

SEASON'S GREETINGS

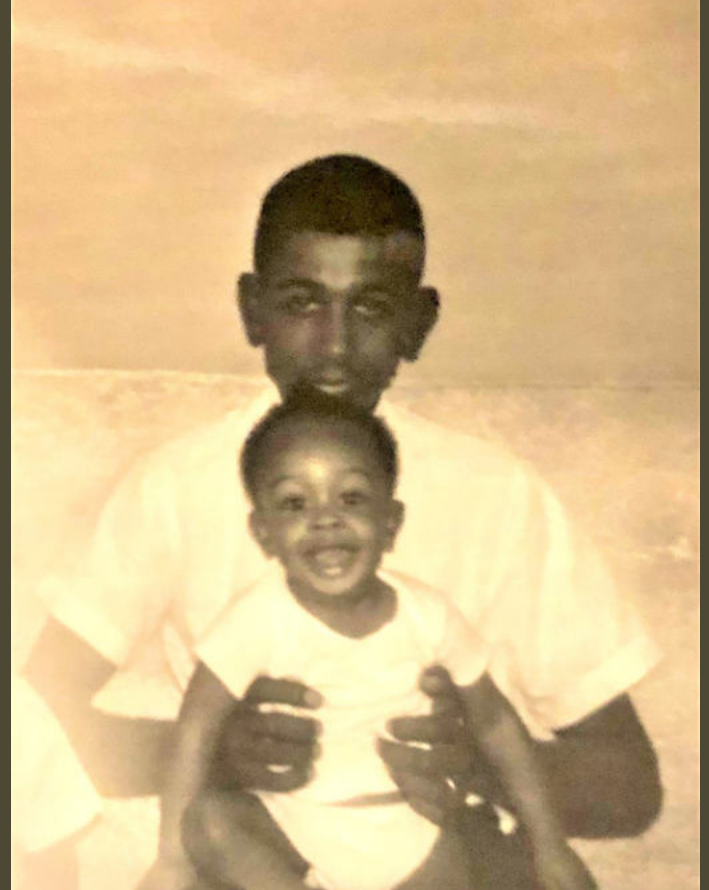
**LAST SAY SO HOLIDAY
NEWSLETTER**

**CHRISTMAS 2022
FOURTEENTH EDITION**

NEW DAY NEW MERCIES



BEGINNINGS



REFLECTION



When my brother and I sold our parent's house on Stokes Avenue and cleared out all of their belongings, I assumed several boxes of old family photographs that my mom collected over the years. Many of the photographs were placed in photo albums, and the edges of many of the photos had become yellow and discolored. Mom placed photos that didn't make it into photo albums into plastic bags, like leftover food, perhaps with the intention of one day sorting through them. One day, I sifted through hundreds of photos, and I found several taken of me as a baby, photos that I hadn't seen in decades. I am the man I am because of everything that happened to me as a child. Looking over my life from then to now, I am thankful for God's endless mercies. No matter how terrible our day is or how many mistakes we make, we should find comfort in knowing that when a new day comes, there are new mercies waiting for us. This edition of the newsletter celebrates the opportunity each of us has to start anew each day. Read on. Love, WMG

Ariona's Special Day...



...and oh, what a special day it was, one that we all had been waiting on for years. Ariona has been part of our family since she was five years old, so in my mind, she has always been a Gentry. It became official on March 2nd, when, with the strike of a pen, Ariona joined her forever family. My brother's text message to me, "Man I'm ecstatic, I don't know your schedule, but I sho wish you can come." It didn't take any convincing me to be there, because Uncle DD, the name Ariona gave me because she said I looked like a DD, wouldn't miss out on his niece's special day.

It takes a village, and many members of Ariona's village was there to witness this momentous occasion. Psalms says that "Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from Him." What a blessing Ariona is to us. Love to you, Ariona. From your Uncle DD.



