

Last Say So Holiday Newsletter

2012



Season's Greetings

GRATITUDE

DECEMBER 2012



W. MARICHAL GENTRY

“In all things give thanks.”



Doris Annette Gentry
Mom and Nana

Dear family and friends,

Greetings and happy holidays. I hope this letter finds your family and you well. It is written, “In all things, give thanks,” so it is with a spirit of gratitude that I write this year’s holiday newsletter. I am keenly aware of the abundant blessings that I have, and I count you among them.

I started writing the text for this year’s newsletter on Saturday, the first day of December. It was a lazy, colder than normal day in Connecticut, so I decided to make soup in my twenty-five year-old crock pot. I am grateful to have this crock pot, because I’ve used it to prepare many delicious comfort foods.

While the soup was cooking, I drove to campus to see an afternoon production of the play, *The Colored*

Museum, performed by a cast of Yale’s undergraduate students from The Heritage Theatre Ensemble. This controversial play satirizes the black experience in the 1980’s by depicting extreme and exaggerated stereotypes. I cringed and squirmed in my seat as I watched the performers bring to life difficult topics we often try to avoid. I am grateful that I had this experience. It caused me to think.

When I returned home from the play, the aroma of the soup I’d prepared filled my house. I ate and then went upstairs to my home office. For background noise I turned on the TV. The Alabama/Georgia football game was on. I began writing.

I am surrounded by the comforts of a heated home, food in the refrigerator, a car, a career and job, and family and friends that I can

count on. I am thankful, I am blessed.

In this newsletter, I decided to include more photos than usual, because I saw more family and friends this past year than I have in many years. I brought along my camera almost everywhere I went.

I have enjoyed being part of many exciting things this past year, and I have gotten to meet many interesting people from all over the world. What has stuck in my mind the most are the most simple things, like a student from my hometown being the first (that I know of) to attend Yale, or the almost daily texts that I receive from a friend, or the multiple telephone calls from my mom. It doesn’t get better than that! More for which I am grateful is on the inside back cover. Read on! Peace be unto you and your family, always. WMG

I am into my sixth year at Yale, and my experience here continues to be fresh, challenging, and rewarding. No moment ever repeats itself, so the revelations that I find behind each day's door is like receiving a new gift. Unwrapping it is the best part, because I never know what's inside.

The year 2012 began on a high note. The famed all-women a cappella singing group, Sweet Honey in the Rock, accepted our invitation to perform in concert at one of Yale's Martin Luther King holiday celebrations. I'd seen them perform years ago, so I knew that they would attract a large crowd, and they did—there were more than 2000 people in attendance.

There are six women in Sweet Honey—five singers, and one woman who performs using sign language. I was given the honor of introducing the group. When the concert was about to begin, I positioned myself backstage on the side closest to the podium, so I could simply walk through the doors onto the stage and be at the podium. As I waited for the cue to go onstage, one of the women from Sweet Honey approached me. I didn't see the remaining five members of the group. I greeted her, and told her that I was excited to have been asked to introduce them. She thanked me and then asked if I would read to her what I planned to say. Unsure what she was getting at, I asked why I needed to recite my remarks to her. She responded, "Didn't they tell you that when you go onstage, I'm joining you, and that I'll communicate your remarks through the use of sign language?" I told her that I wasn't aware that anyone would join me onstage, but I didn't object; in fact, I would be honored. So I commenced to reading my remarks to her



Taylor, my nephew, (lower left) is pictured here signing to play college football for Campbellsville University. He is joined by his family, (top row) Masha (mother), O'Brien (brother), Terry (father), Annette (grandmother), and Coach Thomas (head coach).

as she requested. She closed her eyes as if meditating, taking in each word. When I finished, her eyes remained closed. In her own time, she opened her eyes. She looked at me and said, "That was beautifully written." I thanked her, and then offered my arm to her, as I escorted her onto the stage. The concert was amazing.

I spent Spring Break in North Carolina this year. I was long overdue for a visit. The last time I was in NC, I spent time seeing my Duke friends; this visit, as I was short on time, I split time

in Charlotte and Durham. While in Charlotte, I was able to visit with the Tappy family. I first met them in 1986—the result of being asked by my friend, Mark Peeler, to help him coach a basketball team, on which Skip, an eighth grader at the time and the oldest of the two Tappy sons, was a member. I got to know Lee, the younger son, because he often hung out in the gym while the team practiced. Mr. and Mrs. Tappy traveled from time to time, and one day they invited me to their home and asked if I'd stay with Skip and Lee when they went away. A friendship was

"I am thankful for the riches in life, which are my amazing family and friends."



