

SEASONS

A Last Say So Production

Holiday Newsletter

Tenth Edition

Greetings and Happy Holidays. I hope your family and you are well.

I started writing this year's newsletter edition during the first days of November while enjoying a long weekend in South Carolina with my dear friends, Mark and Maggie Peeler and their four children. It was a dreary, rainy, five-hour drive from Sewanee to South Carolina, and I had a lot of time to ponder ideas for the newsletter. The fall foliage, while wet from the rains, still was beautiful to behold during my trip; more than that, it signified the changing of the season.

My South Carolina friends and I planned no major activities, intentionally. It felt good to get a bit of downtime and allow myself to relax and not think about work, or what I had left to do. I was content to have a few perfectly quiet, uneventful days to begin writing some of the text for this year's newsletter, entitled, SEASONS. It's a simple title, but one single word can hold so much meaning, truth, and power.

The term *season(s)* has many meanings. For example, there are the four divisions of the year, *seasons*, marked by the changing weather patterns. We also speak about special days in terms of seasons—Christmas season, holiday season, shopping season, mud season (the term one hears in Vermont when the snow melts).

In this day and age when people's busy schedules don't allow them to watch their favorite television show when it airs; rather they binge watch it, perhaps watching three or four *seasons* of their show in one weekend.

Another example I'll share will yield an *LOL* from one of my dear Vermont friends, Francois Clemmons. There is a restaurant in Middlebury, Vermont called Rosie's. Unlike Francois, I simply do not enjoy dining there. While their food looks good when it's presented, the good folks at Rosie's do not *season* their food. To me, the food has little flavor and tastes as bland as the paper on which you're reading this newsletter.

My friend, Marlon West, Founder and Director of the 100 Men in Black Gospel Chorus, and I often talk about the *seasons* that take place in our lives—how we come in and out of *seasons* with our friends, with our jobs, and with our passions. The third chapter of Ecclesiastes, perhaps, best illuminates my point: *To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.*

As I grow older, it seems that the days that pass between the Christmas Season come more quickly. As I become wiser, and my time becomes more precious, I know when a good thing has to end. The holiday newsletter has run its course, and I plan to end it this year. It was a fun ten-year run for me, and ten is a good, even number. I hope you've enjoyed reading it as much as I've enjoyed writing it. But I must move on and take on a new hobby. Mr. Rogers once stated, "When you think you're at the end of something, you're at the beginning of something else." I don't know what the "something else" is yet, but I'll follow wherever He leads. That's always been my story. This final edition is a long, wordy one, so read on...at your own pace. Love to you, always, *WMG*.

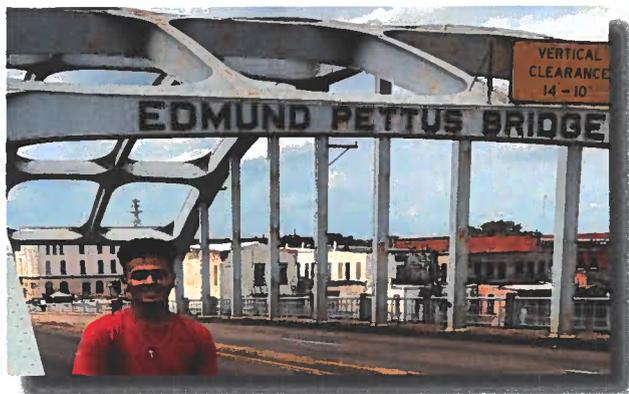
My Journey

I'm in year four at Sewanee. It has been an incredibly busy year. I've had the good fortune to travel more than usual. My travels have taken me to Washington, D. C. several times, to New Orleans, New Haven, CT, Due West, South Carolina, and I spent a reflective week of vacation in Vancouver, British Columbia.

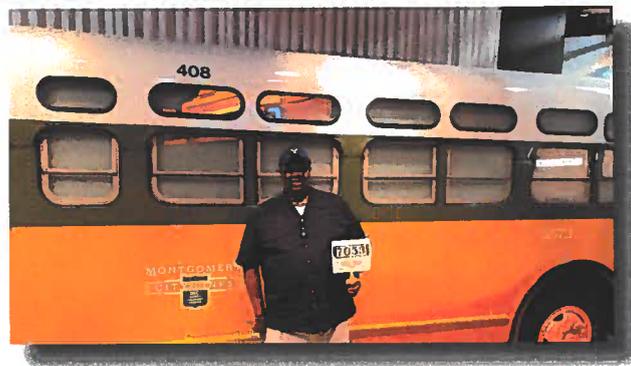
I also enjoyed several fun trips to Chapel Hill, NC. This is the place I'd like to return and retire one day. I'm so drawn to that place for many reasons. It's a great university town (Go Heels!), and I made many lasting friends through the years-as a graduate student at UNC, as a former employee at Duke, and as a member of the church I attended.