Ariona Shaney-Woods Gentry
Adoption
 TOOK TIME
Love 
 ARRIVED INSTANTLY
 She was born
 10/03/10
 God placed her with us
 01/08/16
 Forever Family Day
 03/02/22





MARICHAL'S BIRTHDAY LUNCHEON

My birthday is on December 28. I've never really been a big birthday person, because it takes place so close to Christmas. When I was younger, some of my relatives who still were in town, might stop by to say happy birthday, but I never got to enjoy my born day at school with my friends, because we always were out of school for Christmas break. Bette and the gang (Francine, Kia, Torey, and Toney), revived my birthday spirit when they asked if they could take me out for my birthday. What a fun time we had in fellowship with one another. Here we are at a restaurant enjoying each other's company. Below, I also share a few photos from other holiday gatherings that I attended with Clark, Derrick and Tamara, a few Tout a' Fait friends, and some of my work friends celebrating at the Carolina Inn.



Officer Clemmons Holds Court in NC



Officer Clemmons, my dear friend since 1999, came for a visit last April. The purpose of his visit was to see my new place, bask in the warm NC sun, and relax. He saw my place and the weather was great all week, but I don't believe he got as much rest as he'd planned. That was my fault. It's difficult to show up to any place with Francois and not have folks want to meet this man, whose presence fills every room that he enters. That was the case when he visited my school, where he met my colleague, Kemi (to the right). Also, some of the middle school theatre students asked if they could perform for him, and Francois reciprocated by holding court and singing a few songs for them. In the photos above, Francois blesses the meal, and Marlon, Francois, and I are dining out at Homestead Restaurant.



Marichal's Travels

WOULDN'T TAKE NOTHING FOR MY JOURNEY NOW



SAVORING EVERY MOMENT

The next few pages show photos that document many special moments that I've had this past year. Above, my longtime friend and college teammate, Mark, and his children met me off an interstate exit somewhere in South Carolina to see each other and have lunch. They were driving back home from Christmas and so was I. To the left, Amy gives Ariona a piggyback ride. And in the photos below, my cousin, Francine, and her son, Torey, are enjoying the holidays at our yearly family gathering.





Uncle Nearest is named for master distiller, Nathan "Nearest" Green, once a slave, who taught Jack Daniels how to distill whiskey. This story had been long-forgotten, until Fawn Weaver, an historian and entrepreneur, bottom left, saw a photo of Jack Daniels and Nearest Green together and pursued their story. She bought 300 acres of land in Lynchburg, TN, where Nearest taught Jack Daniels how to distill. Uncle Nearest is the fastest growing whiskey brand in the US. Fawn Weaver's story is important, not because she's selling a lot of award-winning whiskey, but because she has revealed yet another part of history that shines a light on and recognizes the contributions of black Americans. Additionally, Ms. Weaver created a foundation that provides full scholarships to every descendant of Nearest Green. I met Ms. Weaver in Orlando, where she gave a keynote talk about leadership. She got a kick out of the fact that I grew up near Shelbyville, TN, the home of Uncle Nearest's distillery. She asked if I'd taken a tour of the distillery, and I told her that I hadn't yet, but it might be a destination when I get home for the holidays. I know my sister-in-law has visited and raved about it. Other photos: Sharing the bathroom with brother Terry. Family friends, Greg, Aimee, Grant, and Cruz at adoption ceremony, and in Orlando with friend and colleague, President Mike Sorrell from Paul Quinn College.



Part of my outreach work is to find talented black and Latino boys who might be a good match as students at Durham Academy. In the top middle photo, I am pictured with the 8th grade boys from Durham Nativity School. I've developed a relationship with this partner school, and many of these boys have applied for admission to Durham Academy.

Once a Yalie, always a Yalie. The Yale Alley Cats, an a cappella singing group, performed at Durham Academy this past spring. Here I am with them in the bottom middle photo.

After not being in touch for nearly 25 years, Professor Jacqui Macmillan-Bohler reached out to say hello. It's been fun reconnecting with her. We met years ago when I worked at Duke and she was a nurse at a Girl Scouts camp. She studied nurse-midwifery at Vanderbilt and now is teaching at Duke. Here we are in the top left photo.

