

ODYSSEY ORACLE

CONQUERING CAMPUS



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Emily Auerbach, Executive Director/Co-Founder
Emily Azad, Program Manager; Photographer
Katie Arredondo, Coordinator; Oracle Assistant
Sarah Lensmire, Assistant Program Manager; Photographer
Clarissa Brown, Typing Assistant
Beth Auerbach, Oracle Designer

emily.auerbach@wisc.edu

608-712-6321

CONQUERING CAMPUS

The Class of 2026 traveled by Badger Coach bus together to the UW-Madison campus to receive UW photo ID cards at the Union South, take a group photo, and tour part of the Chazen Museum of Art with Professor Gene Phillips.

My most memorable moment about this trip was when everyone was so eager and excited about getting their IDs. That is probably going to be a core memory for me. Everyone was cheering and smiling so big and proud about this next chapter in our lives.

Also, another memorable moment for me was taking everything “in” at the Chazen Museum, the art work, the history. It makes me want to know more of the unknown. I was intrigued by the different styles of art work, not only that but the messages they conveyed. I want to produce messages like that without words. I loved that each room to me felt different. I felt as if I was in a different space in each room I went in. I can’t wait to go back and get a deeper understanding of what I experienced. **(Roche Palmer)**

My most impressionable moment/memory from the campus trip was seeing the African section at the Chazen Museum of Art. When viewing the art, I felt still and kind of stuck; something like a chill went down my spine. You can see the culture, and it brings you a sense of happiness and sadness at the same time.

Getting my UW-Madison student ID was also a great feeling. The UW is what people from all over know about Madison, WI. To be a part of the UW Madison’s system gives me great pleasure. The ID card makes it/me feel official. **(Shataya Hall)**



I remember sitting next to Brittany. I didn’t know what to expect of the trip. So many thoughts were going through my head, like I wonder how long it’s going to take for us to get there? Will we have to walk far or will we get dropped off in front? Were we going to get our ID pictures that same day? When we arrived on campus where we were taking the pictures, I was disappointed to find out we needed our government ID and I didn’t have mine, but I was grateful to know we could do it another day.

When we arrived at the museum, it was nothing like what I had pictured and was much better. It really captured my attention with all the different unique pieces that we were allowed to see. I left there thinking to myself, I have to come back to explore the floors that weren’t shown to us. **(Shakila Woods)**

The most memorable moment for me was at the Chazen Museum. One particular art work stood out for me and it is by a local artist. The piece had what looked like Asian women sitting around in a circle naked. This piece evoked in me something I cannot explain. The piece left a mark on me and I just cannot stop thinking about it. It was also so great to see the artwork by a South African artist; the piece seemed typical of South African art and brought back some memories. The day was warm and the sun was out, and we were all so excited and eager to learn and see new things. **(Viwe Mpurwanda)**



To me the most memorable part of the tour was dissecting the artist's work, understanding the underlying truth behind each piece and why it was presented. My ultimate piece was the women sitting in a circle in the middle of the room. Naked, vulnerable, yet comfortable is the impression I received from that piece.

I also appreciated the description of material used to create each piece and the reasoning behind it. Comparing paintings made with acrylics vs. paintings made with oil paint, those with oil paint felt more "alive" as they were made with layering dimensions.



Overall, I realized I always walked past the establishment without knowing what truly was inside. I love art and I'm making my goal to return to the museum alone and dissect each piece some more. Thank you for opening that window of opportunity. **(Stacy Castillo)**

On our trip to Union South, nothing looked familiar to me. Being born and raised in Madison WI, it was crazy that I've never been here. It was like a whole new world that I wanted to be a part of.

At the Chazen Art Museum, the first two statues we looked at were of President Abraham Lincoln and a slave and then Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. I noticed that the slave had no face, no detail. To me, that said that slave had no identity. Frederick Douglass, a freed slave, had detail so much so that it was clear who he was; I could recognize him.

There was a picture of what looked like food at Thanksgiving, with dead animals—rabbit, chickens, turkeys, and fresh veggies that looked alive! I once was a vegetarian and my reason for it was me feeling that we eat dead animals that were killed by someone else somewhere else. You ARE what you EAT. I think we weren't designed to eat meat/fish. We should eat food that's alive to stay alive. Eat food with life to live! **(Valencia Collins)**

What I remember the most about our class trip was how beautiful the museum was and how little time we had to explore it. I plan to revisit as a date with my fiancé when we have some free time away from the kids. I remember all the colors and different art, a lot of pieces that I wanted to study closer. I also remember the feeling of joy as we all received our UW ID cards. We were all just so happy to be there, taking photos with big smiles for memories.



One of the most memorable moments from our trip was getting my UW ID. Holding that tiny red piece of plastic meant everything to me. I never thought I would have the experience of having a UW student ID. It may seem small to some, but in that moment I felt so proud of myself. I felt like I made it. Or at least I'm one step closer to my dreams. As I stood in line with my classmates, I felt so nervous, my hands sweaty, my mind racing through emotion, all while not trying to show how nervous I was. My picture could have turned out better, but I am proud of my tiny red piece of plastic, my UW Madison Student ID. I plan on wearing it proudly. I'm officially a Badger now. Being in the

middle of campus, hearing the students chatting, observing them walking to their classes, I thought to myself, I am finally a part of something big and that feels so good. **(Kiana Galloway)**

I also remember carrying my baby's bad, heavy car seat in and out of the bus. I felt like having my baby distracted me a little from getting the full experience, but, hey, being a parent will always trump all, right? At least he did very well! I guess he enjoyed being out and about as much as I did! His little screams and screeches in the museum showed he was excited to see the art! I expected it to be a little harder but he was actually pretty calm for the most part, which I'm very grateful for. **(Laura Bass)**

Well, you can't forget the pictures for sure. That day it seemed like we took a picture after everything we did. But I also learned why we take too many pictures. It makes sense: so you can always catch us smiling for the camera.

The second thing that was etched into my head was the statue of the eight bald women with their feet in the bucket. It puzzled me more that our guide saying he never talks about it, even though it's the most asked about. **(Shelton Murphy)**



A memorable moment for me was just being on the bus and going on a trip being in class again. It just brings me joy. I learned how art can be on the same background structure, but feel and look so different. I'm just learning so much about different things. The part about standing in line, taking a group photo, meeting new people felt like of being a part of something great. It felt like a sense of community. **(Jacqueline Hawkins)**



When we arrived at the Chazen Museum, I was excited to view the art inside. The tall grey building looked dull on the outside, but upon walking in, I saw the glass doors gleamed, and I noticed a wooden statue in the middle of the gallery. However, my attention drifted to these vases like the ones from the movie "Hercules." Beautiful images were painted onto the vases, reminding me of my favorite childhood movie. As we walked up the stairs, I noticed this beautiful art piece made of different strokes of paint colors. Red, oranges, yellows, and blues filled the art frame. I was amazing that no shape or form had to be painted to understand this art. For me this was art, not specific or deliberate but just what flowed from the artist. **(Lilibeth Sobrevilla)**

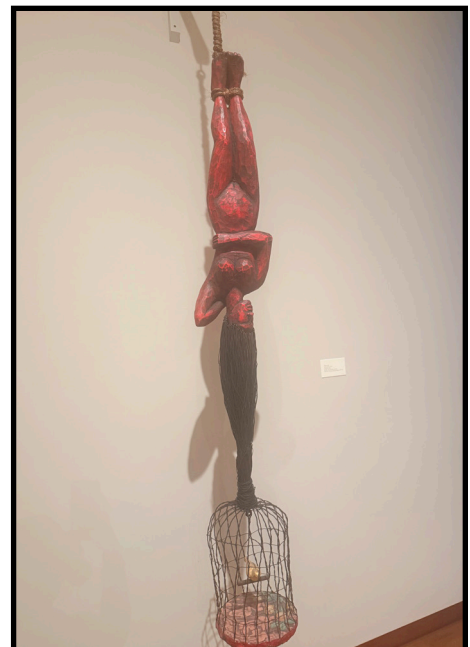
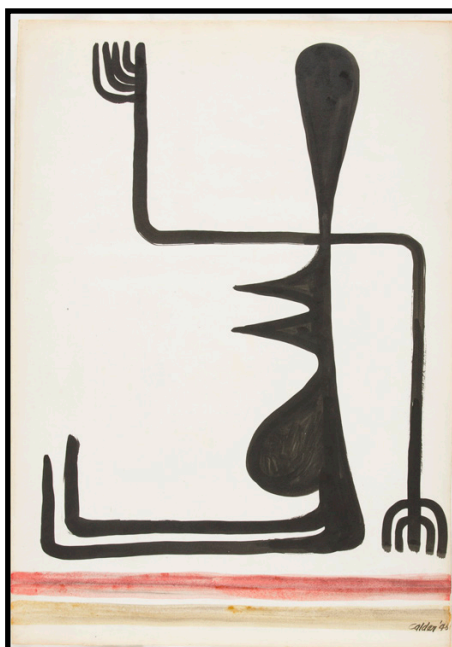
I thought about slavery. Many different forms of art showed pain or a message of some sort.

My favorite that I would like to know more about was a slave hanging upside down from rope with a gold bird and bird cage tied to the hair while upside down. What is the message in this piece? It stood out to me a lot.

Also, the Thomas Ball statue ("Emancipation Group") stood out.

I loved the bus ride. I work for a bus company. **(Anteijah Greer)**

The most memorable moment was when I noticed some art work titled "A pregnant black woman." I took a picture of it on sight because it left me somewhat triggered in both good and bad ways. I felt it was a message to say pregnant black women are art in a way. Art comes in many different shapes and sizes. The bad thought was why would someone create this oddly shaped piece of work and name it a black woman? Although Art isn't bad, a pregnant black woman is much more! **(Richard Butler)**



The museum gave me chills as if I was there during those times. I pictured the bodies that were sitting all together in a circle. It made me think about all the slaves that were chained together and sent to the bottom of the ocean. I felt a sudden thump in my heart as if those were my people. I really enjoyed it and it helped me understand that we were not the only ones who went through that.

Another thing that stood out to me was the picture with the wrappers. I've never seen anything like that. It helped me understand how so many countries have different strengths in things. It was so amazing to see all different kind of things on the wall. **(Cquemiah Clark- Richmond)**

One thing I remember about the visit to the Chazen Museum of Art was that it is free to bring my family any time of the week. It's shocking because I've been driving past so much that I never knew it was for the public as well.



Most buildings in downtown Madison look more suitable for students. I'm glad to have a student card; now I feel the part.

Another thing I enjoyed was the bus ride. That was my first time riding the Badger bus. Growing up in Wisconsin, I always saw them and wondered what the inside looked like. I know mostly their sports teams use these buses, so when I saw them I always thought it was either the basketball team or football team because those were my favorite sports growing up. **(Joseph Thigpen Jr.)**



The most memorable moment was actually getting on a bus for a field trip. I don't remember the last time I did that. The Chazen Museum was great. I honestly think it was the first art museum I've been to. I liked the layout, the stairs, how the rooms were set up. It was some very good art in there that had deep meaning to it. I liked the African room, different cultures. I also liked the thing made out of can tops. I plan to go back just to look around and not have to rush. The UW ID was a plus with the things we can do with it. The art was very detailed and expressed each culture. **(Johnnell Britt)**

My most memorable moment was at the Chazen Museum. What stood out most was the statue of Frederick Douglass. Reading about his life afterwards, I felt a stronger connection. The Chazen also held a diverse variety of art. There were many new forms and styles I was not aware of prior, from sculptures, colors, to textures on a canvas. Art connects to history, providing a visual representation of the message, with some for you to add your own context to. **(Lisa Brown)**

Being at the Union South reminded me of the times I would go down there for PEOPLE program. It felt like a bittersweet moment of perceived failure vs. the excitement of a new beginning. I enjoyed getting a glimpse of what a true UW experience can feel like.

I've been to the Chazen Museum of Art many times. I believe the Frederick Douglass statue was there the last time I went as well. I didn't quite understand what that art piece represented until now. Years ago, I perceived it as pain, revenge, and



rebellion. This time it felt empowering, restorative, and dignifying. I simply viewed it as an opportunity for an "eye for an eye" moment and didn't realize the intention that went into the stance, poses, and facial expressions. It was very stoic, powerful, and restorative. **(Shaneece Taylor)**

The field trip was amazing! Stretching the legs a little bit, we left the classroom for a change. I didn't think I would like the museum like that because

I have always found museums to be boring. But the sculptures and the different ways of painting were amazing. I loved the information you gave about the Lincoln statues; the explanations were great and how it relates to the class and the books we are reading. I would love to go back to the museum and take my time to look through the pictures again and especially the sculptures. Even if it's not the same museum, I want to try to understand the different art works. **(Tida Drammeh)**



My most memorable moment from Union South was the ice cream shop. I remember being like “I really want ice cream,” and I saw the Bar & grill called Set. It smelled so good.

My museum experience was great. I saw the Two Skull sculptures. That was cool to see. And there was an Asian tribute all in a circle like us at Odyssey. **(George Sydnor)**

The class trip made it official. I have a UW student I.D. Holding the real thing gave me motivation. Being in their space with them, being able to use the I.D. to access things provided for students is a great feeling. It felt good to be back in school settings of field trips as a group, learning about different art pieces. I personally haven’t been on a school trip in many years.

Visiting the art museum was informational—all the different types of art and nations that were



represented from all over. My personal favorite was the life size skulls. **(Tikoya Gilmer)**

One of my most memorable moments from the trip was when we got our IDs. I know officially we aren’t UW students. The amount of joy that I felt taking my picture was immense. I sent the picture to my daughter because I wanted her to be proud.

Walking into the Chazen Museum was pretty amazing, first the way the doors opened. Walking to the lobby, I saw how quiet and relaxed the environment was. The beautiful long staircase took us up three floors. The artwork and pieces were sitting so beautifully, waiting to tell their stories, not believing they were portraits. **(Paola Damiani)**

On the way to the Union South, I was filled with excitement. After getting my beautiful picture taken, I was even more excited to see the ID. It showed “student” for University of Wisconsin; just those logos and words made an impact on my life. I’m a UW student. Who’d have thought? I am forever blessed beyond measure.

The Chazen Museum was beautiful, very colorful, filled with historical, meaningful art. If we had enough time, I would have sat to listen about every religion and their culture’s beliefs. **(Destiny Drone)**



I enjoyed the trip; it was nice to get out of the classroom. I enjoyed the artwork. I got some food for thought on that piece with the people in the circle; I learned that our experience really shapes our perspectives. I enjoyed seeing different works and hearing the intentions and interpretations. I really enjoyed hearing Gene's voice. He isn't a man of many words, but when he speaks on art, he commands the room and encourages you to engage.

(Kharmen Thomas)



The bus ride was exciting for me, just to be surrounded with my classmates and instructors, usually concerned about a picture but that day it was okay. You look fine! I was fascinated by the new collection of the detailed art work, different cultures, how they were very expressive. Each exhibit showcases their history. I especially enjoyed learning about the whys and the hows of how the art work was educational and enjoyable, and it left me

with a great appreciation for art. **(Angel Moore)**

The most memorable moments from the class trip for me were visiting the Art Museum and taking our class picture. I loved the museum and plan on revisiting. Although we had a tour guide who described the pieces, I enjoyed trying to figure out the message through each piece. Each piece was amazing to look at; you could see the passion and the message being delivered from each artist's work. I really enjoyed the trip!