This past summer, I spent a good deal of time with my nephew, O'Brien. He turns 18 years-old in January, and he is poised to graduate from high school in June. We all wait with anticipation on which college or university he'll select.

O'Brien spent some of his summer in Chapel Hill, NC (no influence from me; he's a smart young man who knows a good thing when he sees it) where he attended a leadership program for students who are interested in the sciences. I happened to be in North Carolina during the summer at the same time, and we



O'Brien ready to walk across the bridge.



At the Rosa Parks Museum in Montgomery, Alabama

decided to travel together. Once O'Brien's program ended, we drove to Davidson College to take a look and to visit with my college friend and teammate, Jim Folds, who lives in Davidson. We stayed overnight in their beautiful home. Jim's son, James, and O'Brien are the same age, and they'd met each other the previous year during their college visit to Sewanee as prospective students. They had a good time hanging out and playing ping pong, while we older folks visited with each other.

Museums

O'Brien also joined me on my spontaneous excursion to Montgomery, Alabama, where we visited The Legacy Museum, The National Museum for Peace and Justice, in particular, and the Rosa Parks Museum. I wanted to see these museums, because at Sewanee, we were considering having our first-year students read the book, *Just Mercy*, by Bryan Stevenson, who was responsible for creating the Equal Justice Initiative, which raised more than \$20 million to build The Legacy Museum and The National Museum for Peace and Justice. Here's a quick summary of the book, that will give you a sense as to why it was chosen as the common read for our students:

"Just Mercy is Bryan Stevenson's account of his decades-long career as a legal advocate for marginalized people who have been either falsely convicted or harshly sentenced. Though the book contains profiles of many different people, the central storyline is that of the relationship be-

tween Stevenson, the organization he founded (the Equal Justice Initiative, or EJI), and Walter McMillian, a black man wrongfully accused of murder and sentenced to death in Alabama in the late 1980's. Throughout the book, Stevenson provides historical context, as well as his own moral and philosophical reflections on the American criminal justice and prison systems. He ultimately argues that society should choose empathy and mercy over condemnation and punishment."

It was a moving and personally emotional experience for me to move through the museum and see image after image and account after account of a painful period in our history. I believe O'Brien sensed the importance of the history he was learning.

While we explored The Legacy Museum, I asked O'Brien to pay close attention to the photos and to the historical accounts of *Bloody Sunday*, which took place on March 7, 1965. I didn't tell him that on our way home I'd plan to drive through Selma, a small town once known for its resistance to allowing African Americans to register to vote, and where several protest marches to Montgomery originated. I wanted him to see the Edmund Pettus Bridge, the iconic structure, where hundreds of protesters, led by United States Representative and civil rights leader, John Lewis, were told by Alabama State troop-

ers to turn around, and when they refused, were shot with tear-gas and beaten with billy clubs.

After visiting the Rosa Parks museum, O'Brien and I traveled a few blocks and toured the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church, where Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. preached for six years, and where, from his office in the lower floor of the church, organized the 1956 Montgomery Bus Boycott. Then we agreed that it was time to head home.

Once we returned to our car, in typical teenage fashion, O'Brien nestled comfortably in his seat and put on his head phones, readying himself for a four-hour nap, the time it would take to drive home (or so he believed). Once we got near Selma, which was approximately a forty-five-minute drive from Montgomery, I stopped by the Dollar General Store, partly to awaken O'Brien and to get a few snacks. With only a few moments before we reached "the Bridge," O'Brien hadn't returned to his nap, he was alert. When we approached the bridge, he asked with surprise, "Isn't that the bridge where all those people were beaten up?" I told him that it was, pleased that he'd paid attention to the *Bloody Sunday* exhibit at The Legacy Museum.

I parked the car, and asked O'Brien if he wanted to walk across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. He



Terry, Amy, OB, and Ariona at a UT Football Game



Marlon West lunching with my family

said yes, and as millions of people have done, we walked across the Bridge, honoring the brave men and women who stood up against intolerance and hate and fought for equity and inclusion.

