end
You gotta be stronger than that
I am Mickey **(Mickey Mestiza)**



I am Tim, as known by my friends. My classmates I grew up with know me as Timothy. My family members refer to me as Timmy. I am the oldest of 15 siblings. That's a long story so another time to expand upon that.

However, I am Frosty the Tinman. Tinman is my nickname, and I love frost, so I cook ice. Confused? Here, come a little closer and let me elaborate in depth. Frost sits on the ice cubes in bags of ice. The grocery "Pick and Save" sells the best ice for the cooking process. So after purchasing I rush the ice home because it needs to remain dry, otherwise if it gets wet it can evaporate the frost, and if that happens it needs to be put in the freezer to dry it up again.

While the ice is in the bag, I take a hammer to it and smash, smash, smash, crushing the ice until it is transformed into powder like ice. I then pour the mix of frost and ice cubes into an ice bucket, and then I use a sifting spoon. Holding the ice bucket at an angle, I then stir the ice mixture, detach it from the cubes, and it falls to the bottom of the bucket. I then proceed to remove the remaining ice cube from the bucket and return it to the freezer.

Now, here's the best part because when the ice is done, I grab a tablespoon and dig in and mmm, ooh, tastes great! Everyone is invited to my birthday party!!! The taste of frost. And it's a Timmy, Timmy, Timmy Comer thang. Timmy, Timmy, Timmy Comer. **(Timothy Comer)**

EIGHT YEARS FROM NOW

Students were asked to imagine a day in their life in February 2033.

Eight years feels like such an impossible amount of time to comprehend. At the same time earlier, I was 14; I blinked and was 22. [Eight years later and I'm 30.] If I'm still on the right track/walking the path I'm attempting to complete, I am still in school. Hopefully I have studied abroad, hopefully am still in vet school. I would have not made a name for myself per se but have written and studied then published papers on wildlife conservation and aided somehow in the conservation of both plants and animals.

I imagine in eight years I would have pushed myself far and hard enough to at least get the attention of someone in the botany or veterinary medical fields to give me a chance to expand. As far as other aspects of my life, I envision an apartment with my cat and perhaps a friend (another cat or dog). Maybe I have more friends too in the same field as I am in. I'm hoping for a quiet life free of disruption but an expansive life full of knowledge.

I also hope I'm well-traveled at this point. I did mention studying abroad but I also want to travel just because I want to. Whether it be solo or with a friend or future partner, seeing the world is the ultimate goal, not just in eight years but for life. Tagging green sea turtles in Fiji to monitor migration patterns, or running out of breath climbing mountains in Peru to see Masdevallia orchids in their natural environment. The goal in these eight years and in life is to expand the library in my mind and just keep moving up.

(Brianna Espanol)

In eight years, I will be 35 years old with an 18-year-old son, hopefully married, maybe with a daughter and dog in my four-bedroom house paid for with my dental hygiene career that I work at part time. I have a successful hair salon that I own and manage with my friends and family working



in it while I'm picking up shifts as a nurse to pay for my son's college tuition and so I can take lavish international trips with my husband.

We wake up together and go to the gym before the sun is up, walk the dog, and come home to prepare breakfast before saying our goodbyes and going to work around 8:30 am. On an early morning, my day consists of four appointments before lunch and I'm stopping by the salon seeing everyone when on break to make sure everything is running smoothly. On the way back to work, I am welcomed with flowers sent by my man and a note that says be ready for date night on a random Thursday evening to my favorite restaurant.

When I get home, I call my son to check on how school is doing for him. I park my car in the garage and am greeted by my niece, who watches her cousin during the days I work. I get ready for a night out with friends and come home to enjoy my in-home theater, snuggle up with my dog and husband to enjoy a long weekend because I have off Fridays to pop up on my daughter's school.

(Daija Pigram)

I am currently sitting on my life-sized bean bag in the fourth bedroom of my home reading on my kindle. I can hear my daughters in our newly built backyard playing in their life-sized dollhouse.

I've been praying for days like this since I was a young girl. I never would've imagined this life for me, but I've worked so hard for it. I now own a four-bedroom home with a two-car garage, and my girls are now 13 and 10. I'm currently finishing up my second draft for my third novel I'm writing. My homework for class is already finished. I'm currently taking classes to become a nurse practitioner as well. **(Tiana Richmond-Lee)**

It's honestly hard for me to think about eight years from now because when I was younger (and somewhat now) I really didn't think I was going to be where I am today. I have struggled with depression my whole life, and I am always just trying to think about the present day and what I can do right now.

In eight years, I hope I imagine myself being settled down with the person I am meant to be with for the rest of my life. We live in a house we built with four bedrooms and four bathrooms, a basement with a bar, and a nice smaller room for a workout area. I want my home to be welcoming to everyone, the house everyone wants to be at after school. It's a place for my future and foster kids to hang out and a living room everyone wants to be in together-filled with love.

I'll live in the country with a lot of land and nature to wander in and watch. A beautiful porch with a swing to relax on so I can drink my coffee in the morning. A bunch of land so my dog(s) can run around and a backdoor they can go in and out of whenever they want; to chase rabbits, squirrels, and go outside. I can watch the sunrise and sunset every morning and night whenever I want. The house

has a bunch of windows so sunlight comes straight in, and we don't have to use so much energy every day. Solar panels help as well. I also want big windows so my cat can sit and sunbathe whenever she wants because that's her favorite thing to do.

My partner and I are expecting our first child together, so we're getting the baby room together and putting a playground up in the backyard so we don't have to do it later. My house is decorated just the way I want it: simple, modern, and cozy. There's a bonfire area so all the adults can hang out and the kids can have their friends over as well. I know my home will be a safe place for everyone.

I live in a warm state; I'll never have to worry about snow again, and I'll always be happy because I'll have vitamin D. I have a great job that I love and am happy with, and my partner and I will be financially stable. I'll probably still be in school working on bettering myself and bettering my education. My nieces and nephews will be all grown up, and they can visit me whenever they want. I am happy with my life and what I have created with myself. **(Kyiana Baker)**



Log: 02/01/2033

I woke up to the familiar sounds of Blue Mockingbirds echoing through the forest con un canto, and I knew all was well. I knew by their chorus that we had a few minutes before the rooster called for us to begin tending the land. This early in the morning, the emerald green mountain range outside of our casita is painted by the sky mirroring deep ocean shades of blue, layered with hues of orange that Abuelito Sol projects into the clouds passing by as he rises.

Feeling heaven on Earth is observing how the elements on the land interact in harmony with our breath. My lips curl into a smile while Pajarito wings soar over the mountains when I gaze to see you still sleeping. I take a deep breath and hold our shared warmth at the top of my lungs to brace for the cool morning air on my body as I move gently out of bed to reach for the guitar you were playing the night before. Waking up with the land has become a ritual to welcome each day with song. I strum to the melody of the Blue Mockingbirds and hum to fill the room with warmth as you awaken. I see your spirit return to your body when the music reaches your ears. Buenos Dias, Amor, welcome back to the symphony of a life we have co-created.

Eight years ago, you told me for the first time that you love waking up to the guitar. You said that before an acoustic guitar became a guitar, it was first the entire forest. At that time, we were waking up in different spaces--to alarm clocks in a city we made home by collaborating with others who missed connecting with land through people as much as we did. We spent so much time on Google Calendars and daily planners to keep track of meetings, notes, ideas, and safety plans to protect the people we love. We were destined to challenge the administration in the face of oppression together.

We are motivated by a pulse that we feel at the core of our beings that is rooted in our ancestors,



roaring with courage for us to keep going. I am grateful that we can rest, recover, and reconnect with the land today. When you extend your arms, I know the gesture means handing over the guitar and making Cafecito. I hold up your favorite tazita I made in the Village, which has a goofy handle and only fits your hand perfectly. You nod and say that the café tastes better because the clay we used on the wheel was from Tierra Sagrada. I sway to the chords you perfected overnight, and as I finish pouring coffee, the rooster crows, and we laugh.
(Mickey Mestiza)

A typical day for me would be waking up from our thick wooden bed and a cotton stuffed sponge, walking to the restroom and freshening up with warm water. Before having a shower, I will first pick up my plastic toothbrush and apply Colgate toothpaste on it and then have a quick mouthwash. Before leaving the house, I'll feed our black cat and the green parrot we keep as pets.