(Brittany Hughes)

I enjoyed the different art cultures. I just had a hard time understanding them, but if I can go back I would understand more about them. **(Larry Grant)**

I woke up, sun shining, excited for class after work. Because I was going to be getting a official school ID, I got my kids dressed, sent my daughter to empty the trash and grab my bookbag out the car, just to see if I had work to complete before class. I finished my last hour of work and went to leave out my door. Then I realized, Oh, crap, where are my keys? I searched high and low, counters, couches, garbage rooms, clothes, but to my surprise still no keys. I stomped my feet frustrated because things always happen to me. Still determined to make it to class, I called a locksmith, which to my surprise wasn't able to assist me until the following day, so I had to make the dreadful text . . . "I won't make it to class today." My feelings were hurt but I was optimistic about the following week. I was determined to make it to class. **(JuJu Stallworth)**



When I arrived on campus, I was nervous but super excited because even though I'm born and raised here, I never really go to explore much. When arriving, I first took a glance and took it all in. Then I started to take pictures so I could have some before walking in the building of the Union South. I finally walked in and saw so many faces but noticed they didn't really notice me. It was like I'd already been there before, which was a great feeling because I had expected so many stares and confusion as to why I had arrived, especially without my class. When I met up with my class, we headed into the building to take our photo ID. I felt like I had already accomplished something and was meant to be there with everyone.

We got on the bus and got to the Chazen Museum. We were greeted, welcomed with a smile, and it

felt great! The building itself was beautiful and interesting all in the same breath. I first noticed an outstanding painting that had so many colors. I had stared so long I had forgotten my instructor was speaking. It had me frozen. The pop colors, the abstract designs were a perfect combination. There were many more other pieces that I admired.
(Roncal Riley)

Going on the class trip to Union South and the Chazen Museum was a lot of fun. I had a few memorable moments. The first one was actually receiving our IDs. I love the thought of being a UW "special student." Secondly would be viewing all of the big sculptures. My favorite one was the lady hanging upside down. Lastly would be everyone taking photos and discussing our thoughts on the art pieces.
(Serene Boyd)



EMBARKING ON AN ODYSSEY

I think it is called Odyssey because we are going to embark on our own journey as we navigate through this class.

This will be my own journey to have a better future and a better me. It will be me discovering and learning new things along the way, while also shaping my future. **(Paola Damiani)**

I believe this course I call Odyssey Project because learning is a journey. It takes time, effort, and determination. It will produce growth from overcoming challenges. For me, the class will be an Odyssey because it will push me to challenge myself, explore new learning ideas, and grow academically and personally. **(Shakila Woods)**

It's called Odyssey to me because of all the new things that you will learn. From the different things that we will read to all the poems, trips to the museums, speakers, teachers, and classmates, it's a new journey. **(Jaqueline Hawkins)**

I think the course is called the Odyssey Project because it's a learning journey for others. And this class will be an odyssey for me because throughout these months this will be a learning journey for me where I will gain many experiences that will help me in the future. **(Serene Boyd)**

It is called Odyssey because it is going to be an adventurous journey with many changes and challenges. This class is going to open a whole new world for me, with a lot of challenges and eventually fortune; opportunities, people, and KNOWLEDGE. **(Shataya Hall)**



I think this course is called The Odyssey Project because it's meant to help others succeed in life who are on a journey from one point to another; for example, "from homelessness to UW master's degrees."

This is my Odyssey to succeed and overcome challenges, to get to the better part of my life, and to see what life brings. This is my odyssey to go from a high school diploma to a master's. This is my odyssey to a long, eventful, and adventurous journey of experience.

(Cquemiah Clark-Richmond)



I feel this course is called the Odyssey Project to highlight and comfort others through the many ups and downs that come with life. No single person is exempt from facing trials and tribulations. This class is an odyssey for me because it represents the journey of the past, present, and future me. Present self is not defined by my past, past self is hopelessly optimistic

I believe the title is the mission of the Odyssey Project. It's to change the course of our life's journey to a positive direction and grant us opportunities to combat the adversities that we can be facing. **(Kharmen Thomas)**

about my future, and future self is thanking me for taking this journey. **(Shaneece Taylor)**

Life is a journey which is marked by many struggles and challenges. In other words, life is a journey with many ups and downs. The course seeks to help us navigate these challenges and make the best out of our circumstances. Just as in life, there will be ups and downs but how you navigate that is up to you. The class will give me the tools and resources to navigate through life's challenges and prepare me to make the best decision not only for myself but for my family as well. By doing so, I hope to change the trajectory of my family's future.

(Viwe Mpurwana)

I think the class is called the Odyssey Program because odyssey means an eventful and adventurous journey. I believe my experience will be just that. I know the journey will be eventful and adventurous and will help mold me into a successful person and college student.

(Brittany Hughes)



I feel that this course is called the Odyssey Project because it is going to come with many challenges, obstacles, good, bad, but it's all for the greater good in the end. I feel that this class will be an odyssey for me because this journey is all new to me. I also have an open mind. I am open to new adventures and new experiences. I also feel that with trying to better yourself comes challenges that we have no choice but to overcome.

(Roche Palmer)

Odyssey refers to any extended adventurous voyage marked by trials and tribulations. I see my life as a voyage, an odyssey. I believe this course is called "The Odyssey Project" because it was specifically designed for the low income/poverty community to break the educational barrier that ties this community of minorities into a cycle of toxicity and generational curses passed down on them from generation to generation. Most of this stems mainly from being uneducated, which contributes to being ill-prepared for life financially, mentally, emotionally, and physically.

The low income/poverty population is mainly uneducated on money management, generational wealth (financial literacy), and healthcare. These gaps in knowledge are not only in the community but at a systemic level as well, which is why a lot of us in this community are destined to fail. Without the knowledge needed to succeed, we fall into the same cycle of oppression as the generation before us and so on and so forth.

This class is an important part of my odyssey of life. I have fallen into the same cycle as the

generation before me, little to no education past high school. All, me included, really lack the tools to create generational wealth and beyond. That is not only wealth monetary wise but in knowledge and freedom. I have some knowledge on financial literacy and healthcare but not much to really apply this in my own life and pass down. The saying goes, "You can lead a horse to the water, but you can't make it drink." This class is going to be the push and help I need to move forward towards my goals of being somebody my kids can be proud of; being somebody I can be proud of, having a career and freedom. It is the beginning on the road to my success and a stepping stone to a better education.

From severe depression, anxiety, self-harm, childhood trauma, and suicide attempts, a person living life in slow motion, just going through the motion of things and not actually living or feeling alive to fighting to come out of it, I've had the courage to keep living, to continue putting one foot in front of the other no matter how hard it's been. I am going to break the generational curses

passed down from those before me, and I'm going to pass down generational wealth, knowledge, and the freedom to just be to my children and generations beyond them. The one thing I want for my children in this lifetime is just happiness, and I'm putting forth the effort no matter how hard to make sure I give that to them. Being a mosaic of my life and all I have endured, I am an unbreakable glass; I got the strength from my past.

This class is a part of my odyssey and I am my savior. **(Laura Bass)**



I think this course is called Odyssey Project because after all the trials and things that may have happened, you choose to finally do something good, overcoming battles to become something better and have a victory. This class is giving me another chance to be back in school to do something for me, to accomplish the thing I've been wanting to forever since dropping out. **(Tikoya Gilmer)**

I think this course is called the Odyssey Project because of the poem *Odyssey*. It means a long journey full of adventures—especially one that is filled with notable experiences, hardship, and personal growth.

This class is my odyssey as an intellectual/spiritual quest; my journey of self-discovery and personal transformation. **(Valencia Collins)**

For me I believe this educational path will be adventurous and challenging at this season and state in my life, overcoming obstacles, such as low self-esteem, depression, and low self-worth. This class is an odyssey for me as it will lift me to a new and loving destination, not just walking across that stage and allowing my family to see I am proud of myself, but to go on with my education to become what I've always dreamed and now dare to become: a social worker! **(Angel Moore)**



I think this course is called Odyssey because it represents a long journey from setbacks and overcoming obstacles. This class can be an odyssey for me to understand that no matter how far I get pushed back, there will always be a way to continue to move forward in life, a chance to complete milestones, goals. **(Larry Grant)**

Life can be an odyssey. I personally feel my life is like an odyssey and I want it to be the best it can be. There are many changes and things that can happen in life. **(Anteijah Greer)**



Odyssey highlights a new journey towards future success. Through changes along the journey/path, a new and prosperous beginning awaits.

I will be re-introducing myself to learning and the idea of obtaining a college degree. Despite what lies ahead—the unknown—a great and potential future lies ahead.
(Lisa Brown)

I think this course is called the Odyssey Project because it is going to be a long journey “home.” Our journey will come with many challenges that will follow us as we embark on this journey to our destination. In a way, I feel the name “Odyssey Project” is a way to mentally prepare us for what is to come. Our obstacles will be outweighed by our successes, thus being like Odysseus and finally making it home. Like Odysseus, we too will have to be clever and use the resources we have to face any challenge that may try to get in our way of us getting home (graduating). **(Lilibeth Sobrevilla)**



Upon listening to all the speakers from our first class, I think the Odyssey Project strives for continuing education past the program.

Personally, the Odyssey Project to me is an open door to countless opportunities and networking. With an overwhelming amount of resources and support, it is not hard to look past an end point.
(Stacy Castillo)



I think this course is called the Odyssey Project because of the journeys of adventures the class embarks on or maybe a challenging journey of experiences. The class might be an odyssey to me because of metaphorical thinking, which I am really bad at. Poems are a challenge for me to understand, but I am here for personal growth, knowledge, and skills. I am here for the struggles and adventures the project/program will bring me!
(Tida Drammeh)

This Odyssey is to better yourself and others through a new path of life and learning experiences.

(George Sydnor)

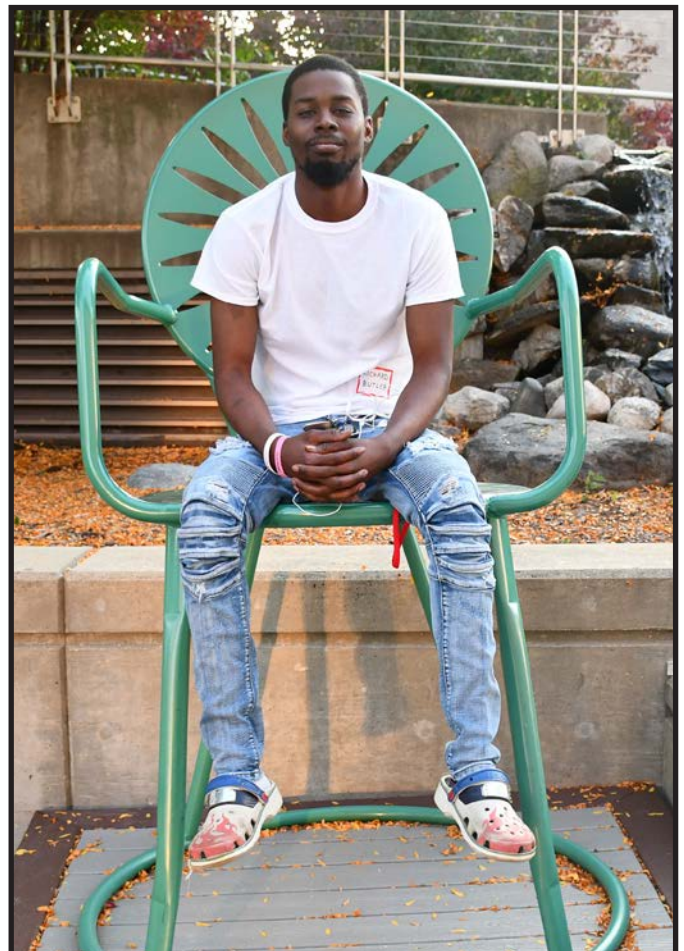
Because I'm battling through my own misfortunes, this class is going to be my own adventure with the graduation being my throne I reclaim. But the glory comes after I can survive the voyage and its trials ahead. **(Shelton Murphy)**

I think this course is called Odyssey because it is helping us overcome adversities we have faced. From reading and hearing about others' experiences, I can see that this program lends a helping hand in helping people find their way and their voice. This program can help guide you to your full potential and help guide you to the life you've been searching for. Just like Odysseus, I have faced obstacles, storms, and temptations, and I have had some of my darkest moments. Just like Odysseus, I will never give up. I will keep persevering. Odyssey is like my crew and ship, helping me make it there. **(Kiana Galloway)**



I think the course is called Odyssey because it could change or bring new fortune to our life.

(Richard Butler)



Based on different challenges and discoveries, the *Odyssey's* Greek hero Odysseus conquered and was able to accomplish.

I think the program will bring me growth, transformation, and exploration within myself. This journey I'm about to take to success will be one of by far my greatest because what awaits for me after graduating this program will be all blessings and support from the Odyssey Project. **(Destiny Drone)**



I think the course is called Odyssey Project because it houses individuals that face hard challenges in life and they keep pushing through. The thing about Odysseus is that he never gave up. When you bring together a group of people that share similar struggles/ hardships, it creates a team-like project that everyone wants to be a part of and finish strong.

someone will notice I am drained, depressed, or even fed up and not having a strong support system can put you in a rough headspace. Knowing that I will have support from my teachers, alumni, and classmates just brings me joy, comfortability, and great vibes. I love the fact that I'm surrounded by people that want everyone to win! **(Joseph Thigpen Jr.)**

In my short 26 years of living, I have faced many challenges that put me in a space where I didn't feel like I could succeed or reach to anyone for support. Just being used to shielding up and hoping

I think it is called Odyssey because of the journey of adventures we've been through. To go through with the program I'm assuming will be full of adventures. **(Johnnell Britt)**



I believe the name “Odyssey Project” reflects the journey of individuals who may not have had the chance to realize their full potential due to various life circumstances. It symbolizes the transformation of fortunes for those who are less fortunate, and I think it embodies the spirit of hope and change that this project aims to provide.



The class is currently in observation phase, but I am confident as we get to know one another we will form a strong community committed to driving change throughout this journey and will become our “Odyssey family.” **(Roncal Riley)**

Odyssey in a nutshell means journey, so I think it’s because this is a journey for me and an uphill battle to complete. **(JuJu Stallworth)**



ENDEAVORING ON AN ENDEAVOR

In preparation for a visit and performance by Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra on the theme of “Endeavor,” students wrote about how the verb or noun applies to them.

verb: endeavor: to try hard to do or achieve something

noun: endeavor: an attempt to achieve a goal

Origin of the term: from Middle English, meaning “to put oneself in” or “do one’s utmost.” If you endeavor to do something, you try with earnestness and effort. NASA named one of its space shuttles Endeavour.

Odyssey is an endeavor to me because I know I can do it, but I know as well that I try hard to achieve this goal. I didn’t have a good feeling because I’ve always doubted myself. Hearing others doubt me made me feel like I couldn’t do it, but once I got into the program, I knew I could achieve something. I learned that no matter what somebody says to you, push harder and recognize who you are. **(Cquemiah Clark-Richmond)**

When I finally started thinking about my education I went to MATC to sign up for HSED classes. That was the first part of my endeavor to further my education. It had been a long time since I was in school, and it was intimidating. I thought of a quote I heard: “if your goals don’t intimidate you, they are too small.” I know furthering my education is going to be intimidating but it is so worth it. **(Kiana Galloway)**

Growing up, my family wasn’t the most oriented, in fact I felt we weren’t oriented at all, which over time led my siblings and me to be placed in foster care. Living with my parents I felt I had high hopes, but I felt that they were nowhere in my reach. I felt that no matter how hard I tried, there was no way I could be my “best self” in that environment.



Moving into foster care brought home for me. I was reassured that “I can” and that’s exactly what I did. Instead of feeling like I wasn’t going to graduate high school, I did what I had to do to beat those odds. I took three buses from the far east side of town to the far west side early before the sun was up. I dedicated myself to do the homework and be the best version of myself. I did just that and graduated high school. **(Roche Palmer)**

Growing up in Chicago, I had to endeavor every day. Whether it was to eat, live, or school projects, it was hard growing up there. Every day was a different situation. I endeavored to do everything: play football, go to the store without fighting to duck bullets. It was crazy. **(Johnnell Britt)**

I had to overcome my hometown. My endeavors were just me growing past everything wrong I learned growing up in a bad environment. I was faced with abuse as well as substance abuse early on in my life, and if I didn't overcome these things I wouldn't be here doing this work today!