As a result of the powerful impact that the book, *Just Mercy*, and the Equal Justice Initiative is having on the Sewanee campus community, we have sponsored two trips to Montgomery this past fall. We hope to get Bryan Stevenson to campus in the near future to discuss his book and to encourage students to stay involved in matters that affect the poor and marginalized.

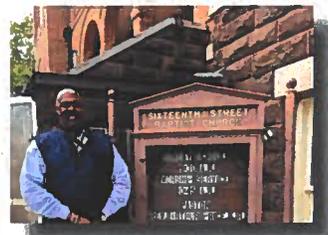
My summer visits to museums in historic Montgomery weren't my first visits to such museums. Earlier this past spring, I took a group of Sewanee students to Birmingham to visit the Civil Rights Institute. It's a significant place where all people can learn about the rich and diverse African American experience.

Late this fall during Sewanee's Fall Break, I traveled to Washington, D.C. and met my friends, Robert and Ann Bradford. Their daughter, Allee, had recently moved to D.C., and she was our very able host and tour guide. I longed for good food that I can't get in Sewanee, and Allee did not disappoint. We ate Mediterranean food, Ethiopian, authentic Chinese, and we dined at a French Wine Bar restaurant. We also had the best soul-food breakfast that I'd had in a long time. Each of these restaurants opened taste buds that hadn't been opened in a while.

The main purpose of our trip to D.C. was to visit the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. This was, by far, the highlight of my year-long visits to museums.

Being able to visit the immense collection of artifacts, from Nat Turner's Bible, to Michael Jackson's epic fedora, to the films, photos, and clothing was an experience like none other. The

most moving image that I saw at the museum—one that I had to wait in line more than 30 minutes before viewing, was Emmett Till's casket. He was the young 14-year-old African American boy from Chicago, who, while visiting relatives in Mississippi in 1955, was lynched, because he was accused of offending a white woman. His body had been exhumed, so that an autopsy could be performed to determine the cause of death and if there was any evidence linking him to his killers. He was re-buried in a different casket, and his original casket was donated to the Smithsonian.



At his funeral, Emmett's mother decided to have a public, open-casket funeral, so the world could see her son's mutilated body, and to highlight the barbaric acts of lynching and racism in America. Many historians assert that Emmett Till's horrific lynching spurred the next phase of the civil rights movement—that same year, the Montgomery bus boycotts began in Alabama, as well. I believe it is necessary to pay respect to and honor the life, legacy, and memory of Emmett Till when you go to the museum; if you plan to visit, I urge you to ready your-

self, because the images at this particular exhibit are a chilling, eerie account of a time in history that still haunts.

Yale/New Haven

Other than a twelve -hour visit to Connecticut to attend my mentor's retirement reception, I'd not returned to New Haven and Yale since departing in 2015. My eight years working at Yale were some of the most memorable times I've had in my professional career. I decided to travel to Connecticut this past summer to meet with Sewanee students who'd accepted internships in New Haven with Dr. Linda Mayes and to visit my former Yale colleagues.

Dr. Linda Mayes is a Sewanee graduate. She grew up in Franklin County, near Sewanee. She was the very first woman to become valedictorian at Sewanee. Her career took her to Yale, where she is a Child Psychiatrist and the Director of the Yale Child Study Center. The center does ground breaking research to improve the mental health of children and families. During the summer, Dr. Mayes invites 15 Sewanee students to Yale to do research with Psychiatrists and Psychologists at the Child Study Center. It's a huge honor for students to be accepted as an intern and study with Dr. Mayes. Having Sewanee students doing research at Yale provided the best opportunity for me to take a trip to New Haven and pay them a visit.

I also notified as many of my Yale friends as I could think of and told them that I would be in town, but that I wouldn't be able to visit with them individually, because I only had time to stay two days. I decided to hold court at the hotel in which I was staying. It was great seeing all my colleagues who were able to stop by my hotel. I saw way more people than I anticipated.

While in New Haven, I also was able to spend time over breakfast with my favorite retired Yale colleagues, like my mentor and friend, Dean Joe Gordon, my predecessor, Dean Betty Trachtenberg, and one of the first people I met at Yale, Dean John Loge and his partner, Marge. John and Marge also had once driven to Sewanee from Connecticut to pay me a visit and to meet my mom.