By our exterior window, there is a brown vase containing the beautiful white Catalia flower that I will water with our wooden brown watering can. Before heading out to work in my silver-colored Ford vehicle, I will fix us something to eat as breakfast—mostly poached eggs and mashed potatoes will be the specialty.
(Alfusainey Manjang)

Eight years from now, I envision myself very wealthy sitting in my favorite chair, in my high-rise condo overlooking Lake Monona, proofreading one of my novels I just wrote. My health is up to par, my children are settling almost to the top of their peek with the help of their father, the famous author Jamal Jackson. I'm so locked in with myself, I do not know what's going on outside these double doors. Sleeping and writing is all my day consists of, with no room for nonsense, mistakes, or foolishness. I can only see myself one way. **(Jamal Jackson)**

Eight years from now, I envision my life to be a beautiful balance of stability and adventure. I will be married to a strong hearted, hardworking, and amazing man, waking up each morning in a home that truly feels like mine. Sunlight is filtering through the windows of a space that I've carefully designed to reflect mine and my husband's personality, achievements, and dreams. Perhaps my home can be charming with a big backyard and garden where I can sip my coffee in the morning and my red wine at night while listening to the wonderful sounds of nature and my children feeling life at a different level than I have at their age.

I am making plans on how to make my company better and to thrive even more and actually doing work that excites me as well as challenges me. And then, the world is mine to explore every few months with my husband and children. Packing our bags, we head off to a destination on our bucket list, whether it's sipping wine in a quiet vineyard in Tuscany; wandering through the neon-lit streets of Tokyo, indulging in the best sushi of my life, or even walking barefoot on the beaches of Bali or Maldives with my feet caressing the grainy sand.

But, after all my adventures, I know home is my favorite place because it is built with love and laughter. Having my lazy Sundays, family funday Fridays, and spontaneous date nights, I feel like no matter where I go, I have a home and my man and kids to share it with. **(Gloria Knight)**

The time I think about life is right now, especially at times like this. Year 2033. I'm so fulfilled with my children and my life as a whole. Jerell has graduated college with his B.A. in physical therapy. I have a grand baby now. Yay! Jerell's wife is expecting another. He's a successful businessman. My daughter will be graduating high school soon. We are so proud of her growth and education. She is quite the scholar. Can't wait to see her cross that stage.

I purchased my place to call home forever. What an amazing accomplishment! And the feeling is so indescribable. It feels like I'm walking on clouds right now. I never thought I would make such a big purchase.

After I finished the Odyssey Program back in 2025, I continued my education at Madison College in the medical field and never looked back, becoming the #1 student in my graduating class. Now my career, family, and life is better than it's ever been. I love life and especially family trips with my kids and friends.

Some days I pinch myself to see if my life is real or am I in a matrix. The typical day of my life has been like this lately. I wake up every day at 6:00 AM. I prepare breakfast, which consists of toast, eggs, and coffee or tea. AND cereal options, too, in case my daughter doesn't want what I'm cooking. Wake my daughter up by 6:25 AM. Make sure she flosses



and brushes her teeth, then gets her clothes and shoes on and says our morning affirmations. "I am beautiful, I am smart, I will be great today." "I'm unstoppable." By the time it's 7:00 AM we both are putting our dishes in the dishwasher. Since it's cold out, we put on our winter coats and hats, and I head out to warm my car up. In the frigid cold!!! Eventually it's heated up and we are off on the start of our daily routines. I drop her off at her elementary school, Marquette. As she closes the car door and grabs her book bag tightly to secure it on her back, she waves and says, "Goodbye, I love you." I return the same gesture and say "I love you" back.

Now I'm on my way to work in the bright early morning of the bustling city of Madison. I do my job and very well. Next thing I know it's 2:00 PM and time for me to head out and go home from work. I pick up my daughter Sariah at 2:35 PM. We come home and start prepping for her activities she does after school. Then we later on prepare dinner and get ready to do it all over again.

(Tiffany Brenston)

Eight years from now I am going to be in a big black charcoal house with long pretty black see-through drapes with a white accent behind. When you first walk in, there is a stand with black and white vases, black and white roses, and a pretty family of white ceramic elephants. Straight ahead from the entrance is a stairwell, and the rail has a pattern almost Doric-like and solid black. Upstairs are two master bedrooms with bathrooms, and two bedrooms across from the master, walk-in closets for all bedrooms, and a full bathroom next to the two bedrooms. Downstairs will be a huge chandelier over my kitchen table and a side bar attached to my island with a built-in cooler.

In eight years I will be driving a Bentley Bentayga-7 seater SUV, the fastest SUV IN THE WORLD!! With a white-knuckle top speed of 187 mph, it is designed

for off-road; front seats can adjust in 22 ways with six programmable massages; passengers want their own entertainment system done! I will have a choice of eleven different shades, even leather choices with fifteen different color options.

In eight years, my son will be a junior, my daughters will be freshmen and sophomores in high school. My kids will be on the honor roll getting a 4.0 GPA with multiple offers at the end of Senior year. They will be great, and they will have the life they desire.

In eight years, I'm going to be looking back at the blessings that got me to where I am. Thank God for everything that I have, everything that I manifested for myself and my family. In eight years, we will all be great. **(Corrie Thomas)**

Eight years from now I see myself being a strong-minded woman. I see myself taking control of everything I can control in my life. I see myself owning a house and a nice car for my family, living my life as the person and mother I want to be. I want to live my dreams for my sons, so they know everything is possible if you put your mind to it. I see myself owning land or almost owning land, building my own house, or creating my own house for my kids. **(Qu'Anna Caffey)**



Eight years from now I see myself graduating from UW or MATC as a nurse. Getting up early to get myself ready for work, I wash my face, take a shower, brush my teeth, and do my daily routine Monday-Friday for myself and my kids. I get them dressed and out the door because eight years from now my kids will be in school. While also working as a nurse, I will be working on going to medical school after getting my BSN. I will be going between work and school beating the odds. I see myself in my five-bedroom house with a beautiful backyard for my kids with a trampoline, black stone, pool, and dog kennels. During the weekend we have fun nights, watch movies, and enjoy each other, creating my own family memories and traditions.



I see myself finally being happy and independent with a nice car (with insurance) that I can afford, not living outside of my means. I have little to no debt, praying my scholarships went through. Eight years from now I see myself married, waking up to my husband that works just as hard as I do and helps me with the kids we have together. I see my kids being our flower girls with a nice wedding in a church the closest to us. Eight years from now I see myself taking my family and me on trips out of town and Wisconsin, getting my kids passports and giving them their first stamps in it going to Mexico, Canada, and Jamaica, allowing them to explore places they never knew existed. I am giving my kids a great life that I know I deserved and don't have.

Eight years from now I see myself being so grateful for this program because without this I would not have started my journey to be where I need to be eight years from now. **(Crystal Lee)**

It is February 5, 2033, and I am interning at Wisconsin's Workforce Development Department for my System Administration's program degree. Assigned to me is a small size cubicle that sits in the middle row of cubicles seating staff members employed by the state. I am learning a different

computer programs, HTML, a sort of programming language used to revise department policies. It is a wonderful time in my life having finally succeeded at attaining my college degree. I am looking forward to the June graduation of the class of 2033 with much enthusiasm.

During my lunch breaks I enjoy daily walks to Lake Wingra and reflect on my challenging journey to position myself in having a career versus having a job. However, I do find it more convenient to use public bus transportation driving to school or work, it's quite the challenge trying to find parking on the street and in pay-to-park parking lots. Anyway, I am very excited about the Superbowl on Sunday. My team, the Chicago Bears, will be playing for the championship. The Bears had a good season and were able to beat some tough NFL teams to make it to the last game of the 2033 season.

Today I am wearing my favorite blue jacket. Blue is my favorite color, always has been. After work today my plan is to go home and cook myself some chicken and rice and gravy. Also, I will add some studying of my math and finance class assignment. It's been an interesting day. I hope that the B bus arrives on time because I cannot wait to get home. **(Timothy Comer)**

Hello, Odyssey students in the Class of 2033,

My name is Alexis McClain. I was once in your “shoes” about eight years ago now. Sweaty palms, crooked smile ready for whatever (or at least I thought I was), I was introduced to a judge-fee environment. Prompts and documents challenged my mind and ways of thinking.

In addition, I was blessed with 29 classmates from all walks of life. I even have contact with many of them to this day. But with that said, I’m thankful for the experience. None of which could anyone prepare you for...such an eye opening and rewarding opportunity.

I was admitted into the Odyssey Project as a 25-year-old struggling, surviving, homeless mother of two toddlers. Once in the course, I did not look at myself as struggling, barely surviving, or homeless. I looked at myself as just another student. With Emily giving me the chance to better my predicament and future by applying myself in this course, I did just that.



I went on to graduate from Madison College with my associates in Human Services and then a bachelor’s at the University of Wisconsin-Madison with my major in Human Social Mental Awareness. I am now a mental health advocate and therapist, and I’m currently working on a homeless diversion program in my free time.