(Richard Butler)

My father was an alcoholic and so it was expected that I would follow in his footsteps. When I turned 18, I made a decision to myself that I would not follow in my father's footsteps. I am proud to say today that I am not an alcoholic, and I don't even drink. Odyssey for me is my endeavor to become more than I am now. I want to finish what I have started and be the best version of myself.

(Viwe Mpurwana)

I am on an endeavor to have a better life/lifestyle for myself and my children. Since I was 14 years old with a newborn baby boy, I have been trying to



make a better life while still struggling. Working and going to school myself while teaching a child as well was very challenging. Pushing myself to keep going and not give up is an endeavor that I still have today and think I will have for a lifetime. **(Shataya Hall)**

I had to endeavor my whole teenage life to prove that I would not be a teen mom dropout. I endeavored to finish school and graduate, something I could be proud of. I struggled to make it to school to turn in my assignments to understand what my teacher was teaching me, but I was determined to see it through to prove just because the odds were against me (a teen mom, a drug addict parent, no sense of direction), I, Jerwanda, was going to get my high school diploma. The day I did was one of my happiest moments and proudest. I finally did it. **(JuJu Stallworth)**

I have heard of the word "endeavor" but I have never used it in a sentence or in my life, to be honest. But the definition I google is "to try hard to do or achieve something." This is what everyone in my Odyssey class is trying to do—to achieve higher education and have a better life or a better career. I hope we all achieve what we want and are looking forward to! **(Tida Drammeh)**



In my life, I have had to endeavor to survive both childbirths. My first pregnancy was a Covid baby. I had Nylah on January 4, 2020, and I didn't have anyone but my mother and my child's godmother by my side. I was in labor for 36 hours and everything that I did not want to happen happened... I had to have an emergency C-section. I had to get an epidural and after having my baby, she was 8 lbs. 9 oz...I developed hypertension, which caused a seizure and I flatlined in front of my mother. When I woke up, I didn't know what had happened to me. I was in so much pain I couldn't even hold my baby for almost a month and a half due to me having nerve spasm in my spine.

Now to this day I have a bit of short-term memory loss here and there, but after all of this had happened to me and I somewhat healed, I felt like a warrior for myself and my baby because I could have died while my baby was born! I went through hell and hot water to bring such a beautiful and amazing baby girl into this world. To be here and have the opportunity to raise my kids, I feel like I was put on this earth to be a mother and so much more in life... why go through so much in life not to be able to tell your story!

I also had to endure a traumatic event that has caused me and my daughter permanent trauma, and I'm still trying to figure out how to recover, trust, and be able to be open and dependent on others when it comes to my kids... that's a touchy story. I had to endeavor to almost become homeless and am still trying to endeavor while being car-less.

I've been put in a position to endeavor to survive so much betrayal from people who I thought would never betray me!

The goal I will endeavor will be me to continue being a great mother and trying to advocate for me and my



girls as much as possible. I will also endeavor to complete the Odyssey program. They have already shown me that I can trust this project, that they're here for me, and that they want to see my children and me be successful through this program despite the challenges I'm having. This chapter of my life is hard and sometimes I don't see myself completing the program, but I'm choosing to fight back as hard as I can. The last two goals I will endeavor to achieve will be getting a new truck and receiving therapy to help my mental state. **(Roncal Riley)**

In 2023, I made a plan to start a new life in Georgia. The same day I got approved for an apartment was the same day I found out I was pregnant. I took it as a sign to go when really it was a sign to stay. I lost everything—my car, home, job, cat,

and even dignity. I may have lost my mind too, in all honesty. Everything was crumbling before me during the time of a new creation blessing my life. It took a lot of resilience, sad nights, guilt, rejections, motivation, overcoming fear, and determination to continue. Although I'm still rebuilding, I've never been more excited for my new life. Things fell apart so that the life I prayed for can come together. **(Shaneece Taylor)**



I think the greatest endeavor thus far in my adulthood has been learning to juggle my mental health while having to be an adult and a parent, while also just doing it all for the first time. Right now, I'm dealing with postpartum and being a mom of two, but it's a little easier now because I've done it before. You see this time I'm in therapy once a week, actually reaching out and asking for help. I had the courage to say it's too much this time! My first rodeo I struggled with postpartum for five long years; self-harm, suicide attempts, extreme weight gain, drug abuse (mostly marijuana), and mental blackouts. But I made it through! My goal was simply to survive, and I did just that; through blood, sweat and tears, I'm here. **(Laura Bass)**



Well, just being a man of color, my life was an endeavor in itself. I was born three months early and had to be incubated. I had a hole in my heart that was never supposed to heal, but it did. My mom sent me to primarily white schools my whole life, and racism first struck me there in high school on the basketball court. The coach would not start any of the colored kids no matter how good we were. And we were good, so good that we embarrassed them every day in practice. Then as an adult you encounter the same discrimination at your job. No matter how good you are, you're never good enough to be

at the top. So just being a colored man living and breathing at age 40 with no criminal background is an endeavor in itself. **(Shelton Murphy)**

One endeavor in my life has been balancing school, work, and family. There are times when it feels very overwhelming, but I push myself to keep going because I do know the outcome will be worth it. I endeavor to show up every Wednesday, even when I am tired and may not have all of my homework done, because I want to learn how to write on a different level and succeed. I want to provide a better future for myself and my kids. Completing Odyssey and working towards my goal of becoming a pediatric nurse is an endeavor and takes dedication. **(Shakila Woods)**

Coming to Odyssey is hard with my three kids. I try my hardest every day to tell myself I can do this for me. The challenge of having to get the kids ready and make sure I have my husband's lunch made and household caught up is something I try hard to achieve every Wednesday and Monday.

(Lilibeth Sobrevilla)

Me being accepted to the Odyssey Project, I will endeavor to further my education. No one from my family got to go to college, so I want to overcome the stereotype of my family. I remember when my parents, my two siblings, and I were sleeping in a one-bedroom apartment. My mom was pregnant. It was hard to learn, but it made us be stronger as a family and learn to never give up. **(George Sydnor)**



Graduating the Odyssey class is an endeavor for me. While working a job and taking care of my baby. I'm driven to also complete my homework on time, as well as come to class even after working a 12-hour shift and still participate. With all that life has going on, I know that this endeavor will be completed successfully. **(Serene Boyd)**

I as a single mother of seven have had to endeavor hard to keep a stable roof over our heads. While suffering from depression, I had to make sure it didn't affect my children. I, as a student in the Odyssey Project program, want to do better than my best. **(Angel Moore)**

In this very moment, Odyssey is my endeavor. With the many obstacles I am facing, my goal is to finish and finish strong. I want to overcome my mental block that I have of not being a writer and not being creative. This endeavor I am on is personal for me. I deserve it. **(Paola Damiani)**

A couple years ago, I took a leap of faith moving my family from Madison to Illinois. I was offered a nice job and promised a nice home/good life. I had to endeavor when I noticed the plan backfired. This left us homeless, jobless, and very uncomfortable. To make things better, we moved back to Madison. I started from scratch looking for a home so that my family doesn't have to live under someone else's rules. **(Joseph Thigpen Jr.)**

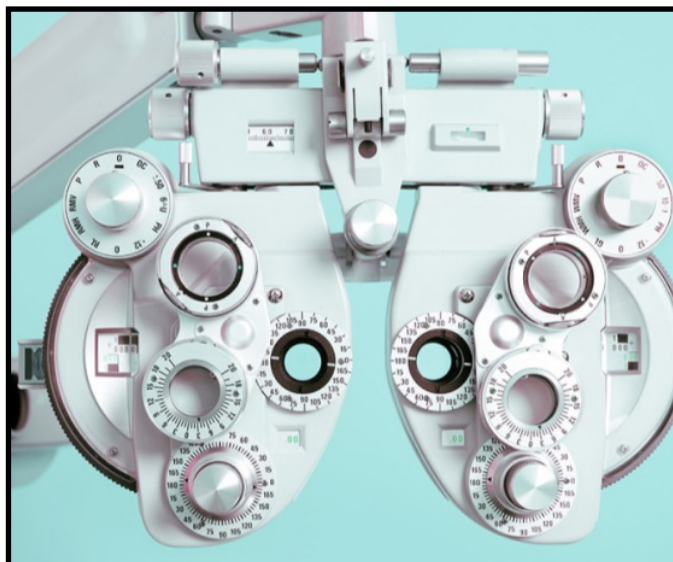
When my career got taken from me, I felt like everything I had endeavored was flushed away and I had nothing to live for. But I found Odyssey Project, a program that is going to get me to my success!!! I've worked so hard to be great, to be something, and with every endeavor I've encountered I will not give up! **(Destiny Drone)**



I've struggled a lot growing up: lots of abuse, low income living, house hopping, and foster home living. I never had a break point even when trying to overcome on my own. I had not much family support and lots of childhood and adulthood trauma. I want to overcome these things, heal, learn myself again, and become the best. I've never had a helping hand or a go-to person. I mostly feel alone, afraid to fail but doing a lot on my own, just trying to overcome many challenges.

(Anteijah Greer)

Obtaining my certification for ophthalmic assistant has been one of the more challenging endeavors I've faced. It took time, dedication, and grit. This meant a lot to me, as my employment was on the line. My job gave an eighteen-month grace period to obtain after date of hire. I'm proud to say I passed and now am a certified ophthalmic assistant. The same willpower will be used during my journey with Odyssey. **(Lisa Brown)**

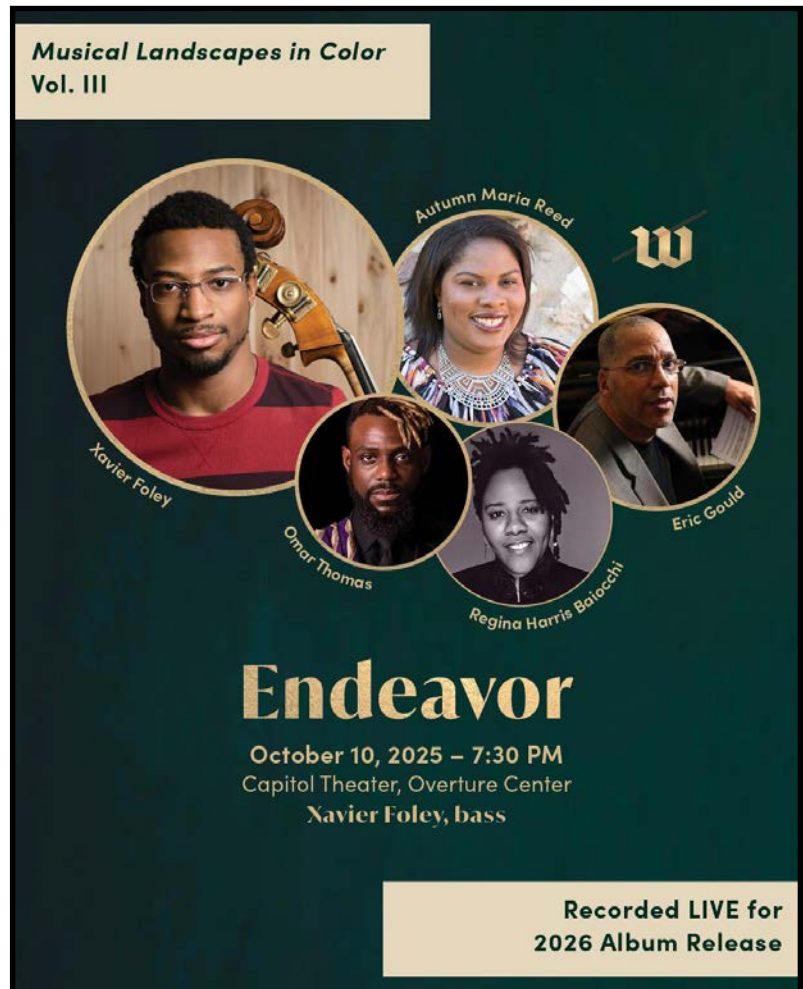


An important endeavor of mine was to be the best mother that I could be, not to be like my mom. My grandmother raised my brothers and me; Joanne just didn't have the time or patience. I vowed to always put my children first, to always be there when they needed advice. I wanted to try and walk a path that I would want them to follow and did not want them to call another woman "mom"—there's only one me. My grandmother was mom to me, and I am grateful for her. **(Jaqueline Hawkins)**

I endeavor in my life to change my mindset. I grew up around drug dealers, gangbangers, and thought that was the life to live. I went to jail, which gave me a different outlook on my life. I wanted to change because the way I was living meant I couldn't get an apartment. I wasn't getting good jobs. I was losing myself. I made a decision to change. I started doing things different. I backed off the street lifestyle and worked hard. As I cut a lot of friends, I started to book good jobs. I started to reach some of my goals. **(Larry Grant)**

Being a mother I feel like every single day is an attempt to achieve goals, to become a better person and show your children a different way of life. You want to have something to be proud to say you've passed down or made better. My son gives me strength and courage to make every dream I have come true, and that means passing this class. I strive to run multiple businesses and to own my own home. I strive as a parent to get my child the support he needs. I want to be the best mother and show him he can do anything even with his challenges. **(Tikoya Gilmer)**

Endeavor is a term that defines life's successful moments. There is always another conquest in our journey, contingent on its very meaning. Successful ones can be encouraged not to be disparaged by the less successful. We sometimes walk into things with confidence in our ability to do well until our very human nature interjects, but we



must remember to keep the lessons to get to the next successful one. **(Kharmen Thomas)**

I plan to endeavor and complete the Odyssey program.

I endeavor and dedicate myself daily to my short-term and long-term goals.

I will endeavor and achieve my goal of getting back into entrepreneurship full time! **(Brittany Hughes)**

An endeavor for me is showing up, completing assignments, and graduating. With life, work and school, it has been challenging, staying afloat and being present. From me being wild in the streets and being troubled growing up, a lot of people never thought I would have made it thus far, by simply just keeping a job. My endeavor is to be the best version of myself, to stick it out and finish all things I start. **(Valencia Collins)**

CONNECTING TO “THE CIRCUIT”

That day I could hardly wait to get home to tell Papa and Mama the great news . . . but when I opened the door to our shack, I saw that everything we owned was neatly packed in cardboard boxes. —from “The Circuit” by Francisco Jimenez

I can relate personally to this story because I moved a lot in my adolescence. I was never really able to connect with anyone because when I truly did it was time to move again, and I grew tired quickly of that heartbreaking feeling. Being unable to connect out of the fear of being quickly jolted away is a heartbreak in itself. You really start to yearn for stability and a real connection at that point. I cannot recall a point where I ever felt grounded until the last time we moved back to Madison. **(Laura Bass)**

The entire story makes me learn to appreciate the life I’ve had growing up. Francisco [called “Panchito” in the story] had to work a lot and miss out on getting an education. I didn’t experience that, but a lot of people do. So it just makes me reflect and be grateful. **(Serene Boyd)**

I relate to the unstoppable upbringing. We were low on funds, constantly having to move from crib to crib, not always having things to eat at home—things like that. **(Johnnell Britt)**

I relate to the constant moving around when growing up, longing for a “permanent” family home. Once we settled in, it was only to move a year or two later to another house.

