

For Every Mountain

A LAST SAY SO HOLIDAY NEWSLETTER

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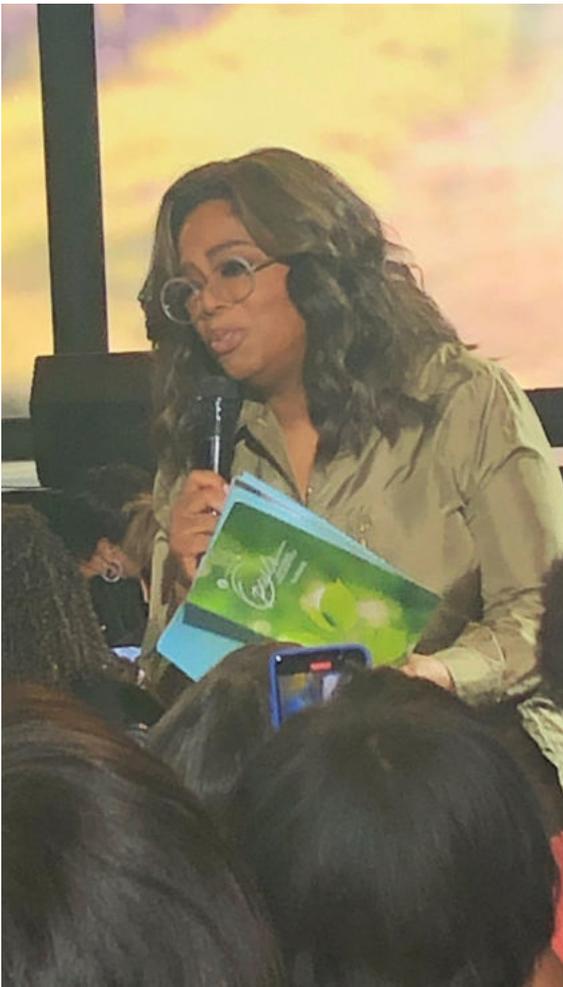
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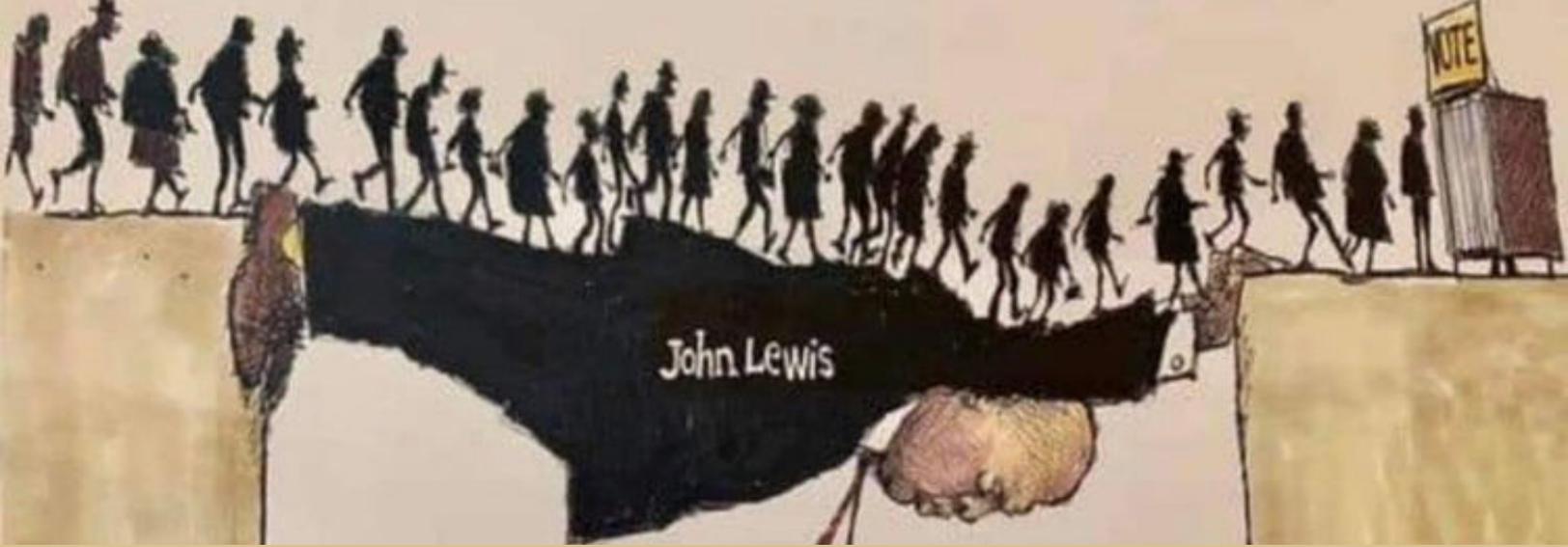
Greetings from Sewanee and happy holidays! I hope your family and you are well. I started writing this year's newsletter on Tuesday, November 3, when I returned home from voting. This was the eleventh time I'd cast my vote for a US President, and more than any other time that I can remember, I returned home needing some alone time. I sat still in my chair staring out my window for several hours, thinking about all the brave people that marched and petitioned for my right to vote. I can't begin to register the amount of gratitude I felt for those people who stood up for the rights I now enjoy. I share the photo above, because I led my first march and call to action this year. It was a peaceful march, where we chanted the names Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Ahmaud Arbery, all people who died senseless deaths. Due to the pandemic, there were few students on campus, except for the few international students you see directly behind me, but Sewanee's permanent residents came out in large numbers. The march was live-streamed, so our students could view what was happening on campus from their computers anywhere in the world. Months later, I still receive emails from marchers who share their stories about how they and their family members are responding to my call to action for justice and peace. One day, I truly believe, we all will get to the Promised Land. Keep climbing your mountains, and "don't let nobody turn you round." WMG