A typical day for me is a day that creates itself from start to finish. Somedays I do “intake” and assess an individual by asking 100+ questions to get an idea of who they are and what I can do to assess/overcome/help an individual. Another day can look like me crying tears of happiness at my desk because I still remember the shy, quiet girl who didn’t know the best was still to come.

(Alexis McClain)

Eight years from now I’d like to imagine myself continuing to pursue education. I will be in school for a long time, and I am honestly looking forward to it. I see myself walking into a class setting, not as a student but as a professor of philosophy and maybe psychology. I can see myself active in my community as a political public servant. I can see myself wearing a suit and tie and carrying a briefcase. I will be the type of teacher that likes to connect current events with those of the past to help the youth navigate their way through the world.

Cecilia will be 18 and I’ll be 45. I will be dragging my battle vest to concerts, attending fighting game and card game tournaments. Hopefully by that time I will have finished my backlog of Gundam model kits, but let’s be honest: no one finishes their backlog. We just keep buying kits, adding more to it. I personally would like technology to reach a point where I am able to live in a hermitage with a dog and some livestock—where I can be left with my studies and hobbies, tending to land and livestock, while continuing to be a productive member of society on an academic level, only to emerge for occasional concerts and tournaments. I want to have enough space to invite all of my friends and family over, just so I can send them home. **(Dan Thomas)**

In eight years, I see myself as a general education or special education teacher—most likely general education—at a small elementary school. The hallways are lined with pink and red heart-shaped cutouts for Valentine’s Day and vibrant Black History Month posters featuring influential leaders. The scent of fresh paper and crayons lingers as I enter my classroom, where colorful bins, labeled cubbies, and student artwork cover the walls.

I start my morning by setting up my classroom, placing my students’ team bins in bright pink, yellow, green, and blue, and ensuring their morning work is ready on their desks. I glance at the clock and wait until I see the buses pulling up outside.

I stand by my door, where a brightly decorated sign is pinned up for everyone to see. It reads: “Good morning! How would you like your greeting? A high five, fist bump, hug, or a secret handshake that you can teach me?” As my students arrive, some run up for a hug, others excitedly show me their latest drawing, and a few give a quick fist bump before heading to their seats.

Once everyone is inside, I walk around the room, checking in on each student to make sure they’re settled and starting their morning work. The soft hum of pencils scratching against paper fills the room. I take attendance, marking each name while exchanging warm smiles with my students. Then, I gather everyone on the plush, rainbow-colored carpet, where they sit cross-legged, eager for the morning meeting. I go over the visual schedule posted on the whiteboard, listing out everything we’ll do for the day. Finally, I pose the question of the day, watching as little hands shoot up, each child eager to share their thoughts. **(Abby Wilson)**

Eight years from now I’m the owner of several successful businesses within the health and beauty industry. I own many acres of land and multiple properties in areas of the world where the weather is always nice, warm, and close to water. I have a large garden and maybe a small farm (I’m still



deciding). My family and I grow our own organic foods and source our own water supply. I have a serene, solar-powered home with a hair & nail salon & spa, and a yoga studio with a sauna where I can exercise and meditate daily. I have a collection of my favorite music, a collection of my favorite classic and luxury cars, and two exotic pet cats. I travel to the many countries that I’m interested in seeing, exploring, and learning more about.

On a typical day, I would wake up to meditate and exercise, selfcare, then enjoy imported fruits and tea. Check on my garden, hop on my laptop and or phone to check my calendar for any scheduled meeting, networking, events, etc. Check business statistics, call kids and grandkids to discuss family life/issues, business and all the above. I like unexpected fun and excitement, so on a typical day I would also book a flight to NY just to go shopping for the day, with myself or with others. Or I would spontaneously take my grandkids to Malibu, CA to see the biggest Barbie dreamhouse in the world, just because they deserve to have fun and enjoy life. Or I would have locally unplanned fun, somewhere I’ve never seen. Just pick a place and go there to learn, explore, and experience something out of the “norm.” Then back home to my family and pets. Maybe keep the day going with a girl’s night or have friends over for good food and conversation. Or I would also end the day as simple as dinner and reading a book, sitting in my bay window with my two cats before going to bed. **(Gela Docks)**

6:30 AM I wake up to my alarm clock going off. I roll over in my bed and slip on my slippers to shuffle my way down the hallway to wake up Adore for another beautiful day of her sophomore year. I can't believe I have a teenager who will soon be able to drive herself wherever she has to go.

After getting my daughter and myself ready for school, it's time to wake up my king with breakfast. Scrambled eggs with cheese, grits, and bacon are on the menu today. His day starts a little later than ours, so there's no use for him to be up so early. Adore and I say our goodbyes to dad and head out to start our day.

After securing an amazing staff to run my family businesses, I was able to dedicate my time and focus to running our nonprofit organization called The Farrow Project. This work also allows me the time to work for the Odyssey program. After dropping Adore off, I head into the office and spend my days helping our team find ways to better support our community.

My life is so full, and I have an amazing family and a beautiful home that we own on two acres of land. Everyone in my family has elevated in many ways. My parents are retired, after 18 years of running Ace Automotives and Tug Away Towing. My sister owns her own insurance agency. Adore is running for Homecoming Queen this year on top of the many extracurriculars she's involved in. God has blessed my life in abundance. I have to reiterate that none of these things would be possible without God. It might sound like I'm boasting, but I'm so proud of how far we all have come. I am now 11 years sober, and it feels good to have over a decade of clear and sober thoughts.

If you told me eight years ago that I would be financially stable, married, doing what I love, I would have told you you're crazy, but now that I am here it feels so well deserved. I wouldn't want it any other way. **(Adrianne Farrow)**

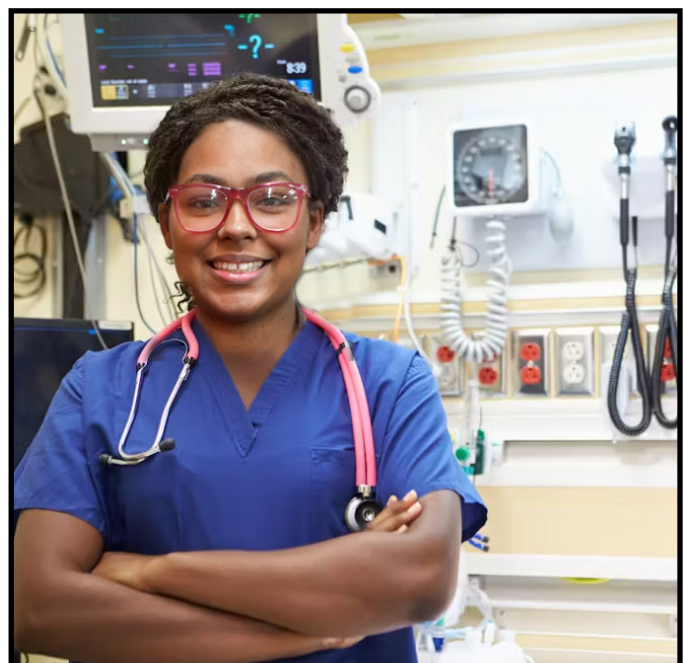
My typical day begins with me waking up and giving thanks to God for waking me up. Making my bed, I then go to work at both jobs, living from pay

check to pay check. I am going to school learning all I can to become a better person. In the next eight years, I will own my own house for older black adults, and it will be the biggest assisted living home in Madison, WI. It went as far as my wildest dream of how I want it built from the ground up: a lot of square feet, an exercise room with hot tubs, swimming pools, tennis courts, hot meals on site, an opera room, theater room, etc. I will also be working for the state as well. That's what I will be doing in the next eight years. I am living the dream I always wanted. **(Sable Wright)**

Eight years from now it will be February 4, 2033. I envision myself coming up on my 34th birthday this summer. I sense myself being much wiser and more comfortable than I am today. My children will be 18, 15, 13, 11 and 8 years old. Ja'Siyah will be an adult I will most likely be sending off to college this June. I sense I will be emotional that I have an adult child now.

By this time, I will have become a nurse and will be much more financially stable. My mother will be in her 50s, so I imagine I will be spending as much time and creating memories with her as well. I believe by then I will have fewer friends but maybe by then I will find more friends. I hope to create better relationships with more genuine people.

(Janessa Weichmann)



I think in February 2033, I will be making small bags of candy and cards for a baby of mine to take to their class. I'd be packing their lunch bag and dropping them off before I go to my marine biology job. I will have a husband who is loving and hardworking. We will have a beautiful garden and a few animals. I will feel financially free. I will own a CBRF home, laundromat, and landscaping company, and I will have stocks.