I’ve learned home is what you make it. It could always be worse. **(Lisa Brown)**



Growing up, my family didn’t have much, basically considered poor. I can also say my mother taught us to stick together and have each other’s back because we were all we had. **(Richard Butler)**

I can relate specifically to learning to adapt to a new environment and language. As a child, I had the fear of not understanding or being able to communicate in an environment, simply because home-life is

a “different world.” His parents faced struggles financially and emotionally solely to provide. **(Stacy Castillo)**

When Francisco said he lacked confidence in school, I can relate to that because I grew up feeling the same way in school. I couldn’t read really well, and I saw most students in my grade could read. They were reading chapter books while I was reading letter books. I didn’t feel as smart as they were. But now I realize no matter what happened during that time, I am who I am today. **(Cquemiah Clark-Richmond)**

I personally can relate to this story because I just figured out that I have to move after just a year of moving in. I just finally got comfortable and stable, to have to pick up and start over again. This story really hit home today. But with a love-based mindset and support, I know it’s another great introduction to my story. **(Valencia Collins)**

I relate to him not speaking English and feeling left out. I remember when I came from Puerto Rico and didn't speak English. **(Paola Damiani)**

The most I relate to the story is, although I already learned English, it was hard to understand each other when I first came to America [from The Gambia]. My parents worked hard to provide for us and have a family bond. Our parents were telling us that education is the most important thing. There is a universal desire for a better future and to learn about different cultures. I related to the fact that people moved for a better life and experienced the hardship of a new country. **(Tida Drammeh)**

I relate to having to adapt to change, just for the "change" to turn out to be a run around!! Or the same ol' same ol'... **(Destiny Drone)**

I can relate to moving around a lot. I had a pretty turbulent home life as a kid. I too was searching for some sort of permanence. I always wished I had a teacher who cared, who saw me, who noticed I needed someone. I felt happy for Francisco that he found that. I think that's why the end of the story made me so sad: he needed something to look forward to. I can relate to that. **(Kiana Galloway)**

I can relate to the feeling of becoming comfortable, things going well for weeks, months, and something coming to change it after feeling it was finally okay. **(Tikoya Gilmer)**

I can relate to him being poor, not able to have food, a home, can't afford clothes, shoes, not being able to live life like a kid. Learning from this story, I know we all go through things as kids. As adults, we try to find things exciting to do, while going and getting through the struggle. **(Larry Grant)**

As a child I remember moving all the time. We only spent a few years in the same school. I would make friends and eventually had to leave them, never being able to build lifelong friends. So, I know how it is to not be able to get established in one place and call it home. **(Shataya Hall)**

It reminds me of how my family moved from Chicago to Wisconsin to find a better life. **(Jaqueline Hawkins)**

I had a strong feeling of empathy! (I've been here.) I felt the weight of his family's life as a migrant farm worker, no rights, no guarantees, no warnings, just the hardships, the constant uprooting, and the poverty. I deeply appreciated the simple joys! **(Angel Moore)**

Being an immigrant in a foreign land, I can relate particularly to the boy's need for "security." His house was a shack but it was his. I can certainly relate to the uncertainty of his life and the need for security. **(Viwe Mpurwana)**

The main thing I can relate to being a black man is understanding that knowledge is power. We miss out on so many opportunities to make money or be successful, all because of lack of knowledge. When a person gains wisdom, that's when the soul is truly rich. **(Shelton Murphy)**



The part I can relate to the most is towards the ending when he's heading home excited about his day, just to find out they are moving again. During my high school years, I was shuffled around a lot through different foster cares or shelters. I felt as soon as I got comfortable, I was being shuffled again. **(Roche Palmer)**

"Never judge a book by its cover." No one truly knows what a person is going through on a daily basis. I personally have been through so much in my life where it too has felt like a cardboard box that is easily broken down, but I still had to pack it all up (my emotions) and move forward with life. **(Roncal Riley)**



I relate to this entire story personally because I am a child of immigrants whose parents also worked the fields. I was actually lucky because I was a girl, and it was a bit more modernized when my parents worked the field. I was able to attend school, but we were moving constantly. I was always having to start over at a new school and never finishing anything I started. I never had long lasting friends, and goodbyes were always left unsaid. **(Lilibeth Sobrevilla)**

I can relate to the entire story because I'm constantly moving and going, trying to find my way through life as well while always uprooting my children and their education. **(JuJu Stallworth)**

I can relate because before I moved to Wisconsin, we weren't stable at all. We moved almost every six months to a new home, often because work for my mom was hard to find when no one's there to watch the kids. **(George Sydnor)**

As a youth worker, many of my clients represent the writer. They relocate often due to the family's economic or social needs. This story gives me a glimpse into their world where nothing is ever 100% or certain. After feeling like you really

found your place in a community, it's ripped away from you—friends, teachers, clubs, restaurants, community spaces, etc. It's quite a lonely and isolated experience. **(Shaneece Taylor)**

I can relate to the idea of life moving in a repetitive cycle, but I've learned that everything started to change when I distanced myself from people who weren't trying to improve themselves. It's easy to be influenced by those you grew up with or share a close bond with, but sometimes growth requires breaking away. I learned to be grateful and understand that there is always someone going through a rougher time than me and that if Francisco can overcome these rough challenges he faced, so can I! **(Joseph Thigpen Jr.)**

I learned to not let my doubts/fears become a missed opportunity due to not seeking support. **(Kharmen Thomas)**

I can relate to Panchito's desire for stability and education because I know how hard it is when life keeps changing and you can't focus on your goals. I was just homeless with three kids. Education was hard for me and them because we didn't have stability. **(Shakila Woods)**

ORACLE OVATIONS

As part of their homework for the first week, Class of 2026 students were asked to respond to a Welcome Oracle featuring eight pages of Odyssey alumni in caps and gowns, letters to them from the Class of 2025, and various poems, essays, and photos from the first two decades of the program.

Reading the Oracle made me feel welcomed, ready, and motivated to conquer the course. These letters really lit a fire in me I thought I'd lost shortly after having my first baby boy due to postpartum depression. The me that had a plan and a purpose, I felt awakened. "She found her focus, beast awoken." I'm back and better and ready to build my life the way I've always dreamt from scratch.

Corrie Thomas's letter on page 17 stuck out to me the most. It really jumped out the page as if she was speaking to me directly. The letter really spoke to me, my situation, and my place in the

world right now. I'm a stay-at-home mom with postpartum depression, helping my sister with her baby who has a TBI, who feels as if I'm not really living life just going through the motions of it. I've dealt with so many trials and tribulations in my past, so much childhood trauma, all things that have molded me into the fighter I am today. But still I graduated high school 10 years ago with nothing to show for it. It sometimes makes me feel like I'm useless, unworthy, or that this is it for me, like I'm incapable of more. Corrie's letter gave me a calm in my storm.



"This is not just an academic achievement—this is a triumph of perseverance, courage, and resilience. You have overcome challenges that would have stopped many in their tracks. You've faced life's storms, health struggles, losses, job changes, and the weight of starting over, but through it all, you have never given up. You kept going, and now here you are, stepping boldly into a room and program designed to elevate voices like yours, to ignite change through education, and to open doors you were always meant to walk through.

This moment is more than a milestone; it's a reminder of your strength. your purpose, and your unstoppable spirit. The Odyssey Project welcomes you and is lucky to have you, just as you are lucky to have them."

The Oracle has shown me the community and the tremendous support provided by the program. It has really shown me what Odyssey is all about. The project is not just about the now but the later too. Already I feel seen, heard, and supported. **(Laura Bass)**

After reading the first Oracle, I'm even more hopeful and excited to attend class for the next two semesters. I am excited to experience all the things Odyssey has to offer. Reading everyone's letters and being congratulated made me feel honored. In my mind, I'm thinking "Wow! I'm really a part of something wonderful and life changing, not only for myself but for my family, especially my daughter."

I feel like after you have a child, you think, "Okay, what's next?" I've always known I had a purpose to do better and be better. But usually after you have a child you hear some people say how hard it becomes, whether it's finding reliable childcare, trying to work and/or go to school. This is why I admired the letters that really touched on their struggles with being parents and working while successfully graduating. I appreciated the motivational words to keep going even when times get hard.

Overall, the Oracle gave me the reassurance that I'm exactly where I'm destined to be and that the Odyssey Project is meant to build those in it up to succeed. Knowing that, I'm forever grateful. And by next year, I'll be writing a letter congratulating the next class of '27, encouraging them to stick through the hard times as well. **(Serene Boyd)**

It made me feel like it might uplift me in ways I didn't know. I like that most of the students said it helped them a lot. Also, they enjoyed this class and value and appreciate all the help they received. More than likely I will write about my life—who I am, who I want to be, what it was like growing up in Chicago, what is going on in life right now, my bad things, my good things.

(Johnnell Britt)

Reading the Oracle from cover to cover instilled so much hope in my heart. I truly walked into this opportunity not knowing what to expect. Each insert felt genuine,

offering words of encouragement and underlying truth. I liked the sentence "Odyssey redefines the sense of what community can really be, and I'm excited for each one of you to experience that."

I've so far learned that Odyssey holds its truth. As I sit here writing these paragraphs, I'm surrounded in a beautiful community, a community of hopeful and determined students, paired with educators filling our cups full of wonderful knowledge.

As the year progresses, I look forward to the progress of my writing and thoughts, being able to hold more confidence in person and on paper and to not let my fear win the battle. In due time, I want to share my gift beyond these walls, hopefully through the rest of my college journey. I am speaking it into existence! **(Lisa Brown)**

As I read each letter, I felt more encouraged about my decision to give Odyssey a real try and effort! The many letters and also length and depth of those letters really stood out to me. I even remembering some graduates when first moving to Madison trying to build a new life for myself. The things most talked about within those letters are a lot of what we used to talk about in my beginning days here. This shows me wanting more and working toward bettering yourself can lead you down a path of success.



The first two sentences jumped out to me because I've always had an issue with quitting or not finishing something. "My advice to the new Odyssey class is don't quit. No matter how hard it gets, don't quit."

Growing up I could relate to this story because my mother was not a high school graduate but was very smart in many ways. My dad and his dad weren't very well educated and could barely read and write.



Open opportunities as well as daily communication, all so simple, yet some people are so out of reach. But with all, hope and resilience lead to success.

I want to be able to inspire others. I am a single mom with a loaded plate on my hands, but nothing is out of reach. I believe that all good we put out will return to us, in any shape or form, and for me Odyssey has become that.
(Stacy Castillo)

Reading this Oracle made me feel like I can succeed even if I

I can relate to Alfusainey Manjang's letter. I say this because I don't feel I had a strong start, but this program has already tested me in good ways. I had to put forth my determination and willingness to succeed and finish! I've also felt the required need of commitment already to make it to April 29, 2026 for graduation.

I learned Odyssey is a program that will help me grow and go further in life.

I'm not really sure what ideas I might have to write about. I will say I'm more confident to share stories of my life growing up to this point of being 29 years old. I feel there are many ideas and ways I could approach this, but I'm still learning and reading and also working on opening up more within this space.

(Richard Butler)

Reading through everyone's letters gave me a warm and peaceful setting. All having those "what if" feelings, yet pushing and working against any and all of their obstacles, was very encouraging. I also have days where I am doubting myself, if I maybe just have overfilled my plate, but looking around, I am not alone at all.

Reading Alice's story ("We Ate Dog Food") made me compare it to Francisco's childhood and struggle. To have the ability to read is to be rich.

doubt myself. I now feel that I can succeed without failing. They gave me motivation to know I can do it; not many people can get me to understand or give me the light in knowing I can do it. I noticed that everyone had their own journey when coming in, whether they were scared, nervous, or unsuccessful, but their outcome was a beautiful accomplishment where they felt completed.

One sentence that jumped out to me was "They make it so hard for us not to succeed." The reason it jumped out to me is because there aren't many opportunities for us, as in color, and for the less fortunate. So, for this program to have such a brilliant opportunity to help people succeed means a lot to me.

Another sentence that jumped out at me is "Odyssey broke a generational curse." There aren't too many people in my family that have graduated or even went to elementary school. I can count on my fingers how many people in my family even succeed in anything. My cousin and I both joined the Odyssey Program; she is in class 2025, and I will be in class 2026. With that being said, only two people in my family have joined and received this lovely opportunity. This means a lot to me, and I hope more of our family members will be able to join in the future for the success of our family.
(Cquemiah Clark-Richmond)

"We Ate Dog Food" reminded me of "The Circuit" because no matter the obstacles, they both remained a family and ate together at the table. Being "rich" morally and spiritually is more valuable than anything in this world.

What I learned from the Oracle was to be ok when things are uncomfortable. Uncomfortability is necessary to make a change. The mother of change is repetition. I learned that I'm not alone. We all are not alone. With the will power to change, all things are possible.



I appreciate all the kind words, stories, and inspirational messages as sometimes it's hard to stay positive and to keep pushing/going, to never give up no matter the challenge. The Odyssey Project is not only a line of support but also a tool of advocacy for us to be reminded that we all have a voice and a place in the world. **(Valencia Collins)**

When reading the Oracle, I first and foremost felt inspired. It gives me hope knowing that I'm not the only person that has this feeling of being nervous about the unknown. We all have different paths in life that we come from but are all welcomed here. Reading the stories from last year's class makes me nervous. With having so many things going on at home and in my personal life, it makes me weary of how am I going to do this? At the same time, it allows me to draw strength because no matter what everyone went through, they showed up. That motivates me to want to come and show up and be my best. For my idea of my story, I am going to channel my feelings throughout my journey, share my flaws and my ups and downs.

(Paola Damiani)

Reading the Oracle was a lot. Learning the different stories, some which are really hard because of how

much they went through in life and seeing or hearing where they are now, is really promising that maybe I can do it as well.

Alice's story was one of the most emotional stories I read. The story relates to "The Circuit" because of poverty. The fact that the parents didn't finish school or go to school at all was one of the problems. They were not able to get a good job or career because of education. Alice's dad, not being able to read or write, bought dog food and fed his children with it. Both families work on the farm

because nothing else was available for them to do without that education; they could not finish school because of poverty. Both families were rich in terms of having families and having each other and protecting each other.

I could relate to some people that I am not the only young person here, or having to go through too much at home. I have learned that I can rely on the Odyssey program to be here whenever I need help or a hand. Some people have really been through it and they kept going. I am here to do the same. I will try my very best and just keep going!

(Tida Drammeh)

"We Ate Dog Food": her story was projected to feel like Alice and her family had to struggle, equivalent to "The Circuit" story. **(Destiny Drone)**

One passage that resonated with me was the one from Vanessa Martinez. Her words immediately hit when she said, "you are worthy and deserving." Admittedly I was very nervous on the first day, and I needed to be reminded that I was indeed worthy of this opportunity. It was like her message was touching on everything I was feeling. I am shy and uncomfortable in social situations usually. I

knew deep down that I did have to step out of my comfort zone, in order for my life to progress. It was validating to see another student felt exactly the same as me and was able to succeed.

Moving on to Alice's story, it reminded me of "The Circuit" because of her dad's part of the story. He too had a limited education like Francisco's dad. He too had to put work and family before education, and Alice just like Francisco was able to break that cycle and get an education. Another way Alice is similar to Francisco is she and her family, despite the trials and tribulations, found happiness and comfort in each other. It reminds me to be grateful for the small things like sharing a laugh about accidentally eating dog food or sharing chili con carne at the end of a long day.

Lastly, honestly, I am not yet sure the kinds of stories I will share. I am still finding my light and my ability to open up. Sometimes I try to forget my past and live in the now, but I do realize it is a giant part of what makes me who I am today. Maybe I will share some of my struggles and how I found my light in those moments. I know I have a lot to learn, and I am excited to see the version of myself at the end of the program. I am sure the more I learn through this, I will have a much better idea of what I would like to share. **(Kiana Galloway)**

Reading everyone's personal letters to our class of 2026 made me feel more seen, like I can do this, that I made the right decision on picking me for a change. I could relate to so many of the alums' stories. Walking into the class I was so nervous. I still am, thinking what did I get myself into but also knowing I did what was right for me and my child. A lot of them stated they are breaking generational curses and trauma. I have learned that everyone that works on the team wants what is best. Reading others showed me that the class has changed their way of thinking, making them feel accomplished and like they could do anything. **(Tikoya Gilmer)**

Reading those Oracles gave me hope. I felt inspired and motivated. I am very optimistic as I can relate to the stories and hope one day my story will be shared.