My soul has felt more anchored this year than it has in previous years. I'm sheltered comfortably in a home in which I really enjoy. I finally emptied my storage unit and no longer have to pay exorbitant monthly storage fees. Covid, despite its wrenching grip, seems less daunting than before, thanks to vaccines and booster shots. It's still a thing, though, and I keep my masks and sanitizer handy, but it's less of a threat than it was two years ago. I am grateful!

It's been a treat for me to attend any UNC event, but I've thoroughly enjoyed attending UNC football games this season with my friend, Gil (see a photo of us at a game on page 8). When I left NC for Vermont in 1999, Gil said that he'd hold on to my half of our season tickets for when I returned, and I'm sure glad that he did. The Tarheels have enjoyed a great season this year.

Terry, Amy, O'Brien, and Ariona paid me a visit and they went to a UNC game. I believe that I've won them over, and they now are honorary Tarheel fans! See photos of their visit on page 9 and check out all that Carolina blue.

I ran into Jason Maxwell and his lovely wife, Frederica, in Orlando. He and I were there to attend a conference and we all got a chance to have dinner together. I go way back with Jason, who grew up across the street from us and came over to our house not long after he learned to walk to shoot hoops with my brother and me. Jason went on to play Major League Baseball, and now serves as the Director of Middle School Admission and Head Baseball Coach at Ensworth in Nashville, TN. See our photo at the bottom of page 8.

I also had the pleasure of hosting my longtime friend and college basketball teammate, Mark Peeler. He's a VP, Athletic Director, and coach at Erskine College in Due West, South Carolina. Mark was solely responsible for bringing football back to Erskine, and they played a game in nearby Barton College in Wilson, NC. Mark's brother-in-law, Ken, and his nephew, Jackson, also attended the game. See our photo together at the top of page 9.

I also enjoyed a brief visit from Jim Folds, my longtime friend, college basketball teammate, and classmate. He has reason to come to the Triangle, because his daughter is a first-year student at UNC. I failed to get a photo with him.

Jeff Heitzenrater, my partner in praise (he earned that title when he helped me host my first Gospel radio show at Sewanee), was surprised to see me at Durham Academy when he visited to recruit students who might be interested in Sewanee. See our photo at the top of page 8.

Sharon Kugler, my dear friend from Yale, gave me plenty of notice that she'd be coming to Durham to visit her daughter, who's at Duke. We met at a local coffee shop. Sharon arrived at Yale a few months before I arrived, and she became the first woman University Chaplain in Yale's storied history. For eight years, Sharon and I hosted elaborate "Listening Dinners," where we randomly invited Yale College students to join us for a catered meal, and we listened to them tell us about their Yale experience. It was a great way for us to gather information from students and to make changes when change was needed. Sharon's retirement was recently announced, and she has gained the opportunity to relax and enjoy her family. See our photo in the middle of page 8. Love you, Sharon!

I happened to be at a Walmart and I ran into a former Orange Grove church and choir member friend, Coco Sims. I guess we talked for nearly an hour at that Walmart. She caught me up on her now adult children, Amber, Mark, and Trey, who were members of the Youth Gospel Explosion Choir, where I served as an adult mentor and member. Coco and I also worked at Duke, and when I needed surgery on my foot, I wasn't able to drive for several weeks. On days we had choir rehearsal, Coco took me home with her and then drove me to rehearsal, and then someone from the choir took me home. I write about and counsel young people who are in transition to find a spiritual home, a community, or a support network. I found that in Coco and lots of folks like her at my church. Coco and I no longer attend Orange Grove, but we realized that we now both attend New Hope Church in Durham. I hadn't seen her there, because she attends the early service. See the selfie I took of our Walmart reunion on page 8.

You may recall that in my last newsletter, I mentioned that I participated in a documentary, entitled, "Unrivaled," that chronicled the 1899 Sewanee football team that crisscrossed the country and went undefeated. I portrayed the team manager, Mr. Cal Burrows. My brother and his family attended the premiere of the film in Nashville. Since the film's release, it has won several awards, and PBS has picked it up and is currently airing it.