My family will be happy and we'll take many trips. We'll have friends and nice social lives. I'll cook from my garden and so will my husband. We will have a few dogs maybe. I'll have a nice hobby for art and adventurous things like sky diving or water sports. I also want to be closer to the family I have. We'll have BBQs. We'll visit other countries. I'll own a boat. **(Lailaini Reed)**

The year is 2033, and this summer in July I will be turning 56 years old. By this time, I've gotten over the initial shock of turning 50, with more than half a century of living. By this time, I have a better understanding of who Vanessa Martinez really is. Every morning, I open my eyes and rejoice in another day alive. I appreciate life and have converted back to a healthier lifestyle. I drink my morning cup of tea, no caffeine needed.

I look forward to going to my job every day. I have a fulfilling and secure job helping others, either in the healthcare or social work field. Making a difference in others' lives is fulfilling. I have a good relationship with all my children, ages 35, 34 and 24-year-old twins. My grandchildren are 11, 11, 10, and 9.

I have a happy marriage with my soulmate, having endured and prospered despite all the hardships we initially encountered. We have a loving, strong bond. In this life, this is the outcome I struggled and strived for. Nothing came easily but was well deserved. **(Vanessa Martinez)**



Eight years from now, a typical day for me will be easy and smooth. I envision it would start by waking up around 6 am to get focused and ready for the day. I would shower, brush my teeth, and do all of the normal daily cares. I would then make some tea and get breakfast started so that my kids would have a wholesome meal before going to school. Then I would wake my children up, feed them, and get them ready for school.

Once they are at school I would then go to work (ideally from home) getting everything done in a timely manner. After work I would go pick the kids up, having our daily talks which would consist of me asking questions like, "How was school?" "What did you do today and what did you learn?" After making it home, I would help them with any homework and then allow them to rest while I make dinner.

Once dinner is complete, we would sit down as a family and talk about various things that happened throughout the day and plans or goals for the rest of the week and time ahead. After dinner, we would all shower and have a snack watching our favorite shows on Netflix or Hulu. Once it finishes, I would get them to their rooms and put them to sleep. While they're sleeping, I would get clothes and anything else ready that we may need to finish the week successfully. We would then repeat this routine for the rest of the week with having weekends off to rest and reset! **(Ashli Smith)**

It's February 2033 and I am waking up in my king size pillowtop bed in my new four-bedroom, three-bathroom, finished basement home that I purchased six months ago. I am getting my children ready for their school day. My husband, our children, and I are eating a delicious breakfast scramble that consists of savory ground sausage, bell peppers, onions, eggs, and a freshly shredded cheese blend. This is a breakfast that my family loves for me to prepare!

Once breakfast is done, we all rush out the front door to head to our destinations. My husband will be heading to his soul food truck to prep the needed menu for the day. My children are loading into our spacious grayish-blue SUV so I can drop them off at their schools, and I will be heading to the hospital to start my shift as a FPNP (Family Practice Nurse Practitioner). I am in my third year in this career and feel confident and enthusiastic each day when I arrive at my job.

Once the work/ school day is done, my family and I arrive back home. I tell the kids to go freshen up for dinner. My husband and I prepare dinner together in our spacious kitchen and have R&B playing in the background. Our dog is lounging around the house and letting himself out to the backyard through our doggie door, and our children are preparing the table for us. My family and I sit down at our table and laugh and talk joyously about events that took place during our day. We all are in a good mood; the kids are happy and thankful for the life they have, and I am so appreciative of the family we have built together.

At this point in life, I am so happy to be in a space where I am not having to stress about finances and about reaching my goals of becoming a professional in the healthcare field. LIFE IS GOOD! **(Ladella Wilson)**

Eight years from now I see myself very rich, very happy, and very successful. I now stress over which

car i want to drive today, which Birkin bag i want to carry. My mother is still retired, living her best life in her multi-level mansion with all her grandchildren and including her children.

Now moving on to my siblings: they are all business owners, married, making over six figures a year. We are all about to finally get a taste of the "American dream." Amen! No more 8–12-hour shifts, tired, can barely tend to children and family life because we have little to no time before we will be right back at the place that pays us, I wish I took advantage of the work smarter not harder motive. I definitely now understand it.

My son Jayceon is making me so proud. He is the top surgeon in Washington D.C with his own TV show. He is known for being the best surgeon and never turning a family in need away because they don't have the insurance or money. He will save a life over making money.

As for me, I am the top defense lawyer in California, the highest winning rate. I am the top lawyer for the fifth year in a row. My life is very great. I'm happily married and just had a baby girl that Jayceon is sooo happy to welcome. Life is great and I'm enjoying every moment of it with those that matter: my family. **(Eleanor Ceaser)**



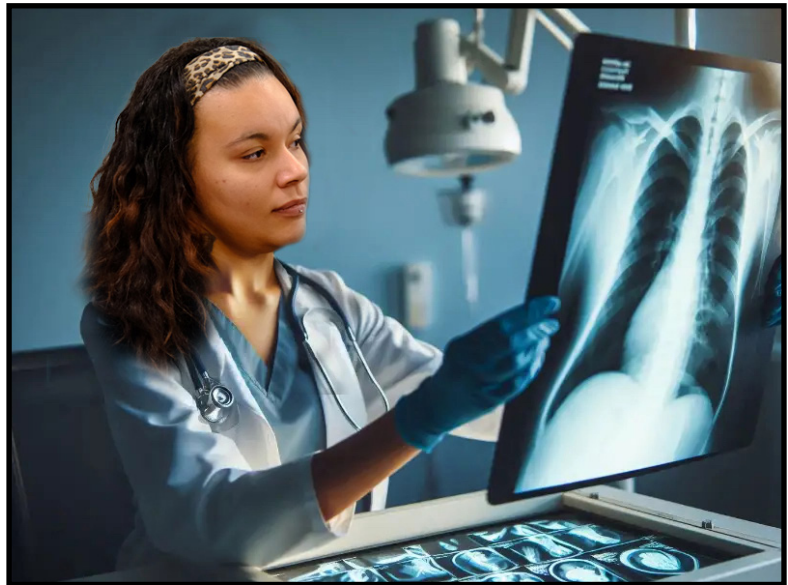
My name is Mariya. I am a 35-year-old radiologist who works at UW Hospital. I have a 16-year-old daughter and 11-year-old son who are my pride and joy and make me proud daily.

Each day can be a challenge. I wake up at 4 AM, go to the gym to do hot yoga, eat breakfast, and get some Starbucks before getting my children off to school and getting to work to pull a 12-hour shift, but I get it done. Weekends are our relaxation time when the family gets together in our huge living room on Saturday nights to play games such as Uno, Bingo, and Monopoly and to watch comedy movies.

Sundays are made for cooking dinner in our house. We eat extra crispy fried chicken, baked mac and cheese with four different cheeses, hot honey cornbread, and fried cabbage with a nice cold cup of Kool-Aid to wash it down with. We end our night in prayer and love and get ready to start our busy proactive week all over again. **(Mariya Lucas)**

February 2033, I'll be 41 years old with freshly seasoned grey curls hiding under my hibiscus-colored, henna-dyed, curly short hair. I'll still be using my treasured perfume "Amber" by Nemat that holds galaxies of tender scented spices that blend magically into my skin. I envision an eight-year sober elder who has completed the 12 steps and lives each day with gratitude and grace. Gratitude for the years that have been gifted to be and to hold myself with grace so I may overcome life's tribulations.

At 41 years old, I'll be a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and mother to a strong-willed, respectful, intelligent young man who holds himself with integrity and kindness. I envision myself taking a trip to our family cottage in a place not yet discovered. I envision my son Noah packing his navy blue-colored suitcase that never seems to zip up easily because the zipper is broken. I scream "¡Ya Vamonos chingo!" (Let's F* Go) to my very obnoxious teen. Once on the road leaving Madison, towards the peninsula, we start arguing on who



was taking longer... After a few eye rolls and a "whatever" later, my son decides to put on our road trip playlist called "Camino de la vida" (paths of life). The first one to play is "BYOB" by System of a Down. My navy blue-colored 2020 Jeep Wrangler still holds strong with a dent on the left side door due to my son's clumsiness. As we drive through the empty roads of the Wisconsin farm lands, delicate porcelain snowflakes start to shelter the ground and form an igloo around our car.