In my own life I have had to restart over and over again even as a young child. It was hard but there were also benefits from the changes, like learning how to persevere and work hard so that my children and I wouldn't have to face the same obstacles in the future. I think some of my writing will be based on the wisdom I've gained over the years and how I've learned how to see it through any challenge I have faced. **(Larry Grant)**

Reading the Oracle made me quite emotional. The further I got and the more stories I read from former students, I noticed that my eyes would start watering more and more. I mean, someone was cutting onions. I was getting the feeling of "I deserve this."

The sentence that stood out to me from the Oracle was from Dan Thomas "I felt as though I knew everything there was to know about 'ME' but I often found myself discovering something new." Also, when Alice's mother said "you fool! You gave my children dog food, with your no reading ass," I laughed out loud for real!!!



Reading the Oracle I learned that this is going to be a journey, a journey with endless opportunities, some challenges, new people, and new lifelong relationships being built. Thinking about writing my own story for the Oracle, I am not quite sure what I would put in it yet, but I do know that this will soon change, and I will have a lot to say.

What I learned about The Odyssey Project is that it is not going to be easy. I noticed how every single person said, "it gets tough, but DO NOT GIVE UP, COME TO CLASS." And I will say now, I'm ready for it. **(Shataya Hall)**

Yes, I can relate to how everyone is excited but nervous at the same time because that was how I am feeling. Reading the Oracle brought me joy because I didn't know how someone you didn't know could care so much about you achieving a better life. The Oracle showed me that there would be so much support and it let me know that I will not give up and I made the right choice applying for the Odyssey program. The two stories reminded me of each other, and it was great to see how the families stuck together no matter what. I will write about my family's life and how we survived. **(Jaqueline Hawkins)**

I felt hopeful. I can finish despite all that I am facing and going through. I can also finish with the help, support, and encouragement of my new established family! 1. Don't quit 2. What is the catch? 3. Odyssey is a course that will teach you that your life struggles are just temporary 4. Stay focused 5. It's an opportunity to make changes in your life and really get to know your dreams and how to start chasing them 6. I want to be a great role model for myself and for my children 7. Believe in yourself and pray 8. (most importantly) you got this 9. Do your best in this. It's definitely worth it.

I relate strongly to several comments in last year's letters. This is a safe place (that means a lot!) and that we are cared for. These well-placed educators will not give up on any one of us! I read words of appreciation, encouragement, sometimes you have to be your own cheerleader, your biggest fan, and that you are where you are supposed to be.

I was elated yet overwhelmed, but the reality stepped into view of the challenges ahead, homework, dedications, retainment, adult children as well as a host of grandchildren with existing obligations.



This has been a delicate commitment, and at times I found myself questioning my own self-worth and confidence. In those moments, I learned that sometimes I had to encourage myself. I looked in the mirror and reminded me I'm worth this, I'm worth this chance, for I too possess the potential and am trusting in me.

Encouraging you to know that you are not alone in this routine, I have 30 plus people behind me, and it's normal to feel a mix of excitement and a little apprehension when stepping into something new, especially when you haven't been in a classroom setting for a while.

But as I am navigating this journey, I have learned the importance of believing in myself and the stories and real-life experiences of the previous alumni who have successfully traveled this same path, and embracing the support of those who surround me and are cheering me on. Alumni encourage you to hold on, fasten your seat belts, and ride on. We are capable of achieving great things, just as I am learning to do every Wednesday.

You are where you are supposed to be.
(Angel Moore)

When reading the comments from the previous class, it put me at ease. The emotions I was feeling at the time, excitement, nervousness and fear of failure, were put at ease by their words. “No matter what happens, show up to class.” These words will be my creed for the next eight months.

The Odyssey Project is more than just some program; it is a gateway to a better life. “The Circuit” has been a great representation of the immigrant experience in the country and I would like to focus on this for my writings. What I have learned from the Oracle as well as “The Circuit” is that life is full of hardship, but how one chooses to move forward is extremely important.

I could write a short story on my immigrant experience so far—on the complexities of navigating immigration during a time when immigrant sentiment has soiled in the country. The journey has been hard and it is still not over. I will attempt to put a human face to the immigrant experience. **(Viwe Mpurwana)**

Reading the Oracle just made me feel excited for the upcoming weeks. I liked that I saw in everyone’s letter that they stressed that the class would become a family, and you guys are the best support system for anything we have going on. That’s very reassuring.

Alice’s story “We Ate Dog Food” reminded me of “The Circuit” because the families struggled to provide for their children. Also, both of their fathers couldn’t read, which was the reason why they ate dog food to begin with.

A part of “The Circuit” I can relate to is being a father. And in the work place you have to deal with racism, biting your tongue because you have mouths you have to feed. It also comes down to having a hell of knowledge/courage to deal with the situation.

What I learned from reading the Oracle was that Odyssey is truly a life changing program because it pushes each student to go past their limits. And that’s primarily because most are already at their limit. Even I myself have my own battles that I face with a smile. So let’s just say I look forward to surpassing my limits. **(Shelton Murphy)**

Reading the Oracle was very reassuring for me. Knowing that all the feelings that I’m feeling starting this odyssey were felt once before settled me. It lets me know that I am not an odd ball.

What jumped out to me the most was Joe Robinson’s Don’t Quit in the Alumni Corner. The phrase “don’t quit” replays in my head, not just about school but with my day-to-day life. Some



days I'm ready to throw the towel in. And others I'm ready to conquer the world. But every day I won't quit!

Reading Alice's "We Ate Dog Food" brings me back to growing up in my parents' household, where bickering became slander wars. And "not finishing high school" was always one of the comments being thrown in between the two of them.

I can relate to almost all of the letters from the previous class, from first day nervousness to being overjoyed that I was selected.

When writing stories and piecing together my part in the Oracle, I just want to be original and share my story. **(Roche Palmer)**

Reading the Oracle brought me a sense of relief and made me reflect on my own journey over the past few months. If others can overcome their struggles, I know I can too. It takes immense courage to keep pushing forward, regardless of the circumstances.

I've noticed that many of these readings emphasize a crucial message: "keep going and never give up." This is incredibly reassuring.

One particular insight that resonated with me was the importance of being present. It's about fully experiencing each moment, rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. With everything happening in my life right now, I acknowledge that this chapter has been exhausting and overwhelming. I've found myself overthinking to the point of losing focus, especially with a significant opportunity right in front of me. I need to clear my mind, enjoy the journey, and embrace every moment.

From the Alumni corner, I learned a valuable lesson!!! NEVER QUIT. Life can be challenging, but perseverance is key. The story of Alice's dad working in the fields, being pulled from school during harvest time, reminded me of Francisco's similar experience. It illustrates a bold truth: everyone faces obstacles, some more daunting than others. Yet the act of showing up makes all the difference.

Reading has reinforced me and my belief that being present and resilient is fundamental. The best approach in life is to keep moving forward and adapt as we go. Embracing the moment helps us recognize that there's a greater outcome at play, even when we can't see it yet. I envision my

stories for the Oracle as before and after narratives, highlighting what I've endured and the triumphs I've achieved. **(Roncal Riley)**

Reading the responses made me feel grateful and filled with emotion. The responses were motivating and real. After reading all the responses, it gave me more confidence and lit a fire in my motivation. As I read, I would pause and say, "I can do it," and at the end of the responses I knew I could because it has been done. I felt they were guiding me on how I would do it.

There were many phrases that stood out to me, but "You got this!" and "You can do it!" jumped out at me.



When reading about the adversities, which were different for all the alumni, they finished off with “you can do this!” and “you will succeed!” They kept reminding me that they succeeded and so can I. All the letters were so moving and powerful in their own ways, but they all made sure to let me know “you can do it!” Even if it was just three words, they were burned into my thoughts and a constant reminder I can do it. I started doing my homework as soon as I finished due to the amount of motivation and support pouring from all the responses in the letters. The letters from last year’s class were amazing! I related to almost every comment because it is coming from a perspective of a journey that I myself will be experiencing too. I know that my journey will be different, but the destination will be the same because we are on the same path they used to be on.

Alice’s story reminded me of my own life and reminded me when my parents could not read, write, or speak English. I remembered the struggles they went through and how it affected everyday life. My sisters and I tried to learn English quickly to help make life easier for them. Alice’s story was a reminder of how education was placed after hard work and was not a priority before providing.

From reading the Oracle, I learned that the Odyssey Project leaves no one behind, and you are not alone on your journey to success. You do have to believe in yourself, work hard, and always show up. Remember that we have support no matter what we go through and can always ask for help.

The stories and writings we will do this year might be about our lives and where we are going. I think we will write about who we are and what we have gone through. In all honesty, I am nervous and excited to see what we will be writing about.
(Lilibeth Sobrevilla)

Reading this made me feel empowered, encouraged and excited to start my journey. I connected with Eleanor Ceaser when she said, “Thank you so much, God, for letting me get chosen for this opportunity” because that’s exactly how I felt when I was chosen: grateful and

thankful. **(JuJu Stallworth)**

My life relates to both stories because I know how it feels to not have enough food, and when you do you have to eat syrup with just bread, moving every six months because my mom could not stand the roaches we had. There was crime in the area, drugs on every corner, my sister and I fighting others in our neighborhood just to make it home. So my dad moved to Wisconsin, and when he was stable enough, he came back to Chicago to get us and better our family. **(George Sydnor)**

Overall, all stories/accounts were meaningful, motivating, assuring, etc. The words of Alfusainey Manjang stood out to me the most: “means of giving back,” “it will be worth it in the end.” For me, I’ve never been more motivated to be a part of this cohort until I realized my duty to my community to serve and empower youth (my own daughter) through modeling and echoing resilience. Knowing my impact can radiate through generations inspires and pushes me through most.



One thing that is pretty consistent through all the letters is the emphasis on receiving adequate and equitable support. Educators ARE the difference in someone's learning experience. I appreciate the support, empathy, challenging, and compassion that the letters reflect about the Odyssey staff.

I have no idea of the kinds of stories I may want to write this year. I often struggle with pinpointing where to start or where to end. However, I feel safe enough explore this with you all. I'm excited to learn, to be challenged, to be inspired, and to make a difference. **(Shaneece Taylor)**

Reading the Oracle made me emotional but also motivated. I saw a couple of familiar faces, and I am thrilled to be one of the chosen ones! What mainly caught my attention was the urge to not give up or quit. The list goes on how many things can get in the way of school work and home life to make someone unmotivated. The Oracle is a great tool to keep when things get rough. Taking a look back at the Oracle, the quotes and short wisdom will help us get through. Not only that, there's a wide range of Odyssey staff willing to help make things easier/doable.

I can relate to a lot of short stories and quotes. It's nice to not feel alone or the only person facing multiple challenges. I learned that no matter what

we go through, Odyssey will have our back. We as the students need to give it the best we've got. **(Joseph Thigpen Jr.)**

It felt inspirational and encouraging. It felt like reading words of affirmation from a loved one. "We Ate Dog Food" was a reminder of the importance of a loving support system when facing hardships in life. I related to Aaniyah in feeling I never have enough time to accomplish things. I learned that growing up is a large part of the program and from there you can flourish. I'm unsure what I might write; it depends on what I've experienced and or grown comfortable to share. As I grow in the program there's the potential for so many options. It would more than likely be about my growth and experience. **(Kharmen Thomas)**

Reading the Oracle made me feel inspired and less alone in my own fears and insecurities. As we started talking on day one about different topics, I felt unqualified to be sitting there, but once I came home and read the Oracle, I learned that Odyssey is more than a class; it is a community that will support me when I feel like giving up. It makes me excited to think about the stories I might write this year, about my own struggles and the ways I've pushed through for my kids. The Oracle gave me hope that if I keep showing up, I'll finish strong too. **(Shakila Woods)**



MOVED BY MUSIC

In class on September 24, students heard alum Rene Robinson sing and Bob Auerbach play piano. Then they wrote about music in their lives while more piano music filled the classroom.

Music means a few things to me. It means joy, it means pain, it means peace and play.

I listen to mostly R&B and pop. But I listen to country and rap as well. To me it's more about the beat and melody than it is the words.

I use music as a therapy, as the background while I cook, to party and enjoy family and friends' company, to tell a story when I don't have the courage to tell it myself, as a way to calm myself when I'm overwhelmed or to let my emotions run when I'm sad.

I use it as a memory; sometimes a song or melody takes me back to a place in time, to a memory of a deceased loved one, to a dance in the rain or a car ride, a hardship or a fun day at work.

Music can be anything and everything because that's what it is to me.

Sometimes music can explain what you're going through and be an anchor. Right now that's what Russ-Workin' On Me is for me. **(Laura Bass)**

Music is therapeutic to me. I enjoy listening to music when I'm sad, happy, cleaning, or even cooking. My favorite genre of music is Hip Hop and R&B. But sometimes I enjoy other genres like Gospel, Pop, and Reggae.

When I'm listening to music, I get into a relaxed mindset. I feel like I can focus more on certain tasks



that I may be trying to complete in a more timely fashion. **(Serene Boyd)**

Music means a lot to me. It describes the mood. There's Sad music, Happy music, Soul music, Rap, Hip-Hop. However you are feeling, there's some music you can listen to. I listen to a lot of rap music because I can relate to a lot of things they talk about due to their upbringing. But I also switch it up and listen to slower music like R&B. I listen to a little of everything. It just depends on how I'm feeling. But music can heal the soul, at least that's how I feel!!! **(Johnnell Britt)**

Music is therapy. It connects with the soul, allowing for a release of emotions. The music genre that resonates most for myself is Indie, with a slower and chill pace. You can sing about both happiness and sorrow. Indie music allows me to reflect, to slow down from the chaos that is life, the release of what I've kept inward, to focus. So much of myself, of me, is a song, one of my own.

Music can truly save lives. It has saved mine. I'm not the best at creating my own. The depths I allow myself to connect through lyrics, the tempo and beat, etc. . . . No matter the mood I feel, I'm able to connect with music at all times. **(Lisa Brown)**

Music means a lot to me. I listen to music for more reasons than I know. It is one of my biggest ways of expression.

I listen to music when I'm sad and need to be lifted up. I also listen to music when I'm angry or hurt to redirect my mood or energy. I sometimes listen to music to fuel my anger or negative thoughts, but always only to get rid of that anger and negative energy entirely. I listen to any genre or style of music that can influence me in a way I feel best needed for whatever situation I might be going through or feeling.

Music affects me so many ways it's hard to be specific. **(Richard Butler)**

I genuinely listen to mostly all genres of music. I like R&B, hip-hop, reggaeton, country, alternative, metal, almost all! To me, music provides feelings. Depending on my mood for the day, it determines what I will listen to. Being bilingual also opens doors for me to listen to even more music. Typically, I like to stay in good moods, so you'll catch me listening to mostly drill music. But if I'm down, R&B and blues are my go-to. Depending on who I'm around or environment also determines my playlist. I enjoy going to concerts even more. I can confidently say I've been to over 50+ shows. The bass, the echoes, the emotions that an artist brings are the reasons I will continue to attend many more events. **(Stacy Castillo)**

Music gives me a spiritual feeling as if your soul is into it and that you're there during the moment.

I listen to gospel music to uplift my spirit and to get me through hard times. Sometimes music is your only choice to get you through

things. There have been times when I couldn't go to nobody and the only thing I had was music by my side.

I am an emotional person so music varies for me. It can be sad for me or happy for me. Music has so many ways of healing people. Music makes me think about things like memories, and sometimes I can relate people and times to music.

(Cquemiah Clark Richmond)

Music means expression, identity.

I love all genres of music. the dusties, soul music, rap, hip hop, drill.

I also enjoy classical music when I'm very stressed.

Music is life, Music is love, Music is me!