Amy, Taylor, O'Brien, and Terry wearing their Sunday best.



Enjoying time at home at a Super Bowl party with a few members of my residential staff. On right, posing for a photo with my Yale College colleagues.

established; though I was happy to be there when they needed me, they were there much more for me. Living in Charlotte wouldn't have been the same without the Tappy family in my life.

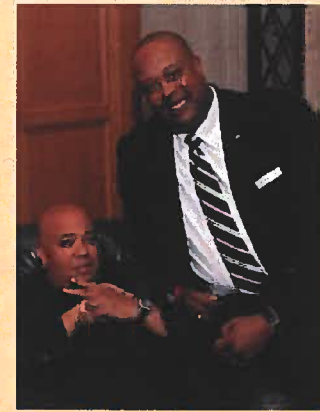
There is a younger generation of Tappy's growing up in Charlotte now, and I'm grateful to have been able to spend time with Owen and Greyson (Skip and Jeanne) and to attend one of their baseball practices. I also got the chance to meet twins Izzy and Bran (Lee and Robin) and to watch their little busy bodies in playful action.

My visit to Charlotte was made complete when I had lunch with two friends and former banking colleagues, Philip James and Addison Fauber Ayer. Sorry I missed you, Suzy, Delves, and Meg. Hope to see you next time!

The second half of my visit to NC was spent in Durham, where I hung out with my friend, Marlon West. The 100 Men in Black, www.100MIB.org, is a male chorus that Marlon created ten years ago, and while I was in Durham, I



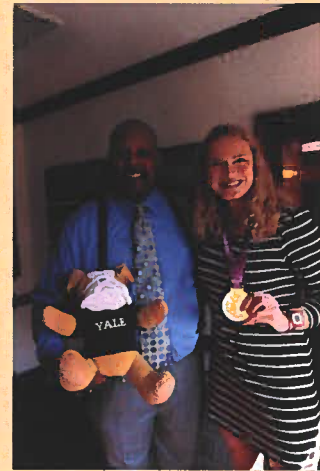
Above: Enjoying a visit from friend, John Seiters and his children.



Right: With Rev. Run from Run DMC at a reception.

Bottom right: With Taylor Ritzel, Olympic gold medalist in women's rowing and former Yale College student.

Bottom: Sweet Honey in the Rock.



COLLEAGUES AND FRIENDS



At home in Lewisburg with longtime friend John Seiters (above); with colleagues on my back deck and at a reception (near right); and with famed singing group *Sweet Honey in the Rock* (far right).



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got the chance to see them in concert at North Carolina Central University. They are a dynamic group of men that promotes a positive message through song, while emphasizing community service. I am grateful and ecstatic to report that the 100 MIB will be our guests at Yale in January, 2013.

May 17th was a joyful day for the Gentry/Taylor families. My nephew, Taylor, graduated from high school. He's now a freshman in college. We are so proud of Taylor and his brother, O'Brien. They are my favorite nephews!

For two weeks in June, I spent time at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, where I was accepted into the Institute for Management and Leadership in Education. Participants arrived from all over the world to share their strategies on becoming effective leaders in the field of higher education. I'd not sat in a classroom for such long hours or read so many case studies since graduate school, so the first day or so was a big adjustment for me. The intense discussions overshadowed my temporary discomfort, however, and I returned to Yale much more professionally enriched than ever. I'm grateful for the opportunity to have been financially



Pausing to pose for a photo with Barbara Walters, who was Yale's Commencement Weekend's Class Day Speaker this year.

supported by Yale and to have participated in this stimulating program.

Following my studies at Harvard, I treated myself to a quick trip to Lewisburg. Actually, I went there to pick up my mother, because we were going to Pennsylvania to celebrate the 4th of July with our family. During my Lewisburg

layover, I was so pleased to have been able to attend a celebration honoring Mr. Roy Dukes, a man who has taught, coached, led, and mentored thousands of students during his long, illustrious career. I was one of the lucky thousands; in fact, his wife, Mrs. Louise Dukes was one of my favorite teachers, too.



~Friends, Old and New~



John Salsman with wife, Jan, and daughters, Carly and Payton.



At Commencement with colleagues, Pamela George and Allyson Moore (above). With friend, Alfie Daniels, at a holiday party (right).