A Day with Oprah Winfrey



Last December, I sat in a movie theatre reading email on my cell phone, waiting for the movie to begin. I read with interest that Oprah Winfrey would be crisscrossing the country hosting talks, and at each stop, she'd planned to bring a famous guest, as if her presence weren't enough! I quickly looked at all the cities she'd planned to visit, and she was scheduled to come to Atlanta on January 25. I checked the date, and as the lights in the theatre dimmed to begin the movie previews, I checked my calendar to determine if I might be free to attend. When I glanced at my calendar, I saw that I would be out of town attending a conference, so my hopes were quickly dashed. When I probed further, it occurred to me that the location of my conference was in Atlanta, and Oprah would be there the day after my conference ended. I covered my cell phone with my jacket, so that the light would not distract the other movie goers, as I looked to see how to order tickets. For a chance to see Oprah, I didn't want to sit high in the rafters of the 16,000 seat State Farm Arena, home to NBA's Atlanta Hawks; I wanted to be close to the stage, so I splurged and bought tickets as close to the front of the stage as possible. When I was ushered to my seat, the attendant said you're going to love these seats, and if you can keep a secret, Gayle King will be seated behind you! Well as you can see below, Gayle did, indeed, sit behind me, and we shared a quick conversation about a mutual friend we have in Adrienne Lopez, the mother of one of my former Middlebury College students. Then you also can see that Oprah stopped by to sit behind me when one of her guests came on stage to entertain us. Needless to say, hanging out with Oprah was THE highlight of an unforgettable year!





Family Time

In anticipation of my great nephew's soon to be birth, one of the most creative gifts I received last year was a T-shirt from my nephew, Taylor, and his wife, J'Chante, that read, "Promoted to Great Uncle." In fact, all of us received a T-shirt that represented our relationship to Taylor and J'Chante's first-born. See photo above.

In the photos to the left are my fourth and fifth cousins, Kiyana with her daughter, Tamiya visiting with my nephew, O'Brien. In the top left photo, my niece, Ariona is with Tamiya. Tamiya and Ariona share a common interest-both are excellent gymnasts. Tamiya performs competitively with her cheerleading squad, and Ariona belongs to a gymnastics club. Watching them twist, flip, and turn on a trampoline is a sight only for the brave at heart.

The message at the top of the page needs no explanation. *"Get in good trouble, necessary trouble, and redeem the soul of America."* as spoken by John Lewis. RIP.



Blessings come in many different ways.

