

# Getting to Wisdom

THIRTEENTH EDITION

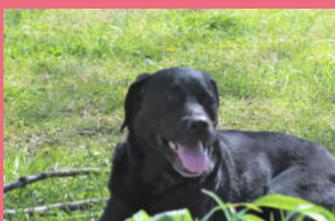
DECEMBER 2021



Tahj Omir Gentry,  
born on 9/30/21



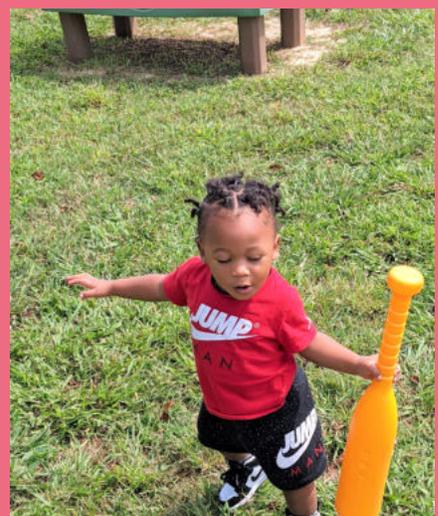
Stan



Seasons Greetings from Durham, NC. This past year, I have rested, written, and paused each day for reflection. As you know, I've been dabbling in writing projects for years. I have about five open projects that I hope, one day, to complete. There are books I've started, that have as many as sixteen finished chapters. They don't get completed, because I find something else exciting to write about. I finally finished one, due, in part, to my self-imposed sabbatical. It's a book about twelve truths I've learned from my life experiences, which have made me a wiser person. Though the book is about my own journey, if I've done my job as a writer, it will encourage you to think about your journey and what is true for you. I call it *Getting to Wisdom*. No one can truthfully say that they have reached their wisdom quota, that is, that they have gotten as wise as they'll ever get. But I'd bet that we all can agree that the lessons we've learned over the course of our lives have made us wiser. That's a process I call getting to wisdom. Read on. Love, WMG.

"What a wonderful opportunity it was to spend Labor Day with family and get to hold my great nephew, TO, for the first time! Can't wait to love on his little brother, Tahj"

On April 8, my brother and I rode together and received our second COVID-19 vaccine. After the two-week incubation period, I loaded my remaining belongings and moved to Durham, NC. For six years I'd grown accustomed to living in TN and taking the easy drive from Sewanee to Murfreesboro to see my brother and his family. I relinquished that luxury when I moved to NC. I was excited when I was able to travel home to see them during Labor Day. It would mark the first time I'd traveled on an airplane since February 2020, a month before the announcement of the pandemic. My nerves gave way to excitement when my brother and his family drove up in their huge SUV and picked me up from the airport. Except for visiting my cousins in Lewisburg, I hovered close to my brother's house for the long weekend, due to TN's extremely high COVID numbers. That was just fine. We had a blast cooking and simply enjoying one another's company. Family is everything, especially when it's a good family.