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Having a conversation with political strategist, Donna Brazile, who was invited by the Yale African American Affinity Group to give a talk on Presidential Politics: "What Happened to We the People?"

My mom's and my week-long trip to New Brighton, Pennsylvania was fulfilled. It had been several decades since I'd been there. When our flight landed and we went to pick up our rental car, we were surprised to have been upgraded to a Lincoln Town Car. Though we were riding in style, when we rolled up in this large black car, it was hard to go unnoticed by anyone in this small Pennsylvania town.

We went to PA to visit my mom's sister and brother-in-law, Rosetta and Frank Evans. It was great to see our family. We simply relaxed and enjoyed each other's company. My mom and my aunt spent hours hanging out talking and watching TV; my uncle, who is a great conversationalist, and I hung out downstairs or out on the front porch discussing sports, politics, or the economy. One evening, he and I loaded ourselves into the big Lincoln and drove to Pittsburgh to see a Pirates' baseball game. Cousins Barbara, Frankie, and Elizabeth took me out the shooting range, and I got a chance to explore the fascination of shooting guns. I also got to spend time with my Aunt Ozella and cousin Bonnie, and her daughter, Mo, and my cousin Janice, and her daughter, Michelle. Visiting our family in PA was a nice way to end the summer.

Yale added a fall break to its academic calendar this year. I took advantage of these few free days by

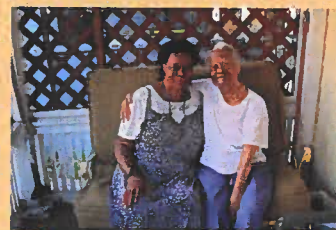
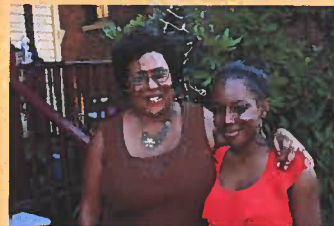
traveling to Due West, SC to visit my friends, Mark and Maggie Peeler. Since my last visit with them, they added a new family member, Charlee. She's adorable; if changing a diaper for the first time in 30 years leads to a bonding experience, then Charlee and I bonded.

Mark still serves as athletic director and head men's basketball coach at Erskine College—I caught one of their games while I was there. They won. Maggie is back in the gym as a coach—she coaches her daughter, Hope's basketball team. Hope's also into music, so throughout my visit, we all were serenaded by Hope, who's becoming a very good guitar player. Brothers, Jenkins and Max, continue to be great siblings to each other and to their sisters and are rock stars in my book.

As it turned out, my trip to SC was extended three days due to hurricane Sandy. A few weeks before Sandy hit land, I decided to remove six large, damaged trees from behind my house—trees that had taken a beating from previous hurricanes. I'm glad I did. Sandy's strong winds might have uprooted these trees causing them to fall onto my house. Grateful, again!

That's all for now from Last Say So Productions. I look forward to seeing you, soon. Visitors welcome here, too. PBUYAYF, always. WMG

Summer in Pennsylvania



POLITICAL AND CULTURAL FIGURES



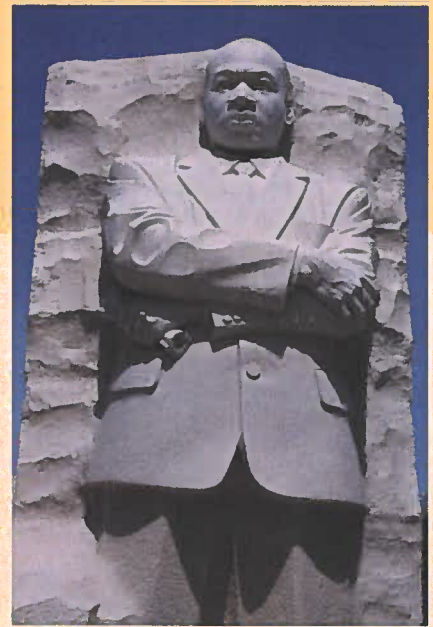
Rev. Run with YAAA

Rev. Run, from the famed rap group, Run DMC, is the center of attention in this photo. He was invited by the Yale African American Affinity Group to speak on family values.