This past summer I was asked if I would sit for an interview for a podcast called "Your College Bound Kid" and to speak to parents about how to successfully transition their high school student to college. I agreed, and I sat for an hourlong interview with the host, Lisa Rouff. I didn't realize how wide the listenership was, until the host told me that more than 30,000 people from all over the world had logged on to listen to the podcast. Lisa has asked if she can interview me again on a different topic next spring. What a blessing it is to have been able to contribute in this way.

Finally, I am grateful to you all for the visits, text messages, and hourlong phone calls (you know who you are). I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible when I get home for the holidays. Be well, enjoy the day you have, and look forward to a new day and brand new mercies. Love to you all, WMG.

I Remember Them

Several people I love died this year, and I pause here to remember them. First, I pay tribute to my cousin, Charles Crutcher, who died this past summer. From my earliest days, I remember Charles' visits to our house. He was a talented artist and carpenter, and my parents hired him to design and build a large deck that wrapped around the corner of our house. Many of you reading this newsletter walked up those steps onto the deck countless times. As Charles designed the deck, he also was thinking ahead, realizing that we all would not remain young forever--that we all would become amble, so Charles built a ramp alongside the deck, which also came in handy for wheelchair users. There wasn't anything Charles wouldn't do to help mom and dad. When my father died, Charles frequently stopped by to check on mom (he called her Nette) and took her riding around town, which they both loved to do. Rest in power, dear Charles.

I also honor my former band director, friend, and mentor, Mr. Arnold Quarles, who died in August. I've always known Mr. Quarles and his family. He and my father served as church deacons for decades, and Mrs. Gloria, his wife, was my very first choir director; one of the first songs I learned from her was, "Greater Is He That Is In Me." Mr. Quarles took great interest in me as a percussionist, as a young leader, and as a professional. He was a wise man and a history buff. He'd often spout off little known facts about the most random things. He even knew about and could speak intellectually about the origin of my name, for example. When I became a Dean at Yale, and when I'd come home and see him at church, he'd come up to me and sing the Yale Bulldog fight song. How he knew the words to that song was a mystery to me. One day at band practice, when I was in ninth grade, Mr. Quarles gave me a huge challenge. Our very skilled field commander, Alice Peacock, became ill, and Mr. Quarles asked me to replace her and conduct the band on the field for three football games, until she became well. I could never replace Alice's dynamic flare, but I gave it my best effort. Mr. Quarles was a showman. Many of the halftime shows he created really got the crowd excited. One of the funniest memories I had was when I was conducting the Pink Panther song. Mr. Quarles' youngest son, Rodney, who couldn't have been more than four or five years-old, dressed up in a pink panther outfit and ran all around me as I tried to conduct the band. It was hilarious and the crowd loved it. Mr. Quarles knew how to bring out the best in his students. I know I'm not unique describing my special relationship with him. He was like that with everyone, and that was his essence. He made everyone feel like they were the most important person in the world. Love you, Mr. Quarles.

Finally, I pay tribute to Frankie Moore, who was my classmate, teammate, churchmate, and Tout a' Fait clubmate. I actually knew Frankie's older brother, Jesse (RIP), before I knew Frankie. Jesse was one of the best baseball pitchers Lewisburg has ever known. We played on the same minor league baseball team as seven and eight year-olds, and I was the catcher. Jesse threw so hard, even as a 10 year-old, I had to place extra padding in my catcher's mitt. I met Frankie a year later, because my father drafted him to play on his Little League Baseball Team. Frankie lived for hitting home runs. He hit more home runs than any other player I've ever known. I'd bet that he still holds the Little League record for most home runs hit in a season. Frankie and I also played together on our high school basketball team. He was a hard worker. By the time we were seniors, he had a growth spurt and his game and our team really improved. Frankie was kind to everyone, and you could always depend on him. He had the biggest smile, and though he is gone, I can hear him calling out to me, "hey Shell." Everyone loved Frankie, and there were few Tout a' Fait events he missed. He was always there, and he thoroughly enjoyed the fellowship of our group. Eternal peace be unto you, my friend. Until we meet again.

New Day, New Mercies

It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: Great is thy faithfulness. Lamentations 3: 22-23

Last Say So Holiday Newsletter
December 2022