

REFUGE

Holiday Newsletter

A Last Say So Production

Ninth Edition

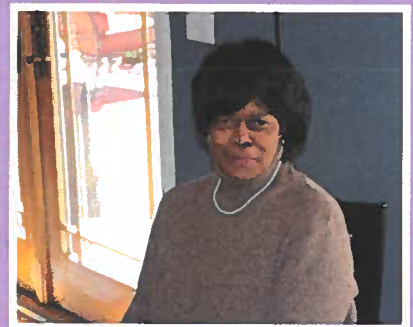
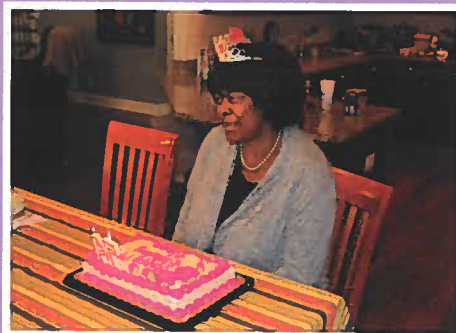
In Memory



Doris Annette Gentry

“Your mother is always with you. She’s the whisper of the leaves as you walk down the street. She’s the smell of certain foods you remember, flowers you pick, the fragrance of life itself. She’s the cool hand on your brow when you’re not feeling well. She’s your breath in the air on a cold winter’s day. She is the sound of the rain that lulls you to sleep, the colors of a rainbow; she is Christmas morning. Your mother lives inside your laughter. She’s the place you came from, your first home, and she’s the map you follow with every step you take. She’s your first love, your first friend, even your first enemy, but nothing on earth can separate you--not time, not space...not even death.”

Author Unknown



"TO LIVE IS CHRIST AND TO DIE IS GAIN"



Greetings family and friends. Life goes on.

This newsletter is sent to people near and far, so I am aware that some of you are learning of my family's loss just now. Please keep us in your prayers. For all others, thanks for all the calls, cards, prayers, and various other expressions of love during our time of mourning.



This year has been a year of personal loss. Joining mom in heaven are her sister, Rosetta Evans (top photo with mom), sister-in-law, Lillian Gentry (second photo), family friends, George Marion Greer (bottom photo with mom) and Larry Johnson, and family member, Randy Lane. I honor and salute each of these precious angels, and I dedicate this year's newsletter to my mom, Doris Annette Gentry.

My world has changed tremendously, and as I learn to live life without mom, I have leaned on and dwelled under the shelter of God more than ever before. I have sought HIS comfort, cover, compassion, and companionship.



Despite my sometimes overwhelming grief and the void that's been left by losing my earthly rock in "Mama," I am well aware of the bigness of God, and am reminded of a refrain in a song by gospel artist, Anthony Brown: "I refuse to believe that my own troubles, or my problems, or my grief, are bigger, or greater, or stronger, than my God." My own stuff (and yours, too) simply can't compare to the big, wide, open, and protective arms of God; and from Him, I have received shelter, cover, and refuge. The title of this year's newsletter serves as a reminder of who shelters and gives me strength.



I wish your family and you a wonderful season of comfort and joy. May God bless and keep you, always. Read on. WMG

The American Spiritual Ensemble

In February of this past year, Sewanee enjoyed the amazing vocal talents of the American Spiritual Ensemble (ASE), created and directed by Dr. Everett McCorvey. My student life budget allowed me to be one of the financial co-sponsors of the three-day event. During their stay in Sewanee, the ASE worked with the local Franklin County school children, and joined them in a moving concert, in which the music selected for the concert celebrated Sewanee's civil rights history. On the following evening, the ASE honored George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* opera. On the final night, the ASE sang from their rich repertoire of American Negro Spirituals. Each night was a night to remember, as each soloist sang from the depths of their souls and brought down the house song after song.

There were two unforgettable moments for me during the ASE's visit—one moment took place after the first concert with the young children when Dr. Francois Clemmons, who was invited by me as Sewanee's guest for the weekend to bear witness, was greeted by the ASE's director, Dr. McCorvey. Mr. McCorvey knows Francois well, because the reason that the ASE exists in the first place is because the Harlem Spiritual Ensemble, created by Francois Clemmons, existed first. Francois' entire life has been spent singing, writing and speaking about, and preserving the American Negro Spiritual. Once Mr. McCorvey realized Francois' presence, he invited Francois on stage to say a few private words to the members

of the ASE. Francois congratulated the members on their performance, and spoke passionately on the importance of preserving our ancestors' songs of survival, praise, and freedom. Francois' words brought tears to the eyes of many of the ASE members (see bottom photo).