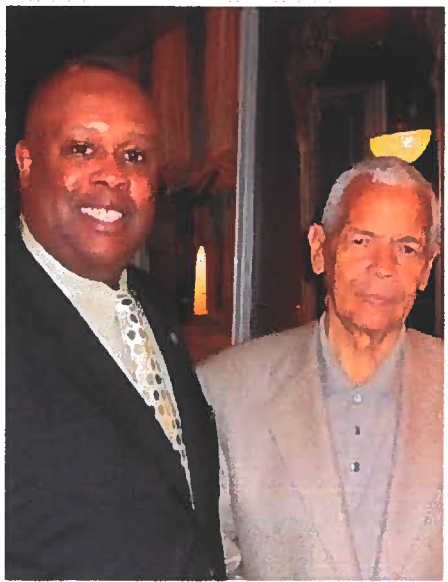
Anita Hill

Anita Hill paid a visit to Yale to promote her new book, "Re-imagining Equality", and to reflect on her life 20 years after testifying against Justice Clarence Thomas in a landmark sexual harassment case.



Martin Luther King, Jr.

This past April, I traveled to DC with a group of Yale College students to see the MLK Memorial for the very first time.



← **Julian Bond**

Julian Bond, a prominent leader in the freedom movement, was one of Yale's guest speakers this past year. Following his talk, I had the great fortune to have a three hour, fun-filled dinner with Mr. Bond, his wife, and two of my colleagues. What a treat!

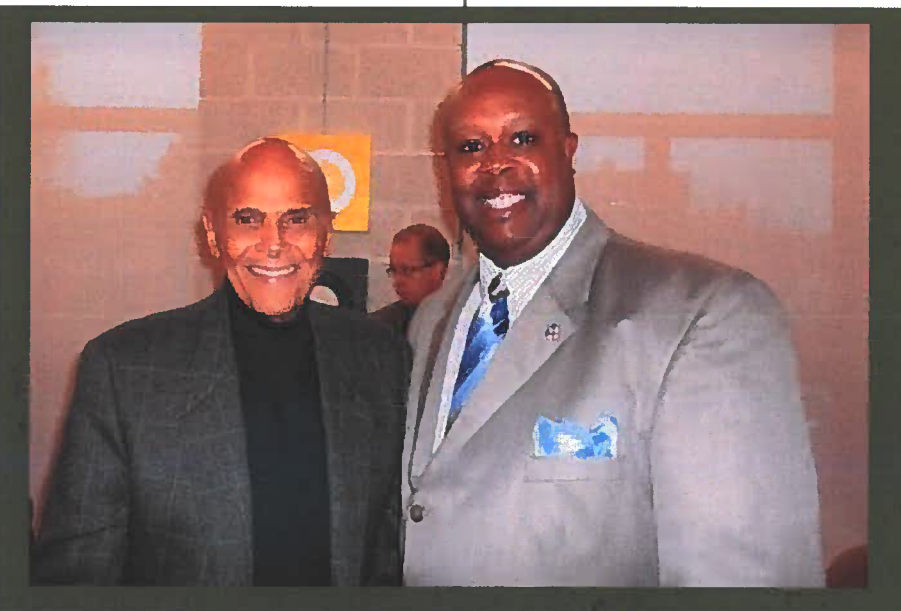
Harry Belafonte

Mr. Belafonte is a treasure. I have learned so much more about him this past year following the release of his tell-all memoir, "My Song", and from the release of his documentary, "Sing Your Song". The book is a must read, and the film-a must see, indeed.