My longtime special New Haven friend, Alfie Daniels, agreed to have dinner with me. You might have heard me mention her name in past and in Last Say So Newsletters, where her photo also has appeared.

I also could not pass up an opportunity to reach out to the person that made it possible for me to work at Yale-Peter Salovey. Peter is a psychologist and is recognized as one of the founding "fathers" of the concept of Emotional Intelligence. In fact, there are people still doing research in the lab that Peter started at Yale.

Peter was the Dean of Yale College when I was hired, and I was fortunate to work for him for a year and a half before he was promoted



Sewanee Students at Yale Child Study Center



With Teri Barbuto in
New Haven, CT



In NC with Marlon
West's family

to Provost at Yale. He now is Yale University's President, one of the most lauded positions in higher education. I can't think of many other more difficult positions to have in academia-being the president of arguably one of the most politicized, praised, and criticized institutions in the world.

Peter and I have had some fun times over the years, often jointly agreeing to let down our guards and appearing in the yearly Yale Halloween film, produced by students who perform in the Yale Symphony Orchestra. We also have engaged in many serious discussions about our families and music, for example (he loves bluegrass music and plays a mean stand up bass).

Peter agreed to meet me for breakfast, and we picked up from where we left off three years ago, without having missed a beat. Here I was, sitting over a meal with the president of Yale University, whom everyone in the restaurant knows, wondering by their stares, how I, no longer a familiar face in New Haven, got the opportunity to gain access to Peter Salovey.

While we dined, I could have launched into all the Yale news that gets covered by the national television stations and newspapers, but I imagine that Peter often is confronted by people who always want to talk shop or address University business during his limited, precious free time. Really, I didn't have any interest in discussing Yale with Peter; I was more interested in speaking with him in the way we'd always interacted, by discussing topics that matter, like how we now both experience episodic

waves of grief, owing to the death of both of our parents (I learned that Peter's father died a few months after my mother died); or about simple life events that we are experiencing, like how the passage of time is forcing us to think about how, as *fifty and sixty-somethings*, we are in the second half of our lives, and how we plan to live it.

Not only was I able to visit with Peter Salovey this summer, I also had an opportunity to visit and take a photo with several former and current presidents, including Sam Williamson, a former Sewanee Vice Chancellor (president) with whom I spent time in North Carolina, and John McCardell, the current Sewanee Vice Chancellor, whom I see almost daily (he also was Middlebury College's president when I worked there), and President Barack Obama, when I went to see his and the former First Lady, Michelle Obama's, portraits at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D. C. I am honored to know Peter, Sam, John, and I'm grateful to have had Barack Obama as my president.

The Get Together

In the fall of 2017, I attended an informal dinner that one of my colleagues hosted for the families of our students of color during Family Weekend. Attending dinner that evening were a few new African American professors, and as we got to know each other, I realized that these two professors didn't yet know many people on campus; I also realized that they were not aware of how far Sewanee had come since my time as a student in the early 1980's, when I could



President Salovey and Vice Chancellor and his wife



Vice Chancellor McCardell and President Obama

count the number of professors of color on two fingers, and the number of African American students on less than 15 fingers. As a Vice President, I have many opportunities to interact with professors and staff members on campus, but my new colleagues don't as much. I pitched the idea of us getting together over dinner, and as we all became busy, we failed to make it happen. Near the end of the school year, around April, I sat down and made a guest list, inviting each faculty member of color at the University, along with each professional staff member to a dinner at my house. I called it, simply, "A Get Together." The intention of this gathering was to give all the attendees an opportunity to get to know each other, but also to illuminate the increasing diversity that Sewanee has achieved over the course of the past decade. The Get Together was a huge success.



Photos from the Let's Get Together Dinner

The Grand Ole Opry

After all these years growing up and living in Tennessee, I'd never been to a show at the Grand Ole Opry. Actually, I've never been interested in going. I love music, just not country music that much. I believe my bias against country music, especially the twangy-sounding country music that I heard growing up, started in the early 1970's. The radio station, WJMM, could be found on AM 1490; it was the only station in our town, until WAXO went on the air around the time I started high school in 1980.

Each morning during school days, the first thing my parents did when they woke up to prepare for work was turn on the radio and listen to the news; I woke up to WJMM blasting in the living room-learning who in our community had died, been arrested, or who was celebrating a birthday or anniversary. Between local news stories, the disc jockey I remembered most, Denny Walker, often would play country music, and on occasion, he'd play southern gospel music. I remember hearing songs like *Elvira*, by the Oak Ridge Boys, or *Coal Miner's Daughter* by Loretta Lynn, or *Hello Darlin'*, by Conway Twitty. My ears simply couldn't tolerate that country twang. I longed for a different sound.