Music can alter the energy and I think that's fascinating.

I want to learn how to play the piano.

Music helps me remember, some good and bad memories.

Music is a reminder of where I came from.

Music is food for the soul.

Music is Motivational. **(Valencia Collins)**



I listen to all types of music. One of my favorites is bachata. Salsa and merengue are next up.

Depending on my mood, music affects one differently. Listening to Bob play the music now is giving me a sense of peace and tranquility. It's so soothing and soft.

Music allows me to escape reality. It allows me to navigate my feelings. It runs through my body like electricity. It doesn't shock, just a wave coursing through, allowing my mind to be free. **(Paola Damiani)**

I absolutely love music. Whenever I am alone or in my car, I just blast the music in my ear. If I don't do that in the car, it just doesn't feel right. The louder the music the better.

One of my absolutely favorite kinds of music to listen to is Afro beats. I just love loud and drum sound music. I also love traditional cultural songs all across Africa. The drum beats to other instruments. I also love Asian traditional music, especially South Asian music. I like Pakistani and Indian songs. I grew up watching their movies and listening to their songs. Recently, I also got into listening to Arabic music (Khaliji songs) like Saudi Arabia and UAE. I don't really like listening to really slow songs, but sometimes I do and it brings me to tears. But I love listening to all different background songs, even though I don't understand most of the time. **(Tida Drammeh)**

I'm pretty open to my genres, but I go based upon my mood at the moment. If I feel excited, I play Rap music to amp me up and get my blood flowing with energy. But when I'm sad or just feeling low, I listen to gospel like R&B type. It all depends because when it's a Saturday night with my friends and we go out for drinks, some places don't let you request your own music. So I have vibed with Rock, country, blues, etc . . . Music speaks to me in ways. It allows my emotions to talk but all through music. **(Destiny Drone)**

I am very open minded when it comes to music. I love classical music, rock, EDM, R&B, pop, hip hop; it depends on my mood. I think music is really powerful. It can take you from sad to being happy or vice versa. It can say everything you're feeling but don't know how to say. I believe music touches the soul and speaks to our hearts. I've gotten goose bumps from music that I love, so it can even physically affect you.

Whenever I'm stressed out, I love to put my headphones in and zone out to my favorite songs. When I'm at concerts I feel alive and happy. Music means a lot to me, even though I am not talented musically. I wish I was because I'd always be playing. Music is therapeutic to me. While music

can be such a beautiful thing, I do think it is very influential. So, I think it's important to watch what kind of music you let into your life.

(Kiana Galloway)

Ever since I can remember, music has played a very important part in my life. I could feel the beat inside me, had my body moving and dancing to every sound. I feel like also growing up in a black household music becomes an escape. Sunday mornings church gospel, Saturday cleaning to old school R&B. I grew up singing, wanting to be a singer, writing songs, performing at talent shows. Still to this day I can hear a song and it takes me back to the time and place I first heard it, bringing back specific memories. After my brother passed, music became a little more personal to me.

I like all kinds of music: rock n roll, hard metal, and R&B is my favorite. Turn on some of Kem's music it's over. I'm singing my heart out. Music can relax me, calm me, depending on the mood I'm in but also the mood I'm getting ready for.

(Tikoya Gilmer)



Music expresses how you feel
 it makes you feel warm safe
 happy it brings joy to your ears
 heart you can get groovy sometimes
 it makes you sad it will have you
 thinking about a loved one or
 a person you are in love with.
 I listen to hip hop, R&B, rap,
 slow jams.

Music keeps me going
 when I am cleaning my apartment
 it motivates me when I am
 down it makes me happy
 when I am feeling groovy it makes
 me want to dance or makes me
 feel like I can sing
 Sometimes it tells a
 story that grabs your attention
 it can also give you a voice
 to be heard or you can relate to. **(Larry Grant)**

Music to me is a form of expressing feelings or
 thoughts.

A way to communicate things.

I listen to rap, hip-hop, Gospel, country, and even
 Instrumental.

Music to me is a good tool for calming the mind
 and releasing thoughts and feelings I feel at the
 moment. I enjoy music in my free time or when I'm
 emotionally overwhelmed.

Honestly, I thought of writing my life story as an
 album one day.

Music can also tell a story, in many forms. **(Anteijah Greer)**

My favorite music is 90s R&B. Monica, Brandy,
 SWV, Keith Sweat, Boys to Men, Mary J. etc. Most
 90s R&B was about love, the love the men had for
 their women and vice versa. We just do not get
 that in a lot of the music today. Rap music is my
 second favorite; there is a deep story in each song
 that tells about the artist's past, and the fast dance
 tempo makes me move a lot.



Another secret music love I have is jazz music. Jazz
 makes me feel happy sometimes, just relaxed; it
 just depends on the style of Jazz that is playing.
(Shataya Hall)

Music is very inspirational to me. I love Gospel
 music, I can be in the worst mood, but if I turn
 on pandora Tamela Mann Station the words of
 all the songs played from different Gospel honors
 brings me joy. Anthony Hamilton: I love how deep
 and soulful his music is; it teaches so much about
 love and how to love, and he prays to God about
 love. Sometimes it can be sad, when someone
 is crying about the mistakes they made to the
 special someone they loved. Or there's that
 new disrespectful rap music that the younger
 generation enjoys, and I also dislike the influence
 it can have on the youth. Music can also be very
 influential. **(Jacqueline Hawkins)**



I have always loved music! The effect that music has on me is the ability to change and improve my mood. Even when I'm feeling down, it can increase my mood. When I need to cook or clean, it gives me the confidence and ability to do things at a different pace. I love to listen to music that has a message. I listen to all types of music and different artists as well. Music is a part of my daily life! **(Brittany Hughes)**

Music? Music means so very much to me. It expresses how I feel at the moment, and later in the day, it brings me pleasure, but sometimes it can bring pain. But most often it's uplifting to my spirit, my soul, my very being. Music affirms me, music expresses words I want to say but sometimes can't; it fills me when I'm empty. Music is a language that I can hear constantly in my ears. Music puts me to sleep, music even wakes me up and affirms to me that I can fly, if I want. Music is a universal language. **(Angel Moore)**

Whenever I feel down and depressed, I often listen to depressing music. To some this way may seem unproductive, but the music is able to help me sort



through whatever issue is before me. After some time of listening, I find strength in knowing what my issue is and attempting to remedy the problem. I prefer blues, particularly Otis Redding is my favorite. When I listen to his songs, I'm transported back in time and it's often a good experience for me. It's kind of like you are reminded of an old childhood moment that brings joy to your heart every time.

The kind of music I listen to depends on my mood. When I'm sad I prefer classical music, and when I'm excited or happy about something then it's blues. In summary, music allows me to take a step back and address whatever emotional distress I'm going through at the time. **(Viwe Mpurwanda)**

To me music is one of the many ways to unlock the soul. You can write and pour all of your emotions into it, or you can release your negative energy by listening to it. You can send a message or tell a story, depending on where your heart it.

Depending on the music that I'm listening to, it might motivate me for the particular task that I need to complete. It helps me get it done fast and efficient as I stay on beat. **(Shelton Murphy)**



Music to me means a lot. It is a really good coping mechanism. I listen to it at any given time of the day. No matter if I am happy, sad, or angry, it helps. Different genres as well. I find myself listening to more soulful music when I am overjoyed. When I am upset, I find myself listening to more upbeat or hard music to take the edge off and to release whatever it is that I am feeling at that given time. I also feel that it can be very therapeutic for me as well. Just simple tones or even rain sounds could soothe me. I am open to any and all music; I love to hear a tone. Music is a way for me to escape from my reality. **(Roche Palmer)**



the way music makes me feel, but it scares me because it is powerful. **(Lilibeth Sobrevilla)**

I love listening to 90s R&B. It gets me through a lot of tough times. "Music is good for the soul" is what they say. My soul dances a little when I hear R&B music. I can relate, I feel it, it's

like they are directly speaking to me about love, happiness, a feeling that I never want to let go of. It gets my body moving and connects to my heart. Depending on the song, it makes me sad, Joyful, motivated, and sometimes even angry. **(Juju Stallworth)**

Honestly, I listen to whatever my ears grasp. It's all about the passion behind music. From country to R&B to hip hop, I love it all. Music is therapy to me and helps whatever mood I'm in.

I feel like whatever I can't express or control, I instantly put on music and it's either going to help me reflect on life or help me forget about what I'm going through.

Music is a bunch of tunes that speak for and to me. It's also like a jump start for me. I can get work done, no matter if it's schoolwork, housework, or work. I feel like without music, life would not be the same. **(Roncal Riley)**

To me music means emotion and a way of expressing yourself. I listen to all kinds of music depending on how I feel. I can go from classical music to Rock. I am not picky with my music selection, but I need it to match me emotionally. Music can affect me in a good or bad way. I feel music can move my moods and emotions. I tend to always listen to the tune before I listen to the words. I've always connected emotionally with music; and I feel that's why I prefer reading. I try to listen but my emotions always get involved. I love

Music to me means bringing you joy, reflection of your day or your year. It tells me a lot of stories about other people's lives that i can relate to. I listen to hip hop & R&B and a little Teddy Pendergrass. I listen to a lot of what my parents listen to as well: a lot of old school R&B. **(George Sydnor)**



Music means a lot to me. I truly feel it can capture feelings and experiences in a unique way. I listen to many different genres of music: Rap, R&B, classical, pop, 80s rock, etc. One of my favorite genres is Lofi, which is only beats, chords, and instrumentals. There are many songs I can listen to that give me the same feeling as the first time I heard it. That can be rage, happiness, pain/sadness, motivation, or apathy.

Music is used as forms of expression but also as a way to educate and teach. Nursery rhymes exist because of the cadence and tones they carry. It specifically helps with language development for babies and toddlers. Music is one of the greatest creations. It can tell stories from decades ago to give the listener true perspective and resonance. **(Shaneece Taylor)**

Music is very instrumental in my upbringing. When I was younger, my mom would put on old-school R&B and soul music from her generation. My grandma knew every old-school song that came on the radio. She would sing the song word for word, from start to finish. Sadly, my grandmother is not with us anymore. When I hear her music come on, I just sit and reminisce on her singing and tapping her feet to the beat. Not to mention she had a

beautiful voice and I always told her so. In my own world I sing and play some of the classic songs she would play. I miss my grandma so much. Music was part of her everyday life. **(Joseph Thigpen Jr.)**

Music plays a critical role in human experience. It often expresses words we can't find effortlessly. Music is layered poetry; it is encompassing and embracing. It can serve as a bridge connecting individuals from diverse backgrounds. Music enables us to understand emotions at a depth like no other medium. It can provide a lifeline in difficult times or serve as a release we didn't know we needed—a safe space that we may lack in human engagement. Music has a voice that resonates and endures even through the test of time. It is like a breath of fresh air when there is pain in my soul. Music embodies history, art, and literature in all its forms. To me, music is the essence of the soul. **(Kharmen Thomas)**

I like to listen to R&B (slow jamz). Music is therapeutic for me. I can switch it up based on my mood. I also like gospel music, but I feel it sounds better at church. You can feel the words. Music to me is energy, healing, and really whatever you need it to be. It can be used for bonding. **(Shakila Woods)**



LOVING THE AUERBACH LOVE STORY

Students read two stories Emily Auerbach published in the Wisconsin State Journal about her parents' journey out of poverty, long-lived marriage, survival of adversity, and generosity towards the Odyssey Project.

The story of Bob Auerbach is truly inspirational, and I think it highlights the fact that nothing in life is ever certain. His story of when he was 10 years old and he had to open the door for the Gestapo while his father ran out the back reminded me of a story my mother once told me of when she was a child. When the "apartheid" police would come to my grandfather's farm in South Africa, my mother would be given the guns that she had to hide down by the river. During apartheid my grandfather often kept weapons which were used in the "struggle" and as a result faced many police raids.

I think that my mother's story and your father's story highlight the true reach of this program. Two people who have been directly or indirectly affected by two of history's worst atrocities based solely on discrimination, Holocaust & Apartheid, can come together and choose to do more for their society. Apartheid used to make me very angry and vengeful when I was younger, but as I have grown, I have found that it has forced me to be more empathetic.

Do you believe your experience of Nazi Germany has made you more empathetic as well? In other words, we have turned discrimination into inclusiveness and Odyssey is highlighting it. One could choose to be bitter and give up, or you can



make a choice and be that change you want to see in the world.

Thank you for embodying the best of human nature. Through the way you loved your wife, you showed us what true love really is. Love and humility are what I have learnt from these stories.
(Viwe Mpurwandi)

This is the golden love that shines through adversity. In my world where love often felt transactional and conditional, I am drawn to this story of a couple whose love appears to transcend the barriers of poverty, religion, and differing backgrounds. This couple inspires admiration for their unwavering commitment and genuine affection for each other. While I often find it difficult to relate to their experience, their love story can serve as a lens through which I can experience the many forms of love and the qualities that make it truly golden.
(Angel Moore)

After reading the two stories, I admire the love Bob and Wanda shared. I believe in relationships, especially in marriage, couples should always stick together no matter what. Like told in the stories, there were people against their marriage, and they even lost their dream home. And with all of that, Bob and Wanda chose to rise above negativity and remain a strong unit together. To me this is a true representation of love and dedication to one another.
(Serene Boyd)

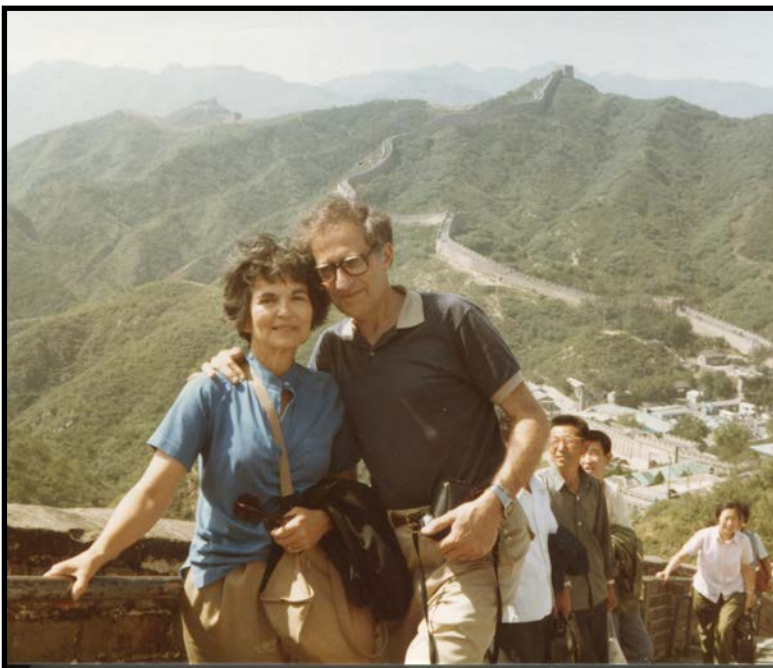
Wow! Both of these stories are profound. I needed to take a moment to gather myself and my emotions. What I read was beautiful and authentic. The marriage and love story is one for the ages. Despite warnings, hardship, and simply life, they never gave up on one another. As I continued to read more, the love and admiration is carried through Bob's volunteering and contributions.