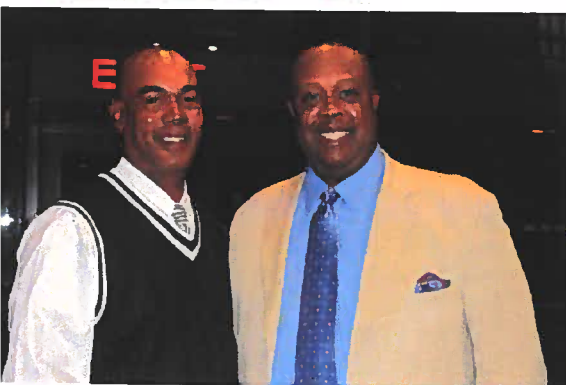
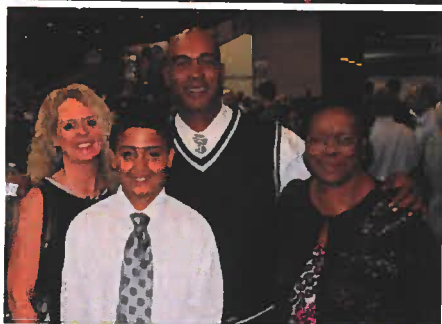
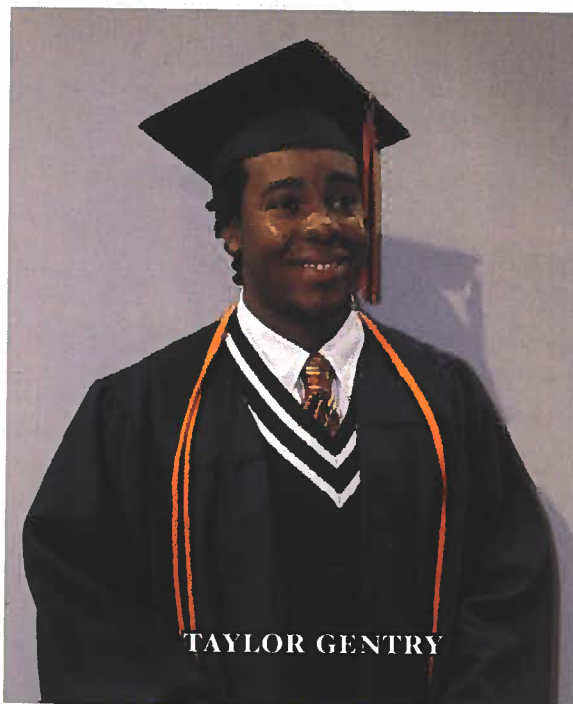
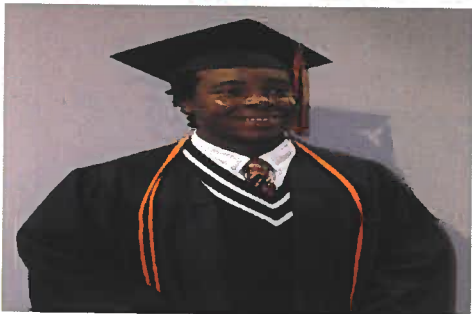
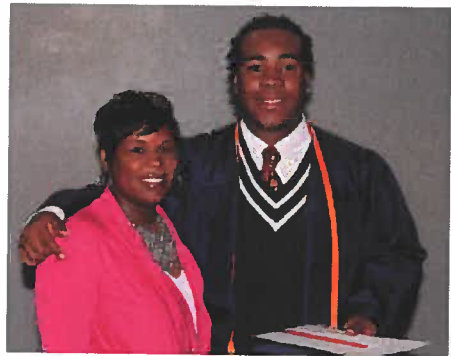
Angela Davis

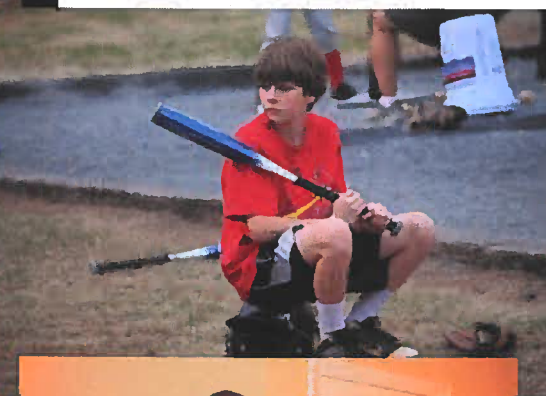
Ms. Davis, an activist, Black Panther associate, and professor, was this year's keynote speaker at the Black Solidarity Conference Conference, which is hosted by Yale College students.



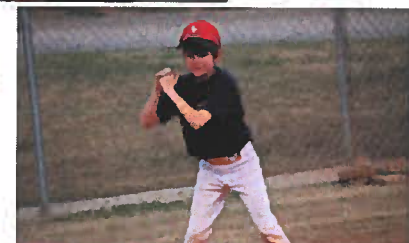
Melissa Harris-Perry

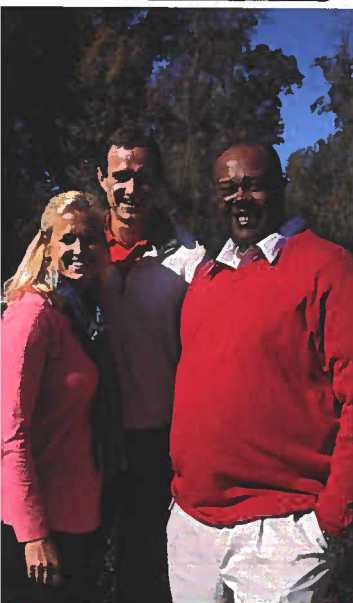
Ms. Harris-Perry, was guest lecturer of the African-American studies department. She is the host of her own political talk show on MSNBC.