The second moment that I will forever cherish is when the ASE and a few guests were invited to Sewanee's President and Vice Chancellor's home for dinner. Before we sat to eat, the Vice Chancellor, who usually blesses the food, announced that there would be an additional special blessing of the food. I happened to be sitting on the sofa chatting with one of the ASE singers, and as if rehearsed, Dr. McCorvey lifted his hand, and on the down beat, another blessing was sung by the ASE, who were dispersed throughout the large sitting room in the Vice Chancellor's house. The words they sang were from the Moses Hogan arrangement of "O Lord, Please Hear My Prayer:" It was a powerful moment.

O Lord, please hear my prayer;
In the morning when I rise.
It's your servant bound for glory.
O dear Lord, please hear my prayer.

O Lord, please hear my prayer.
Keep me safe within your arms.
It's your servant bound for glory.
O dear Lord, please hear my prayer.

When my work on earth is done,
And you come to take me home.
Just to know I'm bound for glory;
And to hear You say, "Well done!"
Done with sin and sorrow.
Have mercy. Mercy. Amen.



FAMILY AND WORK GATHERINGS

Since August 3, 2017, every experience my family and I have had has been “the first time without Mom.” I miss listening to her; I miss holding her hand; I miss the daily car rides we’d take around Sewanee’s campus; I miss her fussing, and the pranks she’d play on us. No one was immune from her teasing and playful nature. I miss hearing the sound of her voice most of all, and how she’d smile when I walked into the house after a busy day at work. All my life growing up in the church, I heard people preach and pray that “God will be a mother to the motherless and a father to the fatherless.” This promise now has eternal meaning to my brother and me.

I began writing the text for this newsletter a few days before Thanksgiving. At first, I was indifferent about doing anything special for this day—the first Thanksgiving without mom. I have a lot for which to be thankful, and I made the decision that I needed to be with people—a few family members and friends, just like in the past. I knew my brother and his family would make the trip to Sewanee, and that we’d enjoy Thanksgiving dinner together; but as a child, after we’d eaten our Thanksgiving meal as a family, I remember always piling in the car and stopping by my first cousin’s house (Betty Marie) to see what she’d cooked; my father, particularly, wanted to stop by ‘Bette’s’ house, because she always cooked her legendary chitterlings dish, my father’s favorite and a delicacy that only few people can stomach to eat. I wanted to relive how things used to be, while paving a new tradition for my family.

I made a quick call to my cousin, Francine, and that was all it took. She called her mom, and we created a menu, and we had more food than we could ever eat, including a large pot of delicious chitterlings. What a great day we had (see photo of us on the stairwell). I now look forward to when our extended family will gather to celebrate Christmas at our annual holiday luncheon.

Returning to live in Tennessee has given me many opportunities to participate in family gatherings. Last Christmas, many of our family members gathered in Murfreesboro at the Boys and Girls Club for our annual Family Christmas luncheon (see photo at the top of the page).

This past September, we gathered at Barfield Park for our annual Labor Day cookout. It was the first family gathering since mom’s funeral, and my cousin Nakia set a place at the table for mom (see photo below).



MY TRAVELS

In early March, I took my fifth and final trip to Monterrey, Mexico, where I have served as a member of the international advisory board for the University of Monterrey (UDEM). It was a bittersweet ending to a meaningful experience, both personally and professionally. The good folks, my colleagues, at UDEM, and my fellow advisory board members, became my friends. Our yearly gatherings were a time for us to talk shop, at the highest level, and to advise a university community, while, at the same time, learn to become better administrators. I was humbled to have been selected. Each of the outgoing members were honored at the closing ceremony.