# MR. MARLON WEST

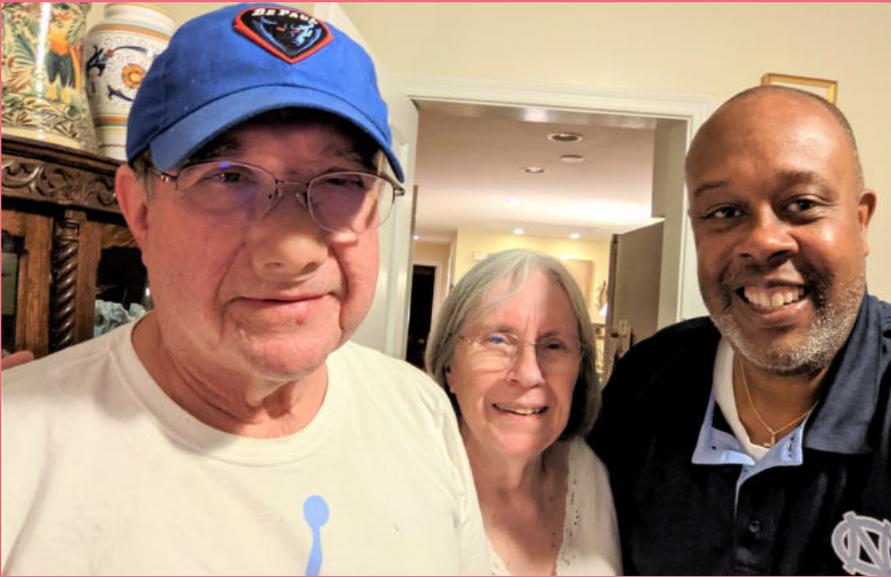


What a friend I have in Marlon West! I didn't intend to get to NC until the summer. I was expected to be able to occupy my NC home by July. In my mind, I imagined a casual, take one's time kind of move. Fortunately, I happened to sell my home in Sewanee quickly, and the buyers were anxious to move in as soon as possible, so my plans changed. I made arrangements to stay in an Extended Stay America apartment for a month or two and then move into my new place. That is, until Marlon so graciously offered me an opportunity to bunk in his beautiful home. Marlon and I have been friends since 1994. He was my choir director at church when I lived in NC after graduate school. He and I have remained friends ever since. He has brought each of his choirs to visit and perform in each of the states I've worked as a College administrator (Vermont-three times, Connecticut, and Tennessee). He also played and sang at my mother's funeral. His family, shown above, has embraced me as one of their own. From left to right is Marlon, his older brother Alvin and his wife, Atheline. Yvette, who is wearing the red blouse, is Marlon's younger sister. Standing beside Yvette is Tyreshia her oldest daughter. Behind Ty is her younger brother, Michael, and on the far right side is Tyrone, Michael and Ty's father and Yvette's husband. I took these photos at Marlon's house at one of his family dinners. What fun!



TYRESHA AND MICHAEL

*"Bear one another's burdens. It's a fundamental rule of true friendship."  
Excerpt from Getting to Wisdom*



## GIL AND NANCY

Whether it's getting me to the emergency department many years ago when I injured my foot during an African dance performance, or going to a UNC football game, or hanging out at their home, or helping me unpack boxes, Gil and Nancy have watched out for me and have been longtime friends whom I've known and admired since my days working at Duke, where Gil and I first became colleagues and friends.

## FRIENDS, FAMILY, AND COLLEAGUES

- Congratulations to Hank for his recent marriage, earning his PhD, and landing his first 'real' job, all in one year. I have known Hank since he was a few days old.
- Here I am with long-time friend and NYTimes Best-Selling Author, Julie Lythcott-Haims, and her family.
- Hanging out with my masked colleagues at work.
- Performing with friend, Robert Bradford, who happens to be Hank's father, as Chester looks on.
- Paid a visit to my first grade teacher, Ms. Zumbro, while in Lewisburg.
- Stopped by to see my cousin, Michael and his wife, Mary.





## **On this day, my sabbatical ended. My first day on the job.**

I'd planned to spend the entire year writing and finding a few young professionals to coach and mentor, but I added to those plans when I was asked to join the team at Durham Academy (also known as DA), an independent Pre-K-12 school. A series of email and Zoom conversations with the head of school about student preparation for college and college advising turned into a job opportunity. I was hired to coordinate the school's community outreach efforts and bolster the number of diverse students at DA. I also serve as the project manager for the institution's diversity, equity, and engagement action plan. It's a meaningful set of responsibilities, and I've enjoyed working in the Pre-K--grade 12 academic environment. It's so different from the college scene. I already see that I'm making an impact.

One thing I've come to know is that people place too great an emphasis on where a person works. One of the first questions I'm often asked is "Where do you work?" I'd rather respond to a better question, one that asks what contributions that I'm making in my work. I've been fortunate to work at some of the premier places in the world, and Durham Academy ranks as one of the best schools in NC. Over time, I've resisted allowing others to define me by where I work. The impact of my work on the lives of the people I serve, no matter where I choose to serve, matters so much more to me. That's is a perfect example of getting to wisdom.