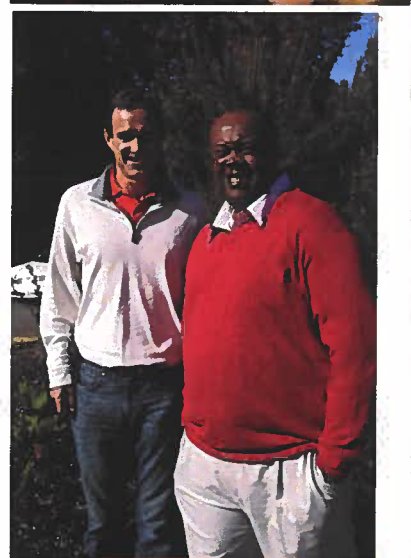


**SPRING BREAK
IN NORTH
CAROLINA**





Fall Break in South Carolina



Excerpts from my Gratitude Journal

I am grateful for being able to write another holiday newsletter. I am grateful for my mother and the courage she has shown this past year. I am grateful to have a loving brother--real husband, father, and man. I am grateful for my sister-in-law—she is a strong, dedicated, and loving woman to her family and to the young children she nurtures daily. I am grateful for my oldest nephew, who, this year, graduated from high school and began his college journey; he is a good son, a doting big brother, and is coming into manhood. I am grateful for my youngest nephew; as a sixth grader, he made all A's in the first nine weeks of school. He also is an athlete; he won the *Anthony Best Physical Education Award* for displaying outstanding sportsmanship and providing inspiration to others. I am grateful for family and friends. I am grateful for the inspiration I get from a great song. I am grateful for first, second, third, and fourth cousins. I am grateful for uncles, aunts, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, and grandparents, whether they are my biological family or not. I am grateful for the power of healing—I have friends who are fighting and winning their battle with cancer. I am grateful that often a simple, kind word has the power to lift-up a person with a shattered spirit. I am grateful for prayer, meditation, reflection, and introspection. I am grateful for belly laughs, silliness, goofiness, and craziness. I am grateful for change. I am grateful for ideas--new and old. I am grateful for good, sound advice. I am grateful to have a sound mind. I am grateful for the ability to learn. I am grateful for the opportunity to correct my many, many mistakes. I am grateful that we all have the ability to make room in our hearts to forgive people who do wrong to us. I am grateful for unexpected phone calls from long-lost friends. I am grateful for mentors, teachers, and professors. I am grateful for long walks. I am grateful for holidays. I am grateful for the changing of seasons. I am grateful for dinner parties with my closest friends that last into the wee hours, where the conversation is more nourishing than the meal. I am grateful for freedom, and am grateful to those who fought for it. I am grateful for the wisdom of my elders, and for the wisdom to listen to them. I am grateful for monthly lunch dates. I am grateful for opportunities, those I seek, and those that seek me. I am grateful for dreams and the hope for a better tomorrow. I am grateful for second, third, and fourth chances. I am grateful for new adventures. I am grateful for the ability to be able to change my mind, regardless of the outcome. I am grateful to all those many people that see the best in me. I am grateful for a good night's sleep. I am grateful to have a place to call home. I am grateful for grace and mercy. I am grateful for surprises. I am grateful that sometimes I am the recipient of someone's kind deed "just because." I am grateful anytime I experience a kind smile/a nod/a hello from a passerby. I am grateful for sunrises and sunsets. I am grateful that I am blessed with a reasonable portion of patience. I am grateful to be employed. I am grateful to have choices. I am grateful for new life. I am grateful for increase. I am grateful for heartache, pain, roadblocks, and trouble. I am grateful that heartache, pain, roadblocks, and trouble don't last always. I am grateful for answered prayers. I am grateful for deferred gratification. I am grateful for a hot meal. I am grateful for now-and-not now. I am grateful for roads less traveled. I am grateful for progress. I am grateful for spontaneity. I am grateful for life and favor. I am grateful for the human spirit. I am grateful for unconditional love and acts of random kindness. I am grateful for comings and goings. I am grateful for waking up each morning. I am grateful for transition, resilience, and the strength to move on. I am grateful for God's awesome majesty and power.