Though I didn't enjoy leaving mom overnight with caregivers for long periods of time to take personal trips, I took a spontaneous two-day spring break trip to Charlotte, North Carolina to visit my long-time friends, the Tappy's. Before I arrived, Skip, the oldest son, gave me the choice of two really fun activities for Friday evening, the day I arrived. He told me I either could hang out at the house, eat a good meal, and watch basketball; he could have stopped there, and I would have been satisfied; or, we can go to a Charlotte Hornets game...I wasn't as interested in going to a Hornets game, because as a former Charlotte resident, I'd attended many games, until I learned who they would be playing...; "they play the Cleveland Cavaliers!" Never had I'd seen King James play, so an enthusiastic YES to being able to see LeBron in action was my response. Our fifth or sixth row seats behind the Hornets' bench ensured that I would see, up close, the likes of Hall of Famer, Patrick Ewing, one of the Hornets' coaches who's now gone on to become the head coach at Georgetown, his alma mater, and LeBron, Kyrie Irwin, and Kevin Love. All I have room to write here, in amazement and respect, is that LeBron James is an incredible human specimen. Phenomenal. As always, my trip was made complete after spending some of Saturday afternoon with Skip's younger brother and his family, and Skip and Lee's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Tappy (see photos below).

I often gravitate toward North Carolina when I need to get away, and in early July, I took a few days off, and I split time visiting friends in Chapel Hill and Durham. Mom's health was beginning to worsen by now, and my leaving for a few days began the process of taking care of myself. I spent a very low-key weekend at the home of my dear friends, Robert and Ann Bradford (see photo at the top of the next page), and at the home of my longtime friend, Marlon West. While in North Carolina, I worked on a speech I had to deliver at my home church for its annual College Day program.

In mid-July, I traveled a few hours' drive alone to Muscle Shoals, Alabama and spent two days at a resort to finish writing my speech, to be in solitude, and to write my mom's obituary. It's here that I chose the title for this year's newsletter; by now, I'm pleading for something that no one else but God can provide—refuge.

On July 30, I traveled alone to Greater First Baptist Church and delivered perhaps one of the most personal speeches I've ever given about belonging and living a favor-minded life. After delivering the speech, I took a detour home and went to Henry Horton State Park to a cook out, where one of my cousins, Tre Crutcher, celebrated with his family and friends one last time before he would depart for college as a first-year student/athlete (see photo at the bottom of the seventh page).

That night, after returning home, I put mom to bed for the final time. As I always did since returning home in 2015, I told her I loved her, and she responded that she loved me, and I never heard her voice again. She died four days later.

It is refuge for which I asked, and it is refuge that I have so graciously received. I miss my mom and dad tremendously, but I can't wallow in my tears, they would not want that. Life goes on.

I pray for refuge for anyone who's feeling lost and alone, and I know that there are people reading this newsletter who have lost loved ones and might be in need of shelter from the storm.



FRIENDS

I saw the birthplace of Helen Keller this summer while riding around in Muscle Shoals. You might recall that she was stricken with an illness that left her deaf and blind. Despite her limitations, she became a political and social activist. She brought attention, hope, and courage to people with disabilities. She also was the first deaf-blind person to earn a bachelor's degree. On the topic of friendship, she was credited with the phrase, "Walking with a friend in the dark is better than walking alone in the light."

I am grateful to my many friends who have spoken words of encouragement, opened up their homes when I visited, or who have stopped by to see me. This fall, I had a wonderful visit with Pamela London and Terry Haislip (see photo to the right), who came to Sewanee to view the solar eclipse. Sewanee hosted a well-attended gathering on the campus quad to celebrate the eclipse, complete with food, drink, and those special solar eclipse shades for everyone to be able to view the eclipse safely. The tablecloths took the shape of an eclipse, and each table was cleverly adorned with a decorative globe ornament, as well as Milky Way candy bars, Eclipse Chewing Gum, Moon Pies, and Sun Chips.