*"I aim to convey a life that is being lived with empathy, humility, and love for others and self—all of which I believe to be necessary and ongoing personal attributes, if you are seeking to find or regain your truth, to learn from your life experiences, and to make meaning of them." Excerpt from Getting to Wisdom*



## APOLOGIZE, AND DO SO SINCERELY

*It's the right thing to do.*

My grandparents often would say, "you'd better get your house in order." They'd also say "don't let the sun set before you get things right with your family and friends. Recent conversations that I've had with several of my friends have focused on the fact that, based on life expectancy, we have lived 3/4's of our lives, and that we have 1/4 of our lives left to live. My friends and I are still in reasonable good health, and we all are active and we hope not to keel over anytime soon, but it got me to thinking about my grandparent's wise words. As we age, is there anything we are leaving unsaid to someone? Have we apologized to someone we've hurt? Say what you need to say, and clear your conscience.

## REMEMBERING STEPHANIE

At her funeral, I heard many people say that Stephanie was a trooper when they remembered her life. She always bounced back each time her body failed her with an illness or medical complication. Unless you were close to the scene, you'd never know that Stephanie didn't always feel well, because she always wore that million dollar smile and showed up everywhere--to church, to family get togethers, to her friends and family member's ballgames, graduations, baptisms, and birthdays. She was always there.

Stephanie was the oldest of our group of six first and second cousins who grew up together. Our paths were made smoother, because Stephanie always went first and she would tell us how that first day of school went, or how it would feel when our first tooth came out. She always led the way.

We'll miss you, Stephanie. May you rest in God's peace and power.

*"Clear your conscience- apologize. There is someone out there to whom you owe an apology." Excerpt from Getting to Wisdom*



Welcome to the world, Tahj



Relaxing with family



Ariona is exhausted

# SEWANEE 1899 UNRIVALED



Undefeated and untied. In one word, *Unrivaled*. In 1899, the Sewanee football team embarked on a 2500 mile, six-day train ride, scheduled to play five teams. As this true story goes, they played and beat Texas, Texas A & M, LSU, Tulane, and Ole Miss. They outscored their opponents 322-10. After playing five games in six days, on the seventh day, they rested. I have told this story hundreds of times, both when I was a student tour guide, and when I worked at Sewanee as an administrator.

Three years ago, longtime friend, Norman Jetmundsen, and his classmate, David Crews, decided to do research on the 1899 team and to make a film as a way to preserve this incredible feat.

After months of filming, Norman and David uncovered an integral part of the story that had never been known or told. Cal Burrows (above) was the team's manager. He was responsible for loading barrels of water from Tremlett Springs (behind the Sewanee Gym) onto the train. As the team continued to win and remained healthy, the water they drank was said to have magical powers. As the trainer, Mr. Burrows also rubbed down the player's sore muscles after each grueling game. He was, indeed, the unsung hero to the team's success.

I was asked to portray Mr. Burrows in the film. All I was given was the only known photo (above) of Mr. Burrows that had been found in the Sewanee archives. I found clothes from my closet to depict his image as closely as possible.

There was a sneak preview of the film last month. It will make its red carpet debut in January. It was an honor to portray this historical figure.

# STAGES OF CONSTRUCTION

Construction on my townhome began in June, nearly a month later than expected, due to the national supply chain issue. Once construction began, things moved along pretty quickly, until they didn't. All work came to a halt in early August when I learned that the arrival of the kitchen cabinets would be delayed for a month. My stay at Marlon's house was extended, and all I could do was wait. Once the cabinets arrived, work resumed, and by early September, I received a closing date, and I was able to set up a day to get my belongings, which had been sitting in storage for seven months, delivered to my new home. Finally, on October 19, I slept in my own bed at my own home. I am grateful. My contact info is: 116 Vallco Lane, Durham, NC 27713; Email: wmarichalgentry@gmail.com; Tele: (919) 360-1171.