This summer, I began my sixth year at Sewanee, having moved to Tennessee, in large part, to care for my mother. It was a blessing to have been asked to return to Sewanee and work for my former Middlebury College boss. At the same time I began my sixth year, Sewanee welcomed its first African-American Vice Chancellor and President, Reuben Brigety. I was one of twelve people who served on the search committee that recommended him to the Board of Trustees. The new Vice Chancellor arrived in June to lead our institution during an unimaginable time for a new, first-time Vice Chancellor and President to start a new role. As with most any new leader, there is bound to be a new way of doing things, and change is inevitable. At Middlebury and at Yale, I'd experienced the appointment of a new president, and I'd welcomed their new ideas. This was no different, but I wasn't sure I wanted to commit to more years at Sewanee. The weeks of sitting at home writing and thinking had given me a certain mental clarity that I hadn't been able to have in several years, because I'd been spending all my time caring for others, whether they were students, staff, or my mom. I cherished every moment, but the "COVID pause" forced me to think about myself. Even with a new proposed title and exciting new responsibility that I would have at Sewanee, it wasn't as exciting as the prospect of returning to North Carolina, where I've lived twice before and where I'd longed to return. I resigned my position at Sewanee, and in a few months, I will be heading back to North Carolina. Change isn't just something that happens to you; it can happen for you.

Life Coaching and Mentoring.

As many of you know, I began a soft launch into life coaching and mentoring almost three years ago. I've now begun to delve more into the practice of guiding others toward helping themselves, and last January, I created a limited liability company (LLC), called W. Marichal Gentry Life Coaching and Mentoring, and my practice was officially launched. I see adult clients of all ages (18 or older) for many different reasons. My professional background tends to attract clients who aspire to maximize their talents in the workplace, or those who are looking for personal or professional change, as well as those who want to overcome their internal fear of failure, and who languish unnecessarily in mediocrity as a result. I am thankful to longtime mentors, colleagues, and friends, Doug Seiters and Eric Benjamin, who, nearly 30 years ago, first invited me to facilitate personal development workshops at a summer academic program for high school students. I later honed this skill with patients, physicians, and nurses while working at Duke University Medical Center. As a result, my life coaching and mentoring practice includes facilitated workshops for small groups. Once we've passed the pandemic, I will resume facilitating small groups, giving lectures about leadership, communication, and goal-setting, as well as skill-building topics on courage, communication, overcoming fear, and helping clients steer past toxic people toward their own North Star. I meet with all clients via Zoom, since geography is no barrier for individual life coaching and mentoring. If you, your young adult children, or friends you know might benefit from a few sessions, I'd appreciate your recommendation. My contact information appears on the back of this newsletter. What a great birthday or Christmas present it could be for someone you love.

Terrell O'Shea Gentry, the newest member of the Gentry family.

Since his birth on June 3, 2020, I've enjoyed listening to his grandparents, Terry, Amy, and Masha, in particular, go on about him. With a twinkle in their eyes, they have shared stories about him that only a grandparent can share. T.O., Terrell, O'Shea, and my favorite, TOG, are a few of the names I've heard him called. Having so many nicknames, it will take him forever to learn his full name. As his great uncle, I look forward to, one day, holding and spoiling him. Taylor and J'Chante, thank you for your joyful contribution to the Gentry family.

Now back to the grandparents, I read some funny quotes about grandparents, and I dedicate this section of the newsletter to TOG's grandparents:

1. "To a small child, the perfect granddad is unafraid of big dogs and fierce storms but absolutely terrified of the word 'boo.'"
2. "If I had known grandkids were so much fun, I would have had them first."
3. "It's funny what happens when you become a grandparent. You start to act all goofy and do things you never thought you'd do. It's terrific."
4. "Grandchildren: the only people who can get more out of you than the IRS."
5. "You know you're a grandparent when you laugh when your grandkids do the same things that made you so angry when your kids did them."
6. "If your baby is 'beautiful and perfect, never cries or fusses, sleeps on schedule and burps on demand, an angel all the time,' you're the grandma."
7. "When a grandparent enters the door, discipline flies out the window."
8. "Grandparents are there to help the child get into the mischief they haven't thought of yet."
9. "I don't spoil my grandkids, I'm just very accommodating."
10. "The best babysitters, of course, are the baby's grandparents. You feel completely comfortable entrusting your baby to them for long periods, which is why most grandparents flee to Florida."

What a year 2020 has been. It's been chock-full of uncertainty, sadness, and fear. We all have been impacted by the pandemic in one way or another. You might have grieved the death of a loved one or acquaintance, you might have lost your job, or had to quit or reduce your hours to care for your children who had to learn from home. You also might have missed the opportunity to celebrate a milestone, like a family member's high school or college graduation. Still, I hope you are prayerful and hopeful for brighter days to come, even if this present moment seems dark, and even if you're holding onto the last knot of your rope. Yes, these are unprecedented and trying times.