I also spent fall break visiting the Peeler family in Due West, South Carolina. On the drive to their house, I received a call from Maggie, who told me that their youngest daughter, five year-old Charlee, might have broken her ankle while playing at school. Maggie continued by reminding me that both she and Mark were in North Carolina for a cross country meet (Maggie's the coach, Mark's the athletic director), and would not get home before I arrived, or before Charlee arrived from the hospital, where she had been taken by her oldest sister, Hope. I arrived to the house first and waited for Hope and Charlee to arrive, not really knowing what to expect. When Hope carried her sister into the house and placed her on the sofa, Charlee wore a pink cast that fit her entire leg; she'd broken her leg, not her ankle. Hope, now a college student needed to be away; thirteen-year-old Max had walked to the school for the football game, and Jenkins, the placekicker for his high school football team, was at the school preparing for the game, so I became Charlee's caregiver. To pass the time before Mark and Maggie returned home, Charlee and I sang her originally composed songs (all recorded on my iPhone for posterity and a good laugh) and I listened to her make-believe stories. She also innocently asked where Nana Gentry was; she remembered meeting her a few years earlier when the Peeler's stopped by to see Mom and me when we first moved to Sewanee. I told her she was in heaven. With my Goggie (Charlee's grandmother)? I nodded.

My frequent visits to NC are most always spent with my dear friend, Marlon West (fourth photo down). Marlon and I have known each other since 1994, and when I think about 'walking with a friend in the dark'...I can always count on Marlon. He knows what we are going through; his mother died last fall.

Francois Clemmons has been my friend since 1999. He and I met when I moved to Vermont to work at Middlebury College. He is one of the wisest men I know. We have long conversations about most any topic.



Shirley Taylor has taken care of me since my college days. She always seems to show up or call to check on me at the right time. Someone once said, "True friendship isn't only about being there when it's convenient, it's about being there when it's not." She's that kind of friend (see photo of Shirley with Francois at the bottom of the previous page).

DRUM CORPS AND THE VICE PRESIDENT

In August, I reunited with Drum Corps after a two-year hiatus. I realized that the finals would take place the second weekend in August, so I went online and found tickets, and I was able to secure a hotel room two blocks from Lucas Oil Stadium, where the drum corps competition would be held (and where the NFL Indianapolis Colts play). I traveled to Indianapolis by car, but once I arrived, I couldn't get close to the hotel—the entire street was blocked, and I didn't understand why. I finally got close enough to a security guard who told me that Vice President Pence, who happens to be from Indiana, was giving a speech somewhere in the same block as my hotel, and all traffic was blocked for that reason. He directed me to a back street that got me to my hotel without any further delay. I checked in and made my way to the stadium, on time, and enjoyed two days of Drum Corps. The nerve of the Vice President to show up and try to make me late for my guilty pleasure of watching a drum corps competition!

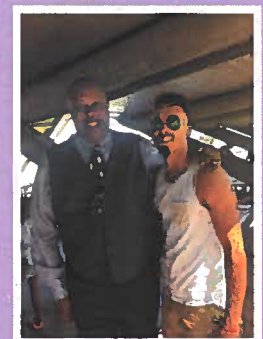
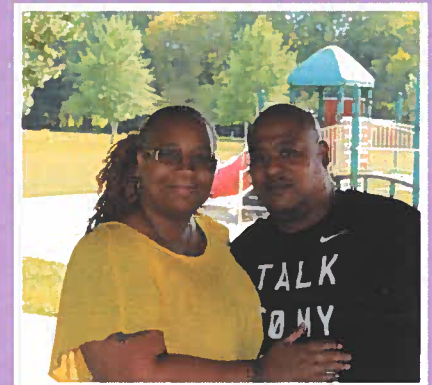
LOOKING FORWARD

Last year, my 16-year-old nephew, O'Brien, had surgery to repair his ACL and missed the entire basketball season. At 6'7" his large frame endured a grueling year of rehabilitation and recovery. He was cleared to play again this year, and I've enjoyed attending his games with my brother Terry, his wife, Amy, and daughter, Ariona.

By the time you receive this year's newsletter, I will have attended the 100 Men in Black Male Chorus' 15th Annual Christmas Concert and Scholarship Program which took place in Durham, NC on December 2 (see photo below). This summer, the 100 MIB also is planning a musical tour of Canada. The 100 MIB is a 501 (C)(3), so if you are interested in making a tax deductible contribution to the 100 MIB, please contact me. Your contribution will go toward a very worthy cause—and will give the 100 MIB the chance to better serve others. The 100 MIB's mission is: To provide proactive positive alternatives to youth and adult males through music, faith, community service, and positive role modeling.

Finally, I look forward to seeing you. Come visit me or invite me to come see you!

Until next time. Love, WMG for Last Say So Productions.



Love Overflow