During the summer when my cousins and I stayed at our grandparent's home when our parents worked, we'd call the radio request line and ask the disc jockey to play songs by the Jackson Five, The O'Jays or the Temptations, and we'd get what became a familiar response, "We don't have that song." My intellectual self often wondered why they couldn't go purchase the music my cousins, friends, and I wanted to hear-"all they played was that twangy music," we'd complain. I later realized that even the five and dime store that sold music didn't have "our kind" of music for sale, either. We'd often have to

travel to nearby Columbia or Nashville to find songs that appealed to our musical palates, and we'd play our own music at home, and I began to bypass WJMM, until James Allen went on the air at night (story for another time, but some of my readers will remember him)!

Fast forward to 2018, the week before Easter. I received a call from my dear friend, Marlon West, from North Carolina, who asked if I wanted company during Easter. He was on vacation, and he'd arranged to have someone else play piano at his church.

I don't get many visitors, so I was excited to host Marlon. He told me that he wanted to spend time in Nashville, a city he'd never toured. I wasn't sure what he'd want to do in Nashville. He's not really one for sports, so I asked him what in particular did he have in mind.

He inquired, "Isn't Nashville known for country music and The Grand Ole Opry?"

I responded with a great deal of surprise, "Yes, it is-you want to go *there*?"

"See if it's possible, it might be fun," he said.

Now for those of you who know me, and since you're receiving this newsletter, you KNOW me pretty well-I wasn't feeling The Grand Ole Opry as an activity. You all also know that I'll do whatever I can to accommodate my guests, within reason. So I called the ticket office, and the person who answered was a woman who spoke with a smile in her voice. I told her that I was interested in purchasing two tickets, but I had a few questions first. Here's the gist of the conversation between the person at the ticket office and me:

Ticket person: "Sure, sir, I'm happy to answer your questions."

Me: "Do black people attend shows at The Grand Ole Opry?"

Ticket person: "Of course. It's a fun time for all, and people come to The Grand Ole Opry from all over the world."

Me: "I see. I don't want any trouble, so are the people who attend shows friendly and nice to people who don't look like them?"

Ticket person: "Why sure, sir. I've never seen any disputes from people who come to The Grand Ole Opry. It's also a kid friendly show."

Me: "Thanks, that makes me feel more comfortable. I have one final question, folks aren't going to be flying confederate flags or anything like that at the show, are they?"

Ticket person laughing now: "Sir, no, The Grand Ole Opry really is not that kind of place, and if it were, I would not be working here. Now let me find you some great seats for the show, and don't worry, I promise you'll have a fantastic time."

The ticket person found tickets for Marlon and me near the front of the auditorium; I have a hunch that she also might have had something to do with the kind African American woman that greeted us when we got to our section. As she guided us to our seats, the usher told us that she'd served as an usher for many years, and that we were in for a treat.

I have to admit that the Grand Ole Opry experience ranks as one of the top-ten best produced musical events that I've ever seen. I believed that it would be the only time I'd ever go to a place to witness country music's finest, but not to be outdone, my friend, Mark Peeler, and his family spent time with me this summer, and they asked me to take them to the Grand Ole Opry, and off we went again. And just like the first time when I went with Marlon, we saw an excellent show.



Marichal Sings the Blues

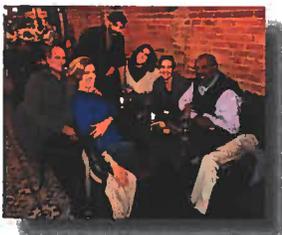
There was a time in the early 1990's when I was the front man in a blues band, named *Marichal and the Giants*. This band was created by my friend, Robert Bradford, a guitarist and writer, among other talents, whom I met in the early 90's, when I worked at Sewanee the first time. When I moved to Chapel Hill, NC to begin graduate school, a few years later, Robert's new job also took him to North Carolina, and there we were, together again in the same town.