On March 11, when the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus a pandemic, Sewanee students were on Spring Break, and while they were away, the University made the decision to shut down the campus and asked students to complete the semester from home. As you can imagine, our students were all over the globe, many without their laptops or books. They had to make the decision whether to return to campus to get their belongings right away or return later at an assigned time, since we weren't permitting anyone to come to campus. We used emergency funds, most of which were donated by alumni, to purchase boxes, and we mailed many of our students' belongings to them. We mailed items as large and as precious as a student's bass guitar and violin, to laptops, to simple items, such as a teddy bear, a student's source of comfort in the time of crisis.

I spent the next three months working from home, as did my colleagues. I have to say that I don't believe I'd ever been more productive than I was by working from home. There were no interruptions at home, and I was able to complete many projects, all of which would normally take days, because of all the telephone calls, walk-in office visits, and distractions from people working in a large, busy office. Those same projects only took hours to complete working from home.

I also had more time to cook and eat more healthily. In honor of my mother, who loved baking, I spent a great deal of time in my kitchen baking breads, cinnamon crumb cakes, and muffins and leaving them on the doorstep of the deans and directors on my team.

As you all know, I enjoy traveling and visiting family and friends. After March 11, I was unable to go anywhere, so I dedicated a few hours each weekend to writing, and I am happy to report that I finally finished a manuscript for a book, and the working title is: *The Evolution of Myself: The Journey to Finding My Own Truth*. I imagine that if it were published, it'd be categorized in the self-help section, though it's quite autobiographical. For the dedicated readers of this newsletter, you all know that I've been writing pages of different literary ideas for years, but work and life demands were placed ahead of the writing projects. I finally completely finished one project, and I'm halfway through completing another one. Right now, I don't have any plans for the books--I simply enjoy the unadulterated pleasure of creating and writing stories. I plan to think of a way to share them with you in due time.

Speaking of writing, following the unimaginable deaths of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Ahmaud Arbery, I sent a letter to all Sewanee students to respond to the killings. Students like to know that we care and that we are aware of the impact of such global events. It's reassuring to students to know that their dean empathizes with the pain that they feel, especially when the pain they feel is the result of an injustice that has taken place. Anyway, the editor of the Sewanee Review, the oldest literary quarterly in the country, read my letter to the students, and asked if I would contribute a piece to a series that he was publishing, called the Corona Correspondences. He simply asked me to tell him a true story in the form of a letter that I would write to him about how the Coronavirus has impacted me. He gave me two days to write the piece, and though I'm a very slow writer, I was able to finish and get the story to him. Copy the following link on your computer's browser, scroll down to correspondence #47, and you'll see my literary piece. I'm happy to share it with you: <https://thesewaneeview.com/articles/corona-correspondences-letter-editor>.

Sheltered in my house for days without going anywhere forced me to be still and to think. I took to heart the words on a wooden cross that hangs on my screened back porch, and sitting still has given me a newfound perspective.

There also is a story about the butterfly that you see hanging above the cross. I found the butterfly at a Dollar General Store, and I bought it, because I knew my mother would enjoy viewing it from the chair she sat in that looked out



onto the screened back porch. Little did I know that two years later, the butterfly would serve as the final stage of a metaphorical journey for life's change cycle that I would learn about in a life coaching certification course that I took. Our lives are in a constant state of change, similar to the metamorphosis that takes place when a caterpillar evolves into a beautiful butterfly. We all are in a constant state of change, and sometimes everything seems to be dissolving and falling apart, as the caterpillar does before it changes to a chrysalis, and then to a beautiful butterfly. We often resist the caterpillar stage (change), because unlike primitive cultures, we no longer have rituals designed to teach us how to welcome change. For those of us who are Christians, many of us have forgotten that *if any of us be in Christ, we become new creatures; old things are passed away; we change, we become new*. To often, during change, we believe that the universe is doing something bad to us, when it's likely that universe is attempting to do something good for us. Embrace change, like a butterfly.