My son begins to wake up from a long heavy snooze, and as he opens his eyes he yells, "¡Ma Mira!" (Mom look). I look towards the direction of his fingers and witness a white buffalo in the wild, a dream my son and I wished for. To us it means prosperity and peace in times of war. This would be our third year making a trip to our family cabin. A tradition my son and I started after I earned my bachelor's degree. A trip to a place where I can unwind and center myself with nature and God. A place Noah can quiet his mind and appreciate his existence. We pass Stevens Point, endure agonizing traffic stops, reminisce through the naked trees that yearn for spring flowers and April showers. The sun starts to fade and shy away from earth; shades of rare orange daffodil and lavender purple bring the sun to its knees. Eight hours and eight minutes later we come upon a narrow road covered in pine trees, and their scent rustles through the air vents as if to welcome us home. A narrow road made of silk felt rocks like a

Roman road was guiding us to our heavenly oasis. I'm a sucker for catching a moment with a song, so I press play and "Got to Go Back" by Van Morrison blocks out the bumps and thumps of the rocky cobbled road. The sunset is at its end, and the last bit of light creates a windmill of sun beam rays pointing to a rusty brown wooden sign. "Iris, home to the lost" was carved into it. Noah screams out "FINALLY!" as if he's Freddie Mercury at the 1985 Live Aid concert.

My back is aching and my butt is sore, and I have a sarcastic, hungry, tired teenager waiting to explode. I decide to speed up and 20 minutes later we arrive. 88 Iris Drive, Unknown, Wisconsin. The cloud-like snow caresses everything it touches. Our red wood cottage with a tint of tiger lily orange stands ageless; the door is red wood with a stained-glass arch at the center and a red velvet colored door knob. The stained glass has a portrait of a grapevine and a crested Caracara eagle that symbolizes Aguascalientes, Mexico, my home.



A dim light starts to count the seconds towards night and decides to say goodbye for the moment. We enter the cabin and turn on the dusty lamp to my left. Before settling in and putting our baggage down, I ask my son to come with me outside so I could take a photo of him with our polaroid opal-colored camera. Imagine a "winter wonderland": the pillow cotton snow, with its sacred patterned snowflakes dancing endlessly till gently landing on Mother Earth. My son Noah is 5'8" at only 15

years old, his long black braided amber hair slicked back like a Native American warrior. His onyx honey pigmented eyes roll back while waiting for me to set up the camera so I can capture the entire landscape. The sun has nearly set and the night stars start to appear. Noah is wearing his favorite Dr. Marten black boots, the Crewson NuBuck leather addition, and he has a red XXL hoodie with black rock cargo pants. "¡Ama ya!" he yells, so I take the picture.

Flash! Snap! Ohh! The polaroid slowly prints. As my son runs inside, I glance at the picture and the image is breathtaking. Perfect untouched snow embeds every inch of the cabin, with its rectangular shaped frame and two small square windows on all sides. At the entrance the word Iris is carved into the wooden floor as if a child had done it; iris is the name of our humble cabin. The photo captured a ray of purple light skidding across the snow and bouncing onto my son's left hand. It was if he was holding a crystal purple ball. The smile on my son's face was humble and peaceful regardless of his attitude. Snow freckles perfectly placed on his long Arabic lashes and the scent of crisp ice mountain rain could be tasted with just one look at the image. Each green pine tree perfectly and symmetrically aligned to shelter our cabin, like a snow globe.

Even as the sun was setting, the remaining light captured every inch of our oasis: the trees, the red wood cabin, my son Noah, the snowflakes' tender shapes, and the earth's radiant light. As I enter our cabin once again for the first time this year, I start to feel melancholy and decide to lie on the purple velvet couch with embroidered orange, yellow, green, and violet flowers. My son Noah has surprisingly fallen asleep on the red plush tribal carpet, his head dangerously too close to the fire pit. As my eyes start to close, I look around to see our cabin filled with family pictures, the red wood walls sheltering us from the 8-degree weather lingering outside like a wolf in the night. I smile at my mother's picture, perfectly placed above the fire chimney. As I doze off, the last emotion, scent, and thought I have are of peace. On February 2033, I am at peace. **(Angelica Alvarez Valenciano)**

FOOD MEMORIES

My grandma would make these chili coleslaw burgers to die for. First, she prepares the meat patties with seasoned salt, black pepper, onion powder, and garlic powder, then mashes it till it becomes one. She flattens them out, then puts them in the oven on 350 for about 45 minutes or until bubbly brown. She chops up vegetables, onion, tomatoes, lettuce, followed by warming up the chili; the coleslaw is in the fridge on cool.

Now it's time to toast the bread, topping the toasted bread with her special sauce, then the tomatoes, onions, lettuce, cheese, coleslaw, and chili. Bring it all together as one. You must eat this with a fork because of the massive overflow of chili and coleslaw. The first bite is always mesmerizing and the different flavors burst into your mouth sending you into orbit to come back down not knowing what just happened from the bite of all bites. **(Jamal Jackson)**



My Nana Monique is the most hard-working lady, being a mail lady still at 59, a mom of four, and then adopting a fifth. She is not a woman with a lot of words but a woman with a lot of wisdom and love to give. She has a mellow soul and a kind heart. She's a great listener who really cares about what you have to say, and she loves to cook!

Macaroni and cheese was always my favorite food growing up, but the day my dad dramatically talked about how good my Nana's Mac and Cheese was I knew I just had to try it. That Thanksgiving I got the opportunity to. I walked into the kitchen and smelled sweet yams, warm honey-glazed cornbread, collard greens cooked at the perfect temperature, as well as that golden yellow brown and bubbly mac and cheese. I walked straight up to my Nana and she handed me a plate with chicken, greens, cornbread, and of course mac and cheese. I took it right over to the dining room table, and I just knew the first thing I had to try. First bite and I knew that out of all the macaroni and cheese I've had this was by far the best. I finished my mac and cheese before anything else on my plate.

Now no matter whose mac and cheese I try and what they may say about it, it always gets compared to my Nana's, which still to this day is the best I've ever had. **(Aaniyah Jefferson)**

On those cold or snowy days my mother used to make the savoriest dish known, Oxtail Stew. We would get up in the morning and my mom would say, “It looks like it’s going to be an oxtail kind of day.” Those would be the most wonderful words and music to my ears. I would sit in the kitchen and watch her prepare the meat by cleaning with lemon and vinegar, while playing her blues. Watching my mother sing and sway to the booming base of the guitar of BB King while moving around the kitchen was one of the most memorable moments.



She would slow cook those oxtails until they melted right off the bone, releasing that gelatin-like consistency that thickened the broth. Layered with caramelized sweetness of the onions, the smoky heat of spices, and earth depth of root vegetables, it caused a soul-warming aroma to fill the house, a combination of beefy buttery goodness. The red glossy sauce clinging to the meat carried a hint of garlic, thyme, and a pinch of delicious red wine. The marrow seeping into the broth packed it with this unbelievable buttery, bone-deep savoriness in every bite. To top things off with this sweet hot-water cornbread made this filling and definitely my favorite dish coming up. **(Gloria Knight)**

This is really hard for me. I am a foodie, but I don’t really have many memories besides one. My grandma cannot cook, bake, or anything else you can think of. I remember one time she made eggs for my sister, cousin Alex, and me for dinner—we were having breakfast for dinner that night. I was probably about seven years old. I ate the sausage, eggs, and pancakes, but those eggs. Those eggs were the most disgusting thing I have ever eaten besides the beanboozled jelly beans.

I have never been that big of a fan of eating eggs. They have to have ketchup, hot sauce, or cheese on them, and these were just plain eggs. My granny made me sit there until I ate them, and I sat there almost the whole night until it was time for bed. I called my mom and tattled on my granny, and my mom said, “take one bite.” I took my one bite and oh my god.

They were cold, so my granny heated them up in the microwave. Afterwards, she sat the plate down and said, “take a bite!” I grabbed my fork, stuck it in the eggs—they looked disgusting. I took my bite and the eggs were rubbery. I could barely chew them in my mouth—my taste buds were screaming “spit it out!” so that’s what I did. They looked rubbery on my plate-- yellow and plastic looking. Ever since then I haven’t been able to look at eggs the same way. **(Kyiana Baker)**





My memory of roast beef with potatoes is my favorite. A nice clean white and dark blue plate out of my brown cabinet is taken out. I scoop up a piece of tender juicy meat on my plate and a few golden potatoes and caramelized carrots. Savory flavor and soft potatoes and carrots. Biting into a bite right out of the oven and having to blow and chew at the same time. **(Janessa Weichmann)**

A make-do recipe of mine once was peanut butter soup when I had to look for mayonnaise in our refrigerator after preparing breakfast and could not find one. Then I thought I could blend peanut butter with mustard and lime to make a substitute for the mayonnaise. It was not entirely bad, but the recipe looked strange and watery. Whenever we took a bite of the bread it was spread in, it leaked down my cheeks or would make a splash. **(Alfusainey Manjang)**



My most beloved memory with food would be the first time my big sister taught me how to prepare chicken wings to be fried (or boiled). First off, I didn't want to do it, but I was hungry and my mom couldn't cook it because she was at work, leaving it up to my sister and me to cook dinner.