Robert wanted to start up a band again and asked if I were interested. We auditioned several musicians, and a few months later, we were playing in small venues in and around Chapel Hill under a new name, *Marichal and the Phatback Blues Band*. Perhaps our biggest, most important gig took place at Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, where we played at the inauguration party of Juniata's new president, Tom Keple. He'd been a former colleague of ours when we worked at Sewanee. It was a fun, festive affair, and it seemed as if everyone from this small college town attended. We had a large stage, like a real band, and it was designed by my talented friend, Dan Backlund, a former and current Sewanee colleague.

My career took me to Vermont. The *Marichal* part of the blues band ceased to exist, but Robert found other front people to replace his favorite and bestie, and the band continued to thrive, until Robert and his family moved to California.

Our paths crossed again when I returned home to be with my mother. A year later, Robert and his wife, now empty nesters, returned to North Carolina.

Robert and I share many characteristics—we're both tall, left-handed, and we share the same December 28 born day. We're in good company with Denzel Washington, Gayle King (Oprah's best friend), John Legend, Seth Meyers, Stan Lee (creator of the Hulk, Iron Man, Thor, and X-Men who died recently), who all were born on December 28. Last Christmas holiday, Robert and Ann invited me to their home, so we could celebrate our birthdays together. They also invited many of their neighbors, and I was allowed to ask a few of my friends to the event. A delicious meal was served, and we didn't allow the evening to pass without performing a few songs for our guests—actually it was a full night of music. In addition to our song list, at Robert's request, I learned the Staple Singer's version of the song, "*The Weight*," and I performed it with Hank, the Bradford's oldest child, who was in town for the holidays with his girlfriend, Haley. I believe Robert, Ann, and I agree that this special evening of food and music was a great way to bid farewell to 2017 and to welcome 2018.



Drum Corps

Many of you know that my year is made more complete when I get an opportunity to go to a Drum Corps competition. For the past two years, I've been able to attend the finals, which take place in Indianapolis. Last year, I drove there alone-I needed time to myself to reflect and to begin the process of healing, since a week earlier, I'd said goodbye to and honored the life of my mother. There was one particular drum corps performance I wanted to see live and in person, because the drum corps performed the song, *Everything Must Change*, written and made famous by George Benson. This song has been covered by many artists. The words had special meaning to me, as my world forever changed last year. I'll share them below, in case the words resonate with you:

*Everything must change, nothing stays the same,
Everyone must change, no one stays the same,
The young become the old, mysteries do unfold,
Cause that's the way of time,
Nothing and no one goes unchanged.
There are not many things in life you can be sure of.
Except,*

Rain comes from the clouds and sun lights up the sky, and humming birds do fly. Winter turns to spring, wounded hearts will heal. Never much too soon, everything must change.

This year, my good friend, Timmy Pigg, took the drive to Indianapolis with me. Timmy and I have known each other all our lives. Timmy played Little League baseball on Heil Quaker, the team my father coached more than 20 years. We also sang in the choir together at our church, and we played in the drum section for our high school marching and concert bands. Timmy and I agree that we had a great time watching and admiring

the musicianship and professionalism of these talented young people.

Relay for Life

Bill Davis and his family have been very generous to Sewanee for a long period of time. In fact, there is a major Sewanee prize, appropriately named, the Davis Family Scholarship, that's given in honor of Bill's brother, also a Sewanee graduate, who died of cancer.

I've known Bill for a while and was aware of his altruistic efforts in the community, but I'd never worked closely with him. He asked to meet with me, because as a member of the Rotary Club, one of the reasons for the meeting was to invite me to become a Rotarian. I politely declined, because I have enough activities on my plate at this time. The other reason for his visit was to learn how I could help him get students to become interested in starting a Rotaract Club at Sewanee. Once I learned what Rotaract's mission is, I immediately thought of a student who could get such a student organization started. Within a few months, the Rotaract Club was created, and it has 50 student members. It has become one of the most active organizations on campus. I serve as their adviser.

As its major project for the year, the student members of the Rotaract Club decided to host a Relay for Life (RFL) event for the Sewanee and surrounding communities, in part, to honor Bill Davis' work and his brother. As you may know, Relay for Life is a national, community-based fund raising event for the American Cancer Society. In any given year, there are more than 5000 Relay for Life events held,



and the funds raised are used to improve cancer survival through research, to reduce the incidents of cancer, and to improve the quality of life of patients living with cancer.