Reciprocal Visits

My hometown friend and high school classmate, Freddie McMillen, and I have been friends since grade school. For many years, I looked forward to hanging out with him when I came home to Lewisburg during breaks. Then Freddie moved to Florida, then to Houston, and then back to Florida. I wasn't able to see him when I came home during that time, but Freddie came to see me in Connecticut a couple of times. We always had a great time. We'd go to Yale sporting events, like hockey and volleyball games. One year he visited during Super Bowl weekend, so we cooked a huge meal and watched the game. We also took the Metro North to New York City, where we ate at Sylvia's famous soul food restaurant in Harlem, and took the subway downtown to peep through the tarped screen wrapped around the World Trade Center remains to view the large hole in the ground, and where a new building soon would be erected. This past year, during the Christmas holidays, Freddie made his usual trip to Tennessee to visit his family, and he decided to stay an extra few days, so he could make some time to come to Sewanee to visit with me. Here we are below in the selfie that I took. This past February 21, I boarded a flight to Jacksonville. Florida to visit Freddie and his girlfriend, Diane. It would be the last time I would board a flight this year. On that flight, I noticed, with great interest, a mother and daughter each wearing a mask, and it was clear that they anticipated the pandemic that soon would be announced. Freddie and Diane are great hosts. I was treated to a delicious dinner that Freddie cooked, and the next day, we traveled to nearby historic St. Augustine and toured the shops. Here we are, below, at a wine tasting store, trying out some delicious wines. I attended church service with Diane on Sunday, and that evening, I also got to meet Diane's brother and wife, who hosted us to an evening at their beautiful home.





FAMILY

The photo to the left was taken with my camera last December at the annual William Howard and Annette Gentry Christmas Luncheon that my brother, Terry, and his wife, Amy, host. It is the last time I took a photo with most of the Crutcher side of the family present. Due to the coronavirus, this year we weren't able to get together in family love and fellowship at our Christmas luncheon or at the Thanksgiving gathering that I have hosted the past few years. Prayerfully, in 2021, things will be different.

A VISIT WITH AUNT PIE

Last January, early one Saturday morning, my brother, Terry, met me in Sewanee, and we made the four-hour drive to Church Hill, TN, a small community in East Tennessee, near Kingsport, to visit with Elizabeth Maxwell, known to us as Aunt Pie. She is one of my father's two living sisters. She no longer is able to make the long trip to Lewisburg during the holidays, so Terry and I decided to travel to see her. We arrived around noon, and for the next several hours, we reminisced with Aunt Pie about old times, and as you can see below, Terry shared some photos from his cell phone with her. Aunt Pie's son, Gary and his wife, Charlotte, were excellent hosts, and I'm thankful to Charlotte for capturing our visit by taking these photos, below.

*"Between peaks
there are always
valleys. How you
manage your valley
determines how
soon
you reach your next
peak."*

Spencer Johnson, M.D.



September 2019



Issue 06



CAPTURING THE MOMENT

These photos were taken at Sewanee events I attended.

Top left: I am with Sewanee's first African-American Vice Chancellor, Reuben Brigety. Here we are on the day his Vice Chancellorship was announced.

Top right: With African students on Africa Night, a popular event celebrating the continent of Africa.

Middle left: Members of my team at my house at a holiday luncheon.

Middle right: The Vice Presidents welcome the new Vice Chancellor.

Bottom left: My dear friend, Shirley Taylor, who has always been there for me in good and bad times. Here she is at a luncheon celebrating black women.

The Tout a' Fait Corner

Nearly forty years after we established the Tout a' Fait Social Club, each year we still gather in fellowship and love, and to reconnect. We eat a delicious meal, but the real nourishment is the precious time we get to spend with each other. Many of the group members are scattered about the country, but most of us make it back home during the holidays to visit with our family and friends. This past year, we met at the Cheesecake Factory at Cool Springs Mall, and there were belly laughs galore. We were joined by Lamont and Sonya Campbell. Kim Johnson met Sonya at work more than 25 years ago, and even though Boyce and Kim have moved to Texas, they have maintained their friendship with them.

During our meal, I had to step out and take a phone call, and I ran into Rev. Michael Pigg, a longtime friend, mentor, former youth choir director. He is pictured below in the middle frame (wearing a hat).