Perseverance is a key theme I picked up with each reading. My personal views align with what has been shared. May we all find love and companionship as Wanda and Bob did. Take our past and mold it into our futures, not letting the pain over-consume who we are as people. As I continue my journey, I will use Odyssey as a gift to reach others, to bring awareness with encouragement. This was a story of love, deep love, family and community intertwined, all things I want for my future and family. **(Lisa Brown)**

62 years of marriage: I'm flabbergasted this happened, and I don't even know what to think. I feel as if I have just discovered a precious jewel, and I don't know what my next step is. In 2025 you don't hear about marriages lasting, and if you do



it's always someone you never met so it doesn't feel real. However, now I am going to meet him, and I have a million questions. Was it love at first sight? Did you both face a lot of discrimination after marriage? Did you make sure she always felt loved? What's your secret to a long marriage full of love? The values Bob and Wanda applied in their marriage to be equals and respect each other is something that was not common back then; how did people feel about this back then? Was it your values that made a strong foundation for your marriage to last? I am excited and honored to meet Bob. I can't wait to hear him play the piano and listen to his love story. **(Lilibeth Sobrevilla)**



Wow! When I dream about marriage, I absolutely dream about having a wonderful marriage like your parents, a marriage built on love that will last a lifetime. I want to come up and grow with my spouse, build a life together, and face the world together. I admire the story and hope that I too will have the same experience. **(JuJu Stallworth)**

Love, love is a beautiful thing. When I picture love, I see the real, the good, and the bad. This was not always the picture of love I had. I used to only see the good. Having gone through a failed marriage, when I now think of love I picture happiness, everlasting memories, laughter, and feelings of completeness and wholeness. **(Shataya Hall)**

This story inspired me and also made me think about my own life and my own relationship. I come from a family that believes in the power of education; that education can and will break generational poverty. I want to not only preach this but also practice what I preach and be an inspiration to my children just as Bob and Wanda were an inspiration to Emily and the Odyssey.

I've been with my fiancé since I was 17 years old; we got engaged last year. Both my mother and sister don't really think we should be married. Their opinions don't matter to me. I believe like Bob I've found my equal. We both believe we are each other's equal and no one has the last say-so over the other. With the love we have for each other and the way we value our kids, our family, and one another, I know in my heart our love will carry us until death.

I'm so inspired by Bob and how he continues to give back to the community and how he gives back to Odyssey. My goal is to be able to be in the position to give back to my community and beyond!

I would be interested in knowing if Bob felt comfortable sharing his experience about those two years escaping Germany during the Holocaust era. How did he and his family escape? When the Gestapo came to the door, what was his purpose? Did he take him or someone in his family? How did this experience help shape him and the life he has today? What impact did it have? Did this have an impact on his mental health? PTSD? Anxiety? If so, how did he deal with all this while maintaining a career and marriage? (**Laura Bass**)

Reading these stories makes me think of myself in so many ways. I want to better myself not only for myself and my family but also to be an inspiration for the next. I want to be able to give back to the community just like Bob, and to be able to use my education to help guide my future. I love how you and your family chose to do what Berea College did for your parents!

I find it fascinating that they only spent about 500 dollars on their wedding because I always thought that all the money people spend on weddings nowadays is insane and quite ridiculous. I've always pictured my wedding as something that would be small and intimate. It's crazy to think that people would have such strong opinions or feelings on who the next person chooses to pursue, especially because they aren't the ones that are going to be with them "for the rest of their lives."

Reading about Bob's upbringing was sorrowful to me. It touched me because I felt like kids were

innocent. I loved how he didn't let his upbringing define who he is as a person. He still chose to be the difference in society. He beat the odds and came out successful in the end. (**Roche Palmer**)

The stories were great. They explain where they met and how the marriage was, and events that happened throughout the marriage. Some were against the marriage because of their two different religions. I'm not really sure what love is. (**Johnnell Britt**)



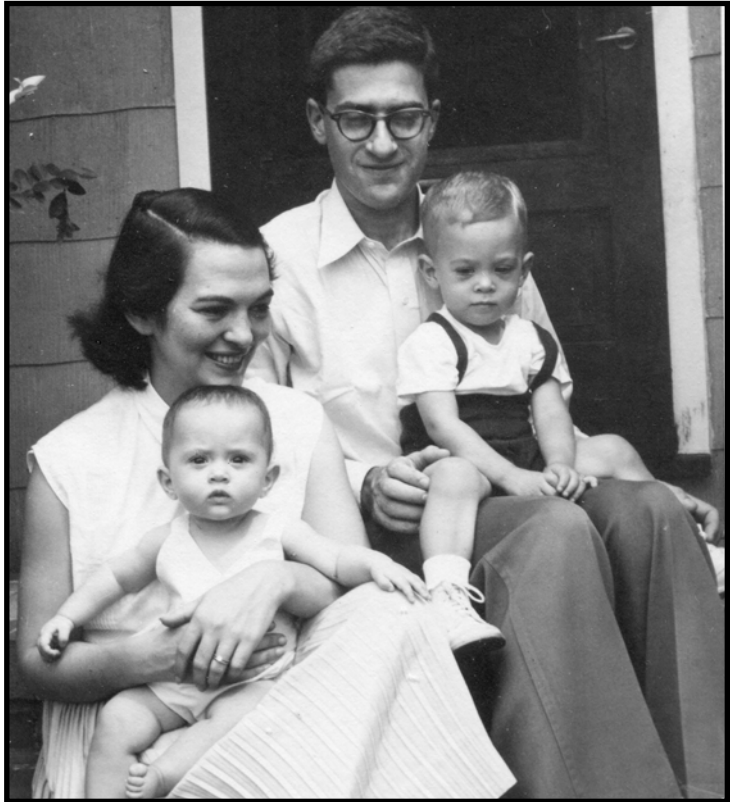
I can relate in a sense to when Wanda was pulled aside and essentially warned about Bob because he came from a different background. Although no one pulled me aside and said anything, I knew some people in my family disliked the fact that I was dating outside of my race, and even more when I had children that are mixed race. I didn't care. We eventually got married and have a beautiful blended family.
(Paola Damiani)

First, I'd like to say Bob and Wanda's love is truly captivating. I love how you said their marriage thrives on absolute equality and respect. Unfortunately, that is rare. So, when true, healthy strong love is present, it's pretty magical. I didn't see much healthy love growing up. I am trying to show my daughter what that looks like. I think it's important to see so that she doesn't ever settle for less. Even though I don't know Bob or Wanda, I could feel their strength through their story. It made me smile many times.

Another thing that stuck out to me was Bob's experience when he was ten. How scared he must have been! What must it have been like to have to flee your home or face death? The Holocaust was so evil and stole so much from so many. I would like to commend Bob for his bravery and for his strength to still be such a kind and caring person. I would also thank Bob for helping us have an opportunity like Odyssey. Lastly, I would ask him what his favorite memory with Wanda is.
(Kiana Galloway)

I love that in the story Emily wrote about her parents, she spoke about how her father and mother were devoted to each other and how both cherished equality and respect in their marriage. Bob was against the "head of the household" title and felt everyone was one. (Destiny Drone)

This story is truly heartwarming. Despite facing challenges from their backgrounds and the skepticism of others, their unwavering devotion to one another is genuinely inspiring. I admire how Bob recognizes that being the head of the



household isn't solely a man's responsibility; rather, it should be an equal partnership. His deep respect for her and their equal commitment to one another speaks volumes about their love and strength as a couple.

It's truly inspiring to see how they support each other. I truly am sorry for the loss of Wanda and I just hope she's proud of Bob because despite the hardest thing to live without, he's still living.

I hope one day I can find my true love who respects me and adores me the way Bob did Wanda, someone who is equally yoked despite the challenges and differences in life. (Roncal Riley)

It's very refreshing to see Bob and Wanda's love grow beyond their years. It gives me hope to know that there truly is nothing more powerful than love. They remind me of my parents, who both equally met young and with their love left their home countries filled with poverty and unfortunately crimes. Their love also blossomed through their children to provide stability. Unfortunately, as Bob and Wanda did, they faced a lot of discrimination.
(Stacy Castillo)

It made me feel much better about love and marriage, that there is real love and you can find it. If you want something or someone, it doesn't matter about race because love has no color. I feel like Bob; we are equal. We do this together. This made me smile. **(Jacqueline Hawkins)**

Reading these two stories gave me faith, hope, and grace in religions. I feel that this story helped me with society today on it being OK and acceptable to date someone outside of your race and religion.

One thing I can relate to is discrimination. Being a black woman and dating outside of your race is a big thing. I've seen stories of women dating outside of their race and the other race's family did not want to accept it due to her being black. **(Cquemiah Clark-Richmond)**

I aspire to marry someone for as long as your parents, to be able to love that long but also overcome so much discrimination, and to continue to push each other for the best, to further educate together and create family and fortune. **(Tikoya Gilmer)**

The thing that intrigued me the most and that I can relate to the most is that their love was really a spiritual connection. That's the most important

thing for love and marriage. I also believe it goes hand and hand with aging, too. The stronger your love and the longer you live in peace and harmony, the longer your lifespan becomes in general. It seems like Wanda and Bob are proof of that with their longevity. And I think the key to that is finding a partner that's your intellectual equal. That in itself is a true blessing from God. I would ask Bob what is his secret to longevity and does he get more spiritually acute the older he gets. **(Shelton Murphy)**

Both stories were passionate and heart filling. I love love and marriage. Growing old with someone and just loving them forever: this is my plan with my current day partner until and after death. **(Brittany Hughes)**

It's interesting to see Bob's views on roles/duties of each spouse in a marriage. I believe for that time, this viewpoint may have been a lot more taboo and unacceptable. Sharing responsibilities in relationships feels more balanced personally and seems to align with modern day views. The marriage alone was "taboo" as well with the social/political climate at the time. It seems that there was a lot of internal and external conflict. Love has no bounds or limits, simply is looking for a home to flourish in. **(Shaneece Taylor)**



These stories showed the power of love, respect, and longevity. Bob and Wanda built a love/marriage on equality and devotion, even through hardship. Through struggles, loss, and change, they stayed devoted to each other and the goal of helping others. Love and generosity can have a lasting legacy. **(Shakila Woods)**

I can relate to the story because my mom and dad have been together for 34 years, not married, but they have been in love every stage. My view on marriage is up and down because my parents weren't married but have been together for 34 years. They show me that you can have love without being married and having love for their children makes them stronger in the relationship. **(George Sydnor)**

As I read through the two stories, I couldn't help but think about me and my partner. We've been together since seventh grade of middle school. That makes 13 years we've managed to keep our relationship alive and strong. That still amazes me sometimes. We've grown up together, been through every awkward phase, every personal change, and every challenge that life threw our way.

Back in middle and high school, people used to tell us all the time that we "weren't going to make it" or "you're too young to know what love is" or the classic "there are more fish in the sea." It felt like nobody believed in us except for us. We weren't trying to prove anything to anyone; just knowing we shared the same struggles and upbringing always kept us close.

We've watched each other grow from kids just trying to figure life out. And the fact we're still here 13 years later, stronger than ever, is something I'll never take for granted. It hasn't always been perfect, but we've always fought for us. I'm so proud of how far we've come and how much love we've poured into our relationship over the years. So, yeah, when I read those stories, it hit close to home. What we have? It's rare and it's real!
(Joseph Thigpen Jr.)

I believe that love is a journey between two people to be celebrated no matter their differences. I feel love is part of what bridges the gaps that cause discrimination in teaching how to set aside differences as well as challenge our bias in the face of its warm embrace. My values align with the ones shown, as with goals to break down barriers and counterproductive gender roles.



I have admiration for their drive, as I have a similar motivation. The willingness of your father to keep motivated and continue to be a positive person even in his grief is inspirational. I am someone who understands the opportunities I have been given that others have not been afforded. Knowing that I've been given rare opportunities, I wish to be capable to pay it forward one day. These news, beliefs, and values are my reasoning for pursuit of my nursing career. It's important for me to make a positive impact and address the disparities in our healthcare system. I strive to be able to break down the barriers in accessibility for the many communities affected due to the intersectionality they fall under.

Your parents are a great example of the love we all strive for. I believe love is a journey with much uncertain territory, but we must embrace the different and unknown in its pursuit. I agree that it has no definitive "look" and can come from the most "random" places. When it comes to love, it always seems to overcome adversities. I believe in breaking down the societal "norms" and roles imposed on our marriages, love journey, and households. **(Kharmen Thomas)**

NOTICING NATURE

I remember my first trip out of state to my dream state, California. Visiting Santa Monica Beach was the highlight. It was the most beautiful beach I'd ever seen, with soft sand, ocean waves, and the pier stretching into the water. I loved watching the boats out at sea and people walking along the shoreline, just enjoying the day, living great.

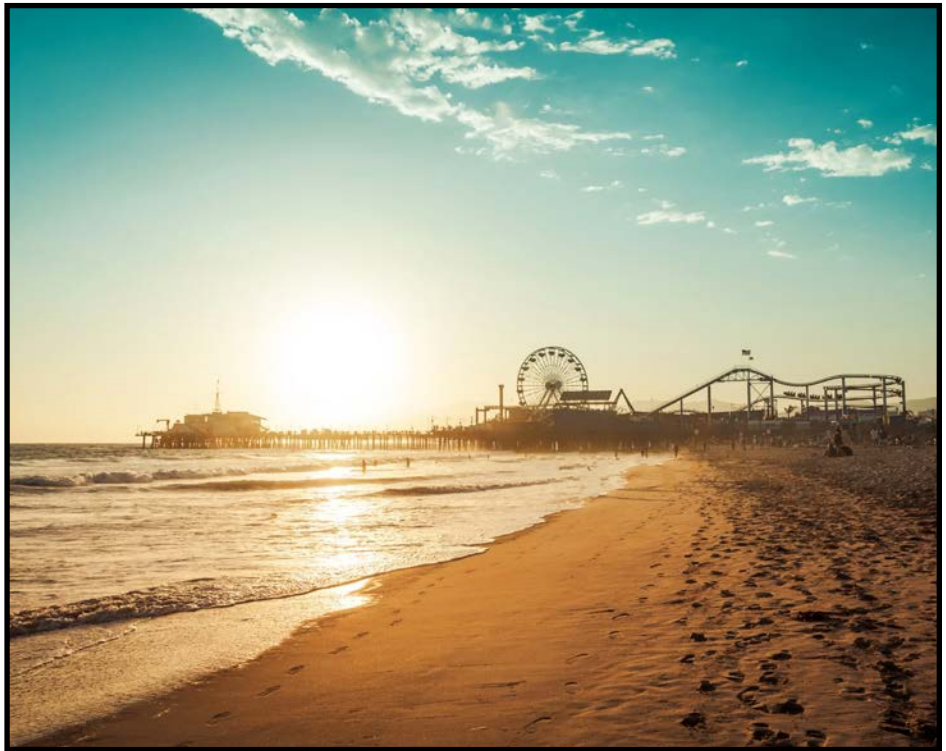
What really stuck with me was the sunny, breezy, full of life vibes I just couldn't get enough of. I even remember a man pushing an ice cream cart, ringing a little bell as he sold popsicles. I grabbed one, and it tasted perfect under the beautiful California sun. That day was simple, a moment that made me fall even more in love with travel and the magic of new places.

Take me back! **(Joseph Thigpen Jr.)**

This past week I went on a vacation to California. It was my first time touching, seeing, smelling the ocean (beach). I could hear the waves splashing back and forth and smelled salt from the body of water. It had a distinct smell.

I walked on the sand first with shoes and felt my feet getting heavy, stuck in the sand. Once the shoes came off, my feet molded in the sand, soft, softer than any sand I've touched, warm. As I walked into the ocean, the water covered my feet, cold but warm at the same time. Seaweed and other ocean plants got stuck in between my toes. The wind was blowing just the right breeze, not too heavy not too low, just right. **(Tikoya Gilmer)**

It had been years since I came home to visit, and the ocean was calling me. I left a bit before dawn



and arrived as the sun was coming out. I parked and took my shoes off as I walked to the shore. Stepping into the cool soft sand, I quietly walked towards the ocean's edge. The familiar scent of fish, earth, and salt filled my nostrils, intensifying as I reached the ocean. I was instantly mesmerized by the ocean's sky-canvas, as if the colors dripped perfectly mirroring the sky's beauty. I began taking in the colors of the blue sky as the sunrise seemed to blush with tones of red and pink, with a kiss of orange. Scattered clouds were magically floating, reluctant to part and say goodbye. It was as if the sun was setting fire to the water's surface as it rose from the depths of the ocean.