So, my sister told me to take it out of the packaging and clean in salt and water. Rinse it really good, put it in the biggest mixing bowl we have, and then get ready to season it with Lawry's seasoning, salt, garlic powder, and pepper. With washed hands

make sure you mush it all around in the bowl to make sure the chicken is fully seasoned on all parts of the wings. Then if you're frying it, put a tablespoon of mustard in it for extra great flavoring. Put the chicken in a bag filled with baking flavor all purpose and get ready to drop into medium hot grease to start your first batch of chicken.

Never will I forget this. I do this move till this day. **(Tiffany Brenston)**

I have many food memories, but I remember the most my grandmother's fluffy, delicious pancakes made with love. Every morning that I stayed at her house, I would wake up to the warm, comforting smell of freshly made pancakes filling the air. I would walk into her kitchen and see her standing at the stove with a smile. I'd give her a hug and a kiss, say good morning, and then she would sit down at the table while I took my first bite. It was like an explosion of flavor in my mouth—unlike any pancake I had ever tasted before. Even now, whenever I eat pancakes, they never taste quite the same.
(Abby Wilson)



After we would be seated, I remember always getting their fruit punch that tasted so tropical and sweet like a mix of pineapple, strawberries, and a hint of lemon that would always make you want to shrivel your face up a little. They also always had the best baked chicken that was so flavorful and juicy. It was seasoned to perfection so good that you could taste the rosemary and Italian flavors making it to the top five of anyone's comfort food.

I remember as a kid when we would go to church as a family on Sundays, my dad would often take the family to Old Country Buffet back before it was changed to Hometown Buffet and then later closing. The ride there would be so fun, and all of my siblings and I would be talking about all of the food we were going to eat.

I also used to get macaroni and cheese, which was the best! The cheese pull was perfect, almost like a mozzarella stick that is fresh, hot, and gooey.



After eating second and third plates of food, the dessert was always my favorite as a child! I always got vanilla ice cream with sprinkles that was so good it seemed to be fresh off of a dairy farm. It was always rich and creamy, the amount of vanilla in the ice cream was just perfect and not overpowering with the perfect crunch of the sprinkles that reminded me of a milky chocolate even though they were rainbow sprinkles.

Memories like these always give me an euphoric feeling because these are some of the core memories of my childhood filled with happiness, warmth, and of course family. **(Ashli Smith)**

I remember when my great-grandmother used to get on the grill on the sunny day of Easter. There was the smell of good food cooking, and she also was making her deviled eggs. We were just waiting for her food to be done and the family appreciating her food. Because it took so long and the food was so good, I didn't stop eating until my plate was empty. **(Quanna Caffey)**



Back when I was younger, my three siblings and I would go to our grandmother's house and spend the weekend there. She always took us out for McDonald's at least one of the days we were there and it was so yummy and fresh, but I do have to say that nothing topped the simplistic breakfast that we used to eat. We would sit down at her light brown wood table, and she would come over and ask what cereal we each wanted; we would excitably respond with the choice we wanted. That was not the best part about the breakfast, though: the best part was the buttered lightly toasted toast she would make for us! The toast would be perfectly golden brown with butter perfectly melted on top of it, and she would then sprinkle sugar and cinnamon on the toast and cut it diagonally. The toast along with the cold milk in the cereal would just be so delicious and crunchy yet soft.



While we would sit at the table and eat our breakfast, we would be doing the puzzles that were on the back of the Captain Crunch boxes. Our grandma would see us finish our toast and ask if we wanted more. When I tell you she was like a line cook when it came to our cinnamon toast, she kept them coming and they were fresh each time, so fresh that when you went in for that first bite you would feel the heat before your lips would touch the toast. **(Ladella Wilson)**

My mom's homemade chocolate chip cookies were literally to die for. They were so soft, so moist, and SO delicious people used to ask her to sell them. The chocolate chips were so gooey in your mouth you had no choice but to have a nice cold cup of milk next to you while eating them. **(Mariya Lucas)**



Everyone has had Chicken Alfredo at least once in their life. But my son's reaction to this one time eating Alfredo was just too unforgettable and funny to not share.

My sister and I decided to go out to eat with our four adventurous toddlers. To my surprise, the kids did just fine, even with boisterous laughs and distracting conversations in the nearby distance. Nothing could prepare me for the moment my two-year-old son's tongue met the most creamy, succulent Alfredo that he has ever had in his short life on this earth.

At first glance, my child's eyes were closed while he heavily exhaled air and heavily inhaled the noodles. Every noodle that met his mouth was better than the last. **(Alexus McClain)**

On Christmas Eve my grandmother used to do her baking of sweet potato pies that would melt in your mouth and not in your hands. She would boil the potatoes (sweet) until they were mashable. Then she would blend the potatoes and add eggs, vanilla extract, sugar, and brown sugar, melted butter, until thick and creamy, then pour into the pie crust until it was brown and crisp. Bake it on 375 degrees until it was done and the crust was brown. Then we would sit around singing Christmas carols wrapped in our warm quilt that my grandmother made with her bare hands. Love the sweet memories. **(Sable Wright)**



One food memory I have is my grandma's sweet potato pie! It is my favorite dessert made directly from scratch. I love everything about this dessert: from the homemade flakey and buttery crust, to the sweet, buttery, fluffy but dense, rich flavors of vanilla and nutmeg, custard-like filling.

This pie reminds me of the holidays and the good ole times. Just being free. It reminds me of how I felt when I was a kid. No worries, no responsibilities, and I didn't have a care in the world. And all I did was enjoy pure happiness and being with my parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and close friends. Enjoying each other's company, music, conversation, and the weather. No matter if it was cold out, it was a great time.



Whenever I have sweet potato pie, it takes me back to those memories and feelings. It brings me to a good place, with a smile on my face and love and joy in my heart. On Thanksgiving and in honor of my grandmother, who's the best cook and matriarch I know, and in keeping with our family traditions, I always make eight or more sweet potato pies. For me it's not Thanksgiving without it. **(Gela Docks)**

My favorite recipe right now has to be the crock pot chicken legs that I found on Tik Tok. So, let's jump right into this most tasteful mouth-watering falling off the bone chicken legs. First you want to wash your meat off. I use water, vinegar, and lemon juice. Once you have your meat washed, you pat it dry really well. While doing this, you want to have your crock pot on high with some flour at the bottom but not too much.



airy cloud. The vanilla ice cream itself has a subtle, sweet flavor that offers a cool and creamy introduction to the cake.

Next you dive into the rich chocolate layer. This part of the cake is a deeper contrast to the lighter vanilla layer: smooth and balanced by just the right amount of sweetness. The chocolate feels dense with a rich flavor that cuts through the sweetness of the

vanilla, providing a harmony of taste.

Next, we are going to peel the skin off the chicken legs and season the meat very well. Once you have it seasoned, throw it in the crock pot and pour some chicken broth in there. Let it cook for seven hours, flipping periodically. Thank me later!!
(Eleanor Ceaser)

No matter what the day had thrown at us or the challenges we were facing, there was always one thing that remained consistent on birthdays: The Dairy Queen ice cream cake. Whether the day had been hectic or filled with unexpected twists, once we gathered together, all those worries seemed to melt away. There was something about the familiar, comforting ritual of sharing this cake that anchored us. The simple act of lighting the candles was like a refresh button—one that reminded us of the little things that bind us together. The Dairy Queen ice cream cake was more than a dessert; it was a tradition that reminded us of what was important in life.

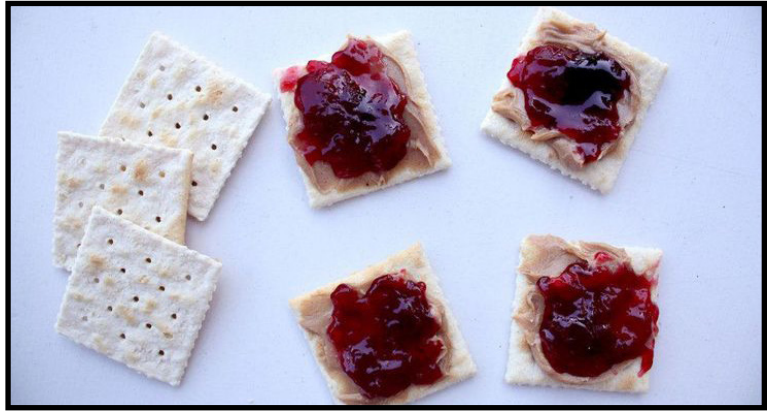
The Dairy Queen ice cream cake is an iconic birthday treat that layers flavor and texture in a way that felt magical. As you first lay eyes on the cake, the top layer is a pristine sheet of velvety vanilla ice cream. It is gently decorated with a touch of whipped cream that's so soft and light it that it feels almost like the taste of a fresh,

But then comes the best part: the middle layer. Hidden beneath the chocolate is a treasure trove of smooth, gooey fudge. The fudge is thick with an almost molten like quality that complements the cool, crisp ice cream. As you dig in, you hit pockets of Oreo cookie crumbles, adding a crunch that's both satisfying and surprising. The Oreo pieces offer a bold texture that stands out beautifully against the layers of smooth ice cream and fudge.