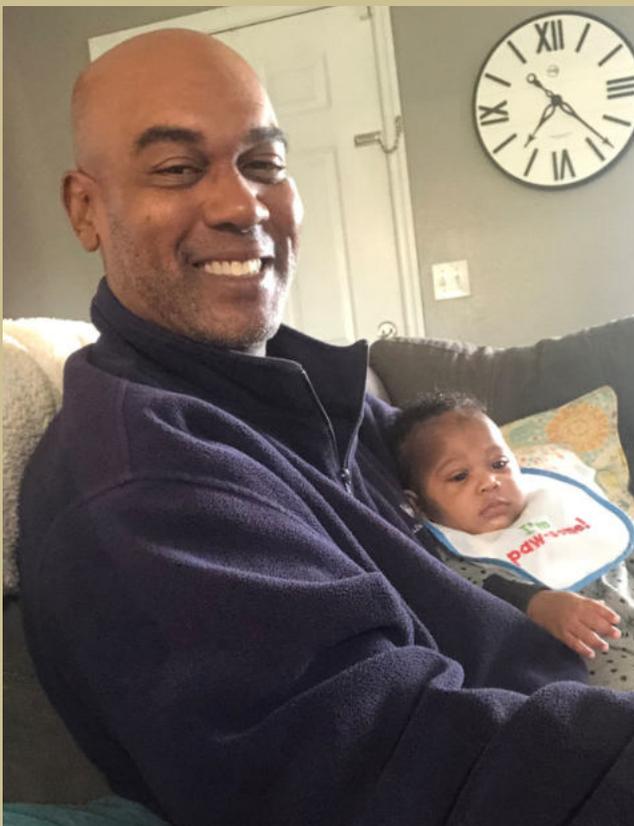


BISHOP ROAF

I met Phoebe Roaf nearly two years ago when she became bishop of West Tennessee, headquartered in Memphis. In fact, she is the first African American woman to become bishop of the Episcopal Church in the South. Even before that major accomplishment, she was the first African American woman to be ordained a priest in Louisiana. I wish everyone could meet Phoebe. She is as real as they get, down to earth, and I have not found her to display one ounce of haughtiness in her soul, which we often perceive in people in power to possess. Phoebe was in Sewanee on church business, and she wrote to me to see if I had any time for a visit. She and I enjoyed a most delightful time on my back porch, socially distanced, sipping on lemonade and munching on snacks. God be with you, Bishop Roaf.



Meet Terrell O'Shea Gentry





WHO'S EATEN AT YOUR TABLE?



As I prepare to depart from Sewanee, one of the things I'm most proud of is the diversity and quality of people that I got to work with on a daily basis. It was not like that when I arrived five years ago, and there was little diversity when I worked there in the early 90's. Diversity, to me, is more than just simply race. I took the photo to the left of my colleagues who were invited to my house for a meal. While the photo seems to show two people of color and two white people, it tells a much deeper story. The title of the first chapter of my book is *Who's Eaten at your Table?* I posed this rhetorical question because one of the fundamental ways I've broadened my perspective is over a meal with people who don't look, think, or act like me.

NAVIGATING TURBULENT TIMES

In this pandemic, stress is bound to occur, perhaps in the form of panic, grief, or overwhelm. To become grounded and calm, people pray, meditate, and supplicate in many ways. I've learned that the five senses exercise (sometimes called the 54321 exercise) is a tool that gets you to a place where you can feel grounded. It simply uses your senses to get you a place where you can pray, meditate, and supplicate. In this exercise, you:

- 1) Notice five things you can see
- 2) Find four things you can hear
- 3) Think of three things you can feel
- 4) Notice two things you can smell and
- 5) Find one thing you can taste.

As you begin to focus on these things you've identified, you become less focused on all the chatter that makes you anxious.

A second exercise I've used to find my calm is called the mantra exercise. I simply find a bible verse or affirming phrase and repeat it over and over. The one I'm using now is "If God be for us, who can be against us?" I repeat it in English and sometimes in French, "Si Dieu est pour nous, qui peut être contre nous?"

*Trust in God who will
not leave you,
Whatsoever years may
bring.
If by earthly friends
forsaken,
Still, more closely to God
cling.
Hold to God's
Unchanging Hand*



My longtime friend and college basketball teammate, Mark Peeler, is pictured here with his children, Hope (21), Jenkins (19), Max (16), and Charlee (7). Mark and his children have been in my daily prayers, and most recently because Mark's mother, Ms. Clara Ellen Peeler, went to be with the Lord. She was such a kind, generous soul to me, and I always felt welcomed by her and Mr. Peeler when I went to their house with Mark. May she rest in heavenly light, and may the entire Peeler family and all who knew and loved Ms. Peeler live to remember her, always.



THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF
LAST SAY SO PRODUCTIONS

***FOR EVERY MOUNTAIN YOU BROUGHT ME OVER,
FOR EVERY TRIAL YOU'VE SEEN ME THROUGH,
FOR EVERY BLESSING-
HALLELUJAH!
FOR THIS I GIVE YOU PRAISE.***

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