Soaking in the rays of beauty, before the sound of the waves crashing into the rocks broke me from my trance, I began walking deeper into the icy waters as the coldness seeped into my bones. With no regrets, in a swift motion I dove into the endless waves of tranquility. The coldness no longer fazed me as it wiped my troubles away. I felt at peace, as the ocean gently embraced me, all my worries leaving me. **(Lillibeth Sobrevilla)**

One day I remember I was working for a construction/conservation crew. We went to the conservation site to do a trail and cut trees. As we started, the head guy decided to knock down a nest that was on a tree we were cutting. It turned out to be a wasp's nest and they chased and stung him. He had to go to a hospital and be out of work for a while. **(Johnnell Britt)**



and appeared realer than the human eye's conceptualization. They didn't appear to move, just to remain present in the current moment. This current moment felt like a mutual escape from reality. What felt like a timeless moment in the 5D (dimension) was an hour and a half in the 3D. an instance of infinity.

(Shaneece Taylor)

Walking down the bike path towards the lake shore, I hear the waves crashing against the rocks and I see the blue sky above with a beautiful piercing sun. I skip a rock and take a seat on a bench, pulling out my diary

Fall of 2020, some friends and I took a girls' trip to Northern Wisconsin. There was a moment when I was lying on a dock looking out towards the lake. My friend was paddleboarding without a life vest, which caused me so much anxiety until she was out of view.

to jot down my thoughts influenced by the calming sound of the waves and the earthy scent around me. As the sun sets, I pause to wonder what's beyond the horizon. Surrounded by people in the park but only listening to the waves, I smile in the moment. But instant reality hits, and now it's my time to walk away. **(Roncal Riley)**

It became a moment of quality time between me and the world. The warm sun hugged me tightly as I relaxed into comfort and safety. My mental fog was conquered by the hymns of birds and the songs of the water. The crashes against the dock reminded me of a slowed ultra-sound, heartbeat-paced, rhythmic, consistent. The sunlight shimmered as it danced upon the lake like liquid gold. It was bright, blinding even. Similar to sparks from electric currents, the sight was a never-ending hypnosis.

I've never seen the clouds so defined. They were big, puffy,



The chaos of the day, cars zooming past, honking horns, engines revving and tires screeching. School letting out, kids running and screaming in excitement to the cars. A moment of serenity in nature is more than needed. A hike in Devil's Lake should do it.

The air was hot and thick on the winding trails. trees towering over me and the leaves dancing with the wind, some crackling and crunching under my feet, birds chirping a gentle chirp, and squirrels shaking branches as they jump from tree to tree. With every step closer to the top, the noise of the busy world drifted away being replaced by tranquility. At the top, the sound of stillness. I scoot my butt toward the edge of the rock and dangle my feet over the edge. I see an eagle soaring, making a piercing high-pitched cry that almost gives off an eerie sound.

Taking deep breaths, inhaling the essence of the lake and sunset in front of me, I feel the quiet and



stillness in my bones. Slowly the noise from the day drifts away. I close my eyes to take in another moment of tranquility before it's time to head back down the mountain to take a splash in the cool lake. **(Shataya Hall)**

I am not an outdoor person, so I will tell you about the time I went hiking. I was forced to hike for some friendship's sake. The path and stones are

dirt. Each step becomes harder and harder on my bones. The trail ascends in smug ascent. Each turn has a cruel torment. The sun is just brutal on my neck and the sweat won't stop. The view I have yet to reach and dread. They keep saying that it will be peaceful and mindful when we get there, but all I feel is my burning legs. And I hope to see it soon. When we get there, all they see is a mountain's gray immensity. But what I see is a long way down. I would prefer some cold drink in my hand. **(Tida Drammeh)**



This past weekend, I took my son fishing, something he showed interest in during the early summer after seeing people near the lake. The sun was beaming hot waves into our faces until our cheeks were as red as this pen's ink. The water smelled of fish and mildew combined. Yet the wind blew gently through my hair, the only thing keeping me from going back home to the a/c.



My son noticed near the lily pads that floated around the dock my favorite flower, a lotus! He made it his goal to gift me that lotus. But the dilemma was that it was unreachable. He said, 'I think I can catch it with my hook!' So he reeled his fishing line back and with all his might threw his hook in the water. Not once but three times, each time was unsuccessful, but he didn't give up. He threw his line back in once more, and to his surprise, he felt a pull! 'It's pulling, Mama!' he said, and in a hurry I guided him to reel his line and pull back.

There it was, a Bluegill! Its scales were gleaming with the sun's rays, dripping water and squirming side to side. Now even stronger was the smell of fish. 'I got it, Mama!' he said. 'I got my own fish, all by myself! Are you proud of me, Mama?' And beyond proud I was. Although I didn't get that lotus flower, I did get a wide smile and excitement from my baby. Nothing compares to that. **(Stacy Castillo)**

On a humid Florida summer day picking up sand dusted seashells, my cousin and I ran closer to the shore, yelling as our toes sunk in and out of the mushy, wet sand. As the warm, clear water began to cover our toes, we proceeded to take more steps until a small tide hit our butts, causing us to plunge the rest of our bodies in. Filled with laughter, we flapped our arms at each other. The lukewarm water had a taste of salt as it slid down my lips. Enjoying this moment, I began to float,

letting the waves sway my body. **(Serene Boyd)**

Lying down in the hot sun, my face is dripping wet and turning red. While I move my toes in the sand, I listen to the waves whispering and the babies splashing and laughing. **(Antejah Greer)**



I believe nature is therapy. My family and I love to go camping. We call our trips vacations because we get to escape society for a little while. That is to us a vacation.

I remember one of my favorite camping trips was at Governor Dodge State Park. This park is filled with beautiful green trees and a big lake. The lake sparkles in the sunlight. There are families on the beach playing with their dogs, kids building sandcastles, people having picnics and grilling. Everyone is having a great time, with so many smiles and so much laughter.

As my family and I look for a spot on the beach for ourselves, the sun beams down on us. We start to get a little hot and anxious to find a nice shady area to lay our towels and blankets down. Thankfully by the beach, there are some grassy areas. We find a spot under a tree and finally relax. My daughter wastes no time. She drops all of her belongings and heads straight for the sand. My boyfriend Joseph and I get our things settled and discuss plans for the rest of our night. I always pack snacks, so I start to pull some sandwiches out of our mini cooler. We enjoy our snacks while watching my daughter play in the sand. When she finally gets bored with that, she comes to recruit Joseph to play in the water. He replies excitedly, 'Sure, Lauren!' They ask if I want to join. I tell them I'll stay with our stuff.

I sit and observe my surroundings. I can see people canoeing in the distance. After a while Lauren comes up to get her snacks and we all decide to set up camp. We pull into our campsite. It's grassy and there is a fire pit with a grate. There's also a picnic table. I help Joseph with the tent and then I find two perfect trees for our hammock. Lauren is looking for sticks to help with kindling. Before we settle in for dinner, we go on a short hike. There are so many trails to choose from. We find a trail that leads to a waterfall and stream. Wisconsin

really is so beautiful. The trail is called Stephen Falls Trail. The sound of the water rushing down, hitting the rocks, and forming a stream was truly therapeutic. There's an opening behind the rocks where the water is rushing down. The pressure of the water is perfect, not too fast, not too slow. We follow a stone path behind the rock wall. There we explore the mossy stones and take pictures.

After this we hike back to our campsite. Joseph starts a fire in the fire pit for dinner. I wash our vegetables with some water we brought along. We start preparing dinner while Lauren sits by the fire. After we eat we hang out for a bit by the fire, making s'mores and telling stories. As the fire dies, we make our way into the tent and say goodnight.

(Kiana Galloway)

As the sun went down below the horizon, the backyard transformed into a cozy haven. The flickering lights of the barn fire were in the air and laughter from the kids, their happiness bringing joy to their father and me. The sweet scent of freshly cut grass lingered in the air from earlier in the day. The warmth from the fire as I laid on the blanket made my heart full of joy with my arm around my husband. It was a joyful time spent with my family and our pets. **(Jacqueline Hawkins)**



I love being in Puerto Rico. I love how the wind blows through my hair and how the sun shines on my skin. I can feel the warmth of the rays flowing through my body. When we go to the beach, you can see right to the bottom. The sand's on my toes as the current flows through.

(Paola Damiani)

My first time seeing the Pacific Ocean took my breath away. It was 2020, the year of Covid. Being outside was safe and peaceful. The waves were growing as they were nearing the shore, crashing down with a rush of rocks below. Although the water was cold as ice, the internal feeling was so nice. I was a mermaid in my mind, even just for a moment. **(Lisa Brown)**

I once was on the Island of Whispers, free diving in the sea of imagination. The water shimmered like liquid glass, inviting and beautiful, but beauty can



be deceiving. Suddenly, I was stung by a lionfish, piercing through my skin like icicles. I felt the sweat on my forehead, as dehydration set in. The vibrant colors of the underwater world became dark. I could feel my energy slipping away like sand through my fingers. But I knew I was dying, so I accepted my fate.



In that moment, I surrendered to the darkness lingering in around my vision. I closed my eyes. Suddenly a ray of hope splashed on the waves. It was a glimmer of light, breaking through the shadows that had threatened to bury me. The water around me now sparkled as if the sand had found its way beneath the surface, illuminating the deep with a golden tone. I opened my eyes, drawn to the radiant glow that danced on the waves, a soft voice calling me back. **(Angel Moore)**

Walking on the dock at Tenney Park where my father used to fish, a huge bright monarch butterfly that nobody could miss. Sitting picture perfect on the lavender wildflower, unbothered by well-organized busy bumble bees. Me and the Monarch made eye contact and that's when we became friends. The wind was calm and the water still, perfect fishing weather. **(Valencia Collins)**



self to just lay a slight chance to slip and get soaked away and become lost like my thoughts or my life. Or as I wished!

Sadly, but as I take a sip of whatever choice of the devil's juice I've decided to poison myself with, I sip, and sip, and sip until I feel 'free,' as I call it, but to the police they would say I'm intoxicated and impaired to drive. But to me I feel just fine. I always gaze into the sky watching all the empty spots, looking at the stars wishing I

could just click my heels three times and become a kid again, wishing upon the stars for magic to happen! But this is my reality . . .

As for any cold, dark, empty day or night, I have found myself by the cold, breezy lake. I don't have a 'favorite spot.' I usually unlock my phone, go to my maps, put my view in satellite, and find a trail that has a lake along the way. On these days which I come across so often, I always have my necessity to help me cope and regain sanity and give my brain clarity.

As I let THAT soak in, I always head back home and praise God. I thank him for all blessings as I ride home with all four windows down, soaking in the smell of late night food on State St. to smelling gas because my car is always having issues. I accept, I smile, and I see that I'm a special person all those stars in the sky were smiling at. **(Destiny Drone)**

As I approach, the grass is wet because for some odd reason the grass is always moist. I don't know if it's from the cold moist air that nightfall does to the atmosphere, but I hate it when my feet get wet or my shoes get muddy. Oh well, I tell myself. I didn't come here to complain; I came for peace. As I approach the high rocks that sit along the edge of the grass, it is about two inches away from touching, two or maybe three feet from the edge, following the immediate ten to a trillion feet of water just waiting for my poor innocent non- swimming



Ants and the Water Hose

I tore through fields in the Louisiana heat
 Grass-stained toes, the wind felt sweet.
 My 'fro flew free, the sky so wide,
 'Til fire red ants burned on my legs and sides.
 They bit and they stung, I shouted and cried.
 The smell of dirt, the sting, the cries,
 the tears welled hot in my startled eyes.
 Then Mama came running, voice sharp and close.
 She grabbed the green garden hose.
 Cool water splashed, a saving rain,
 Washing the red ants, while easing the pain.
 Although it burned, I laughed at last,
 Summer wild memories, forever cast.
(Brittany Hughes)



There She Goes ...

There she goes,
 Off down the hill she strolls,
 Listening as the birds murmur through the sky,
 Unaware of time passing her by,
 There she goes,
 Swaying through the winds,
 As the breezes brush past her cold skin,
 There she goes,
 Walking with no destination,
 Taking step after step with no hesitation,
 Enjoying her strolls,
 There she goes
(Roche Palmer)

As I meditate in the woods on the riverbank next
 to an otter
 I close my eyes inhaling and exhaling slowly until
 my heartbeat gets calmer
 I try to sync my breaths to the wind
 and my thoughts to the water
 but my heart syncs with the earth.
 Gaia's what you can call her.
 When you're in tune with nature, there are so
 many gifts she can offer
 you can unlock magic like the kids in Harry Potter
 or even learn to talk to animals so you can
 meditate with an otter. **(Shelton Murphy)**



I walk where rivers sing
 Beneath the blossoms of spring
 Each petal opens with softness and bling
 Bees land to spread their wings
 The garden rises with nice green leaves
 I feel the spirit in the air
 A gentle pulse, a holy care
 As I walked through the field,
 it was bright but also gave me chills
 God gives me light while nature appears
 I've got the glory of wind and air
(Cquemiah Clark-Richmond)



Still of the Night

From the daily shuffle to the solitude of night
 In the settling of the sun comes a shift into glistening moonlight
 With the silencing of the world a crescendo in nature's song
 Whether an owl's hoot or the cricket's notes belonged
 Following a shift in the sky the stars enter my long gaze
 My mind enters clarity from all the societal haze
 Barefoot and grounding feeling the tickle of the grass
 No more shrieking horns and brakes' abrupt sounds like breaking glass
 The wind's soft whisper caresses the surface of my skin
 Inciting my heart's song to echo within
 Quiet enough I mentally sit in reflection intensely alongside the moon
 Beautiful melodies engulf me so I synchronize with the tune
 Resonating illumination throughout the inky skies of night
 Hurling back to the chaos adjacent drowning the allure in sunlight
 Back to anticipation again for the day to be done
 The conquest of the encroaching epoch again ought to be won
 While festering interlude invades until I return
 to my Peace in the Still of Night **(Kharmen Thomas)**



As I float along the ocean blue,
 no sound besides the waves crashing onto
 the sides of the Carnival cruise.

I sat upon the deck alone,
 the cool breeze of the air unknown
 The ray of the sun beamed down the boat,
 Charging the spirits of all afloat.

The smell of sea life filled the deck,
 Freedom on the tip of my hands,
 Oh, the most peace I've ever known,
 Just drifting through the ocean unknown. **(Laura Bass)**



Sun caressing everyone head to feet
 breeze blowing in the air not sweet
 bad environment waste covering the grass
 a basketball court filled with laughs
 my cousin in the crowd voice carrying
 he tells me a favor is needed near
 gives me directions and points to a tree.
 Running fast to be a quick help
 I reached the tree and just looked back
 a football buzzing flying passed my head
 dozens of hornets were making a bed
 all disrupted in a random scare
 a football my cousin threw landed there.
 Chaos and anger erupts and I feel it
 hundreds of stings on top of my head
 and maybe close to 50 across my legs.
 I scattered like ants, tried to hide like mice,
 but there was no end to the many like knives.
(Richard Butler)

My escape

I watch the waves crashing on the rocks.
 The violent sounds remind me of my pain
 A salty breeze perfumes the air.
 I sit there in silence and great despair.

The vastness of the ocean before me
 rekindles my yearning for the great 'return'
 For it is said, when that mortal coil seizes to exist
 Back to the source they often persist.

Could this be a taste of the 'source' which Buddhists
 expose?

My heart and soul are at peace and in repose
 And just like the ocean full of life and danger
 On the surface I remain calm and kind to the stranger.

The grace of the dolphins as they play,
 reminds me once again to always pray.
 For the beauty which I see before me,
 made me forget why I came looking for thee.
(Viwe Mpurwana)