(Dillon Dahlk)



1: I remember as a teenager one evening having nothing to eat but saltine crackers with grape jelly and butter. I remember crying because of the hunger pains I felt and the unsatisfying “meal.” I remember the sadness in my mother’s face. We were living in an efficiency apartment. My mom had divorced my abusive step-father, and I had recently come out of a foster home. Most of the time we ate simple meals consisting of beans, eggs, potatoes, and tortillas.



It was a rough time but many better times and meals were had...This memory always sticks out as a reminder of some of the hardships I’ve faced as a youth, the feeling of an empty stomach, and how I promised to never let my children feel this pain.

2: I remember when I was in Southern Oaks Girls School. I was a teenager serving two years of a five-year sentence. I remember my mother coming up every other weekend for visits; she had done that since I started my sentence at Lincoln Hills Youth Correctional Facility in Irma, WI. She would ask what I wanted to eat, and I would occasionally ask for her homemade enchiladas. **(Vanessa Martinez)**



One food memory I have: tuna casserole. I hated it so much I would fall asleep at the table. The peas were a faded army green and mushy. They permanently made me hate peas that are cooked. Raw peas are okay. The tuna was watery and gray looking. The sauce was clearly from a packet and not homemade from my mom.



I hated doing homework and smelling it; it would literally make me angry. The side was bread. But I love it because now I’m humble and appreciate my struggles. **(Lailaini Reed)**

My mom makes the best juicy, spicy, and flavorful collard greens you would ever have. Whenever it’s a family event, everyone requests my mom’s greens. Imagine scooping up a fork of perfectly cooked greens and tasting just a spark of different flavors burst into your mouth. I usually add a few squirts of hot sauce to mine, but with or without the flavor it is definitely flavoring. I love a side of some sweet cornbread to also eat with my greens. **(Tiana Richmond-Lee)**

I am remembering a summer of my childhood when I was spending it visiting my great-grandmother Gracie, whom I loved dearly; she had the house smelling awesome from a banana pudding she was baking for my favorite uncle Slim, who was coming home for a stay from his service in the United States Army. Banana pudding was his favorite dessert, and grandma Gracie prepared the best, most delicious banana pudding ever made.

It can be assumed that she used the golden yellow Chiquita bananas, and I definitely know that part of her recipe was the Nabisco vanilla wafer. The aroma that filled the house overflowing from the deliciousness of the homemade pudding was spectacular. **(Timothy Comer)**

When I was growing up my mom was the dessert maker of the family. She was well known for her banana pudding skills. She was always in charge of bringing the banana pudding for the holidays.

My favorite part of making banana pudding was going to stores and gathering all the ingredients to make this dish come to fruition. We checked the eggs to make sure there were no cracks or imperfections. We reached to the very back of the fridge to grab the newest and freshest milk. After we collected all the ingredients, we headed home to make the magic happen.

After unpacking the food, we started our dessert prep. The most important part of cooking was the music, so my mom would put on her favorite tunes. Monica was on repeat whenever we cooked or cleaned while the music played. I can hear her pots and pans clapping, the eyes on the stove igniting, and all the sounds coming together like an orchestra. Making banana pudding was a labor of love. As my mom's cooking assistants, it was always the job of my sister and me to layer the banana pudding. I would grab the biggest bowl and lid, the bundles of bananas, vanilla wafers, a knife, and a cutting board. The layering

process was one of the most important steps. I would lay out a roll of vanilla wafers, then wipe off my hands and start slicing bananas and laying them on every wafer. You never used the ends of the bananas and you have to always build up the sides with extra cookies.

As I completed this task, I saw my mom watching like a hawk. My mom called me over to the stove and asked me to taste. I blew on the spoon and took a taste. My mouth filled with vanilla and smooth textures. The taste was indescribable. An hour later after her pudding had thickened, she would pour it over my perfectly placed bananas and wafers. Then I added a lid on the bowl and in the fridge it went.

Waiting for the banana pudding to properly chill is the hardest part. I waited as long as I could. I snuck downstairs and looked at the clock. It was 2 AM. The perfect time to try the banana pudding, if you ask me. I found a small bowl and spoon, opened up the refrigerator, and scooped into my bowl "pure magic." I sat down and took a bite. It was cold and melted as it touched my tongue; I could taste every ingredient, sugar, milk, and vanilla. The wafers are now soft and have soaked up all the pudding, the bananas are now softer and sweet as they have ripened. Every bite is better than the last. Oh, how I love my momma's banana pudding!

(Adrianne Farrow)



When I think food I think of Ana, my grandma on my mom's side. She's from San Salvador along with my mom, so the food and culture were not just things to remember but the life we lived.

She was the classic Hispanic grandma that didn't tell you what her secret was in her food. "You want it, I make," she'd always say. Every time I was sick, she'd make me *caldo de res*—beef soup. The meat was tender and it absorbed all the broth, making the meat melt with layers of savory flavor in your mouth. The cabbage was a soft but not mushy bite with a backing of earthy sweetness. Sometimes my grandma would add a scoop of rice and a squeeze of lemon or lime. The rice immediately bloomed with the juice of the soup and tang of the citrus.

As you chew and drink this soup you feel yourself healing from the inside out. **(Brianna Español)**

My grandma used to make a meal that I still make to this day because it was simple, easy, and something we usually had in the fridge or was less than \$25 to make. My favorite chicken and noodles! And it wasn't just any chicken and noodles. It wasn't even like chicken noodle soup. For me, it was better, richer, and much more filling.



There were six things to make this, and most for sure were in the pantry. She always started out by boiling the chicken because it took the longest. It is good with any chicken but my favorite way she used to make it was with drumsticks. She would boil the chicken until it was falling off of the bone, but she left the bone on the chicken and didn't let it completely finish. She let it boil till tender and about to fall off the bone. If you don't have chicken broth you wouldn't have to worry because the chicken boiling in the water creates its own broth; otherwise, it wouldn't hurt to get a 32 oz can of chicken broth because the water will slowly burn out due to the chicken boiling for about an hour.

After you add the broth if you choose, you add the noodles. The noodles take about seven minutes, and she always gets the dumpling noodles in a clear bag. Once you let that sit for seven minutes, while it's still boiling you add cream of chicken and cream of mushroom soup (1-2 cans of each). That usually thickens it but still makes it a soup texture, just not runny. After that she added salt and pepper and the meal was basically done.

Dumpling noodles, chicken wings, cream of chicken and cream of mushroom, salt and pepper. We usually finished this with bread and juice if you finished all of your food. The end result was a creamy chicken and noodles, the perfect food for cold days, but I will eat it in the summer as well lol. I definitely miss her cooking, but I make mine the same exact way. I always watched her make hers. It never disappoints me, and my little family loves it. **(Crystal Lee)**

I remember when I was seven my grandmother used to leave my siblings and me two dollars apiece for us all to get our own hoagie sandwich. We would walk up to 87th and Loomis St. in Chicago IL to the hoagie shop every Tuesday after school.



A hoagie is made up of a fresh French roll style bread where it's soft but not too soft and hard but not too hard like a little hard around the ends. I always get mine mixed with turkey and ham, yellow American cheese, with raw fresh white onions and red juicy tomatoes, fresh yellow whole juicy banana peppers, with extra sandwich oil and red vinaigrette, salt, pepper, and oregano. I like the softness of the bread with the little bit of hardness with the strong sense of fresh vegetables and seasonings, the way the vinegar soaks up the hard parts of the bread blended with the fresh meats in every bite.

Every time I eat a hoagie, it brings back childhood memories with my siblings. **(Valvree Mosley)**

The sun was blazing and my tummy was grumbling in pain, a pain I vividly remember. The year might have been 1997 or 1998 in Aguascalientes, Mexico. I woke up to a ratchet feeling; my bones felt like paper on a soaking rainy day, my throat felt as if a desert had magically stopped in to cruelly say "hello," and my tiny fist-sized tummy felt the emptiness and sorrowful cries of hunger. Not the hunger we feel when we miss dinner or the hunger a snobby child feels when denied a sweet. It was a gut wrenching, heart bleeding void of hunger caused by the tragedies of poverty and ill-willed humans.

I remember everything that led me to my treasured meal. The sun was standing above my dry brittle hair and the air was dry. I had

woken up thinking I was sick or dying! My little body was no more than 70 pounds, and my dry hands were the size of a small naval orange. I recall my home being empty, a home that was made of cement with a black-barred metal door with thin rectangular windows on the top half. We had no living room, just a huge bed in the middle and some wooden furniture scattered. As my feet touched the cement floor, a pinch of discomfort disrupted my tired body. I can only describe the feeling as if a snake had crawled into my belly and began eating.

The soup was flower shaped, almost like a daisy but with oval petals. I remember this *sopita* because it might have saved my life that day. The *sopita* is made with tomatoes, garlic, and a tiny bit of yellow onion and salt. To me this soup was heaven. I tasted and savored each bite. I could tell the person who made it was a good cook. The soup was room temperature, and its broth tasted like the Noodles and Company chicken noodle soup mixed with Panera Bread's tomato soup. The pasta flower petals that gave this dish life were perfectly cooked: plump not soggy, soft yet firm until chewed. Its color was like the sunset of fall in Madison, Wisconsin after a long day. Each bit saved my life. Till this day, the "La Moderna" pasta brand is my favorite and my son's favorite pasta dish. **(Angelica Alvarez Valenciano)**



Going to my dad's house every other weekend was definitely one of my highlights. I loved being able to see my family, but walking in the house and seeing a bunch of big family bags of Doritos was a whole different love, a different feeling; it was like they knew I needed this dish, and they also knew this dish always caused a problem in the house and I needed the first plate.

I ran past the kitchen to get outside with my siblings, and I stopped in my tracks. I could smell it, I knew my stepmom was starting to build the casserole. As I crept by the kitchen trying to see how far she has gotten, the overwhelming stench of onions filled the air. I was surprised and I kept watching her chop. I never thought onions were in this dish; I couldn't taste them. So excited, I decided to take my shoes off and asked if I could help with preparing dinner, always trying to be nosy.



My stepmom was an amazing cook, and she knew I wanted to crush the Doritos because we had to open the bag prior and I always got to munch on a few. My heart is starting to thump. She grabbed the glass pan, and here we go. First layer is my job. I get to put my crushed chips down. Key word is "my" because we all know I'm getting the most.

Then comes the meat more so like a taco meat, but the distinct flavor my stepmom brought to the meat was always outstanding. Another layer only this time this layer is a Mexican blend cheese with cheddar, Monterey jack, and asadero. These cheeses combined leaves you with the perfect sharp, buttery, creamy texture you are looking for, and this cheese melts perfectly together. But just wait: one more layer of corn, yes yummmm corn. Then I bet you guessed it: another layer of everything right on top. Once the rest of the corn is on, we top it with the last layer of meat, Doritos, and one last layer of cheese.

Now in the oven to MELT. This cheesy nacho Doritos casserole is to die for and a definite must try. **(Corrie Thomas)**

The year is 2013. For my birthday my friends surprised me with a trip to Las Vegas to attend and compete in the Evolution Tournament for three days. It is pretty much the Super Bowl of fighting games, where even a regular guy like me can compete on the world stage. What I can remember from the first night is vague. We checked in to our hotel at Ceasars Palace. After getting situated we set out to hit the strip! I remember a lady handing me a complimentary bag of lemonade and whiskey. Fast forward to the morning of day two. Mainly because I am not able to remember the events of the night before. Other than Dave finding me passed out on a walking bridge. I still had all my belongings, and I wasn't in any pain, so I'm guessing I had a pretty good time.

Hung over and groggy, I needed to find food as soon as possible. We didn't want to travel far seeing as we were in a land unfamiliar to us. We decided to check out a restaurant that was attached to the hotel. Needless to say, that may

have been a financial hic-up. Food here was expensive for the standards of that time. I spent \$25 on a plate of chicken and waffles. Chicken and waffles are my favorite dish, so I call it “C-n-Dubs.” If I am going to pay this much money for a plate of C-n-dubs, then I am going to critically judge this plate. I wasn’t let down either. That chicken had to have been flash fried by an expensive fryer. The chicken cutlets were nice and tender. They fell apart while locking in all that juice in every bite. That glorious crunch evenly distributed around the entire piece of chicken was heaven sent. Don’t get me started on the waffles. First, I had no idea you could use applesauce in waffle batter to add a level of texture and flavor to an otherwise straightforward dish. A waffle so moist and full of flavor, I really didn’t want to mess it up with syrup. They even covered the waffle in a nice sharp cheddar cheese to offset but complement the sweetness of the waffle. Remember how I considered not using syrup? Well, that was quickly disregarded when our finely dressed waiter explained that it was a signature yuzu maple syrup. Yuzu is illegal in the States, so I was extra excited to get my hands on something I wasn’t supposed to have. Now that I’m older I realize that it could have just been a salty lemon.



properly consume such a fine piece of chocolate. “With a morsel so refined our head chef suggest that you nibble on the piece to let the flavor aerate in your mouth.” Guess what I don’t need? Some dude telling me how to eat candy. I’m a pro at this, lil bro! With slap of my forearm, I popped the candy high in the air and caught it in my mouth. That was a mistake. My face contorted; taste buds ultimately disrespected by my poor choices. It was bitter, and I mean bitter! This bitter was different. Not the overwhelming bitter that comes from bathtub pharmaceutical found at your local electronic music festival. This was a bitter that I knew that I would learn to appreciate over time.

At this point my other line cook buddies and I are amazed and gleefully chatting about what we have been served. It was well worth the money! Then that sharp dressed waiter returned with three 1-inch squares of 90% cacao. He offers us a piece on the house since he too is a fellow competitor, just trapped at work for the day. We accept chocolate, as he explains to us the origins of the chocolate, the methods of how its cultivated and processed in house. At this point he is teaching how to



Once my face relaxed and my salivary glands regained their composure, I was able to taste everything the waiter had been babbling on about. Sweet, nutty, and somewhat smokey on the back end of the bite.

That obscure breakfast was one of the highlights of my entire trip. Now I only want 80+ cacao dark chocolate, and my standard for C-n-Dubs has been elevated to a height that only my own cooking can attain. **(Dan Thomas)**

I arrived at my comadres house at 3:00 pm to start making tamales while the sun shone over the village. The country roads were clear on the drive over, allowing me to reset my overstimulated mind. The thoughts we have, the conversations we share, and the intentions we set all seep into the food as we cook. We are no longer the kids hanging around and playing while our mamas and tias make tamales. This time, we are the cocineras and guardians of a four-month-old baby as we cook. We stand in my comadre's kitchen, which took years to build up to this moment. We are coming together to transmute the grief that comes with surrendering to the responsibility of the task. I hold Jasmine in my arms as my comadre lays the ingredients on the counter with a plan.



Taco Tuesdays are a staple in my diet. I beg my friend who is a personal chef to make them and keep up on his effort to show this talent and profit from it because it is just that good. I feel I would make a great food critic. When he was first starting up, I would be his taste tester. I like to think I am one of the reasons why he started taking his passion of cooking to a business point.

He makes the best birria tacos I've ever had in Madison. I can eat four at a time sitting and watching him cook because it is a very long process and the ventilation in his apartment is not the best. I swear it seems like he is burning all the spices, but it always turns out pretty. Choking on the smoke is worth the savory soft smells with the best cheese pull in the tortillas. The tortillas will burn the roof of my mouth if I don't wait patiently for them to cool down because he is all about serving his food fresh off the stove. Even if you're not there, he tries to start. It'll be coming out as soon as you pull up to his house. He knows that I will love it cold and could warm it up myself instead of waiting around because it is just that good. It is so worth it and I tell everyone to go and support him, as I am his biggest advocate and best customer. I cannot wait to celebrate the opening of his restaurant.

(Daija Pigram)

There is just enough space for everything. The vegetables must be washed, the corn husks must be soaked, the meat needs to boil, and cooking reminds us that water is life. Can we really pull this off? Yes, after a phone call to my mama to make sure we have everything we need and a reminder to cook the chiles long enough for them to change color before blending them. We take turns caring for Jasmine as we alternate tasks prepping. We slice, dice, organize, and two hours later, we are ready to start cooking. The fire is hot, the chiles are cooked, and we are dancing to cumbia while we wait for Jasmine to wake up from a nap before blending.

We finish prepping the ingredients at 8:00 pm with the moon as our testimony to the effort. A day's work is just the beginning. **(Mickey Mestiza)**

Food is the way to the heart. Feeding and sharing meals together, cooking with loved ones: it has always made me happier. I can be in the worst mood before and it will change it for the better at the very least add comfort in hysterical moods.