A typical RFL event is organized as a multi-day public gathering of folks, who often bring tents and camp out around a track (our students had a one-day event). There is food sold at the event, and all the proceeds go to the American Cancer Society. At Sewanee, there were games for the young children, and Sewanee students played flag football on the field. It was quite a festive, fun-filled day. Groups of people form teams over the course of several months leading up to the big day, and each group raises as much money as they can. I was the captain of my team, and our team name was fittingly named the *Dean's Dream Team*. I also was asked by the students to serve as the emcee for the day, and I was honored that they asked.

The event typically begins with people walking what is called a "survivor lap." Participants walk around the track all throughout the event. Then there is the memorial Luminaria Ceremony, which, perhaps is the most heartfelt time of the evening. During the day, memorial candles can be purchased in honor of cancer survivors or people you know who have died of cancer; when the sun sets, the candles are placed around the track in bags with a name of each person who is being honored or memorialized with the purchase of a candle.



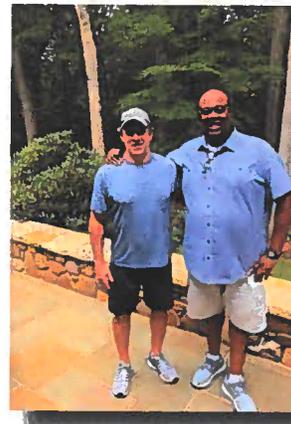
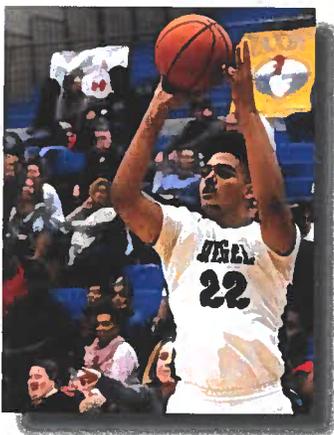
All the lights shining around the dark track really is a thing to behold. I bought candles for all the family and friends I know who are battling and or who have died of cancer, and I bought a special one for my father, who succumbed to cancer in 2011.

The students led a very successful Relay for Life event. When all monies had been counted, the Sewanee community had raised nearly \$40,000.

Thanksgiving 2018

It is my favorite holiday. It's a time to be with family and friends, to give thanks, and to remind ourselves of the blessings we have, big or small.

I was fortunate to share my Thanksgiving with my brother, Terry, Amy, and their family, Greg and Amy Gardner, and their family, colleagues, Nikki Hamilton and Dr. Sylvia Gray, and three college students who didn't go home for the break, (Alex and Letherio, who are Sewanee students), and Lenae, visiting from Furman University, and who is Letherio's sister.





We all assembled at noon, partly because it wouldn't be the final Thanksgiving meal we'd eat that day. Some of us also had received invitations from our extended family and friends requesting our presence at their homes to share in their day of thanks.

As observant as I usually am, I didn't notice what Terry or anyone else in his family was wearing when they arrived. I was busy touring people around the house and getting things ready for our meal. Terry approached me and said, "You didn't say anything about what I'm wearing."

I replied, "I didn't notice, let me take a look."

When I focused on his shirt, I realized that he was wearing an orange T-shirt highlighted by a turkey that read: Gentry Family Annual Thanksgiving Dinner, Sewanee, TN, 2018. Then I noticed that Amy, O'Brien, and Ariona also wore the same T-shirt.

Then Terry told me that he and Amy brought enough T-shirts for everyone who attended, and it was then that Amy added, "That's why I kept asking you how many people were coming. It wasn't to determine how much food to bring, but to get enough T-shirts for everyone who'd planned to attend."

Family

We've had a few family members who have been temporarily hobbled (see photo of Terry on crutches), or who are very ill and unable to make it to some of our family events. Please know that you all are in my daily prayers.



This year, both my immediate and extended families still have found time to get together in love and fellowship. I always enjoy our time together, whether it's a spontaneous trip to Lewisburg to have dinner with Bette, Stephanie, Francine, and Nakia; or whether it's a stop by my brother's house to hang out with Amy, O'Brien, and Ariona; or when some of us get together for the William Howard and Annette Gentry Holiday Luncheon, or at our annual Labor Day Family reunion (thanks Diana and Jack for the work you do for this event).

And lest I forget the annual holiday gathering of the Tout a' Fait Social Club. We begin as an organization nearly 40 years ago, and we've been friends even longer. I consider you all a part of my family. Though in most years we meet at the home of one of the Tout a' Fait members, this past year, we gathered at Shoney's Restaurant, a childhood favorite of ours, and still to this day, no restaurant makes a better hot fudge sundae! I look forward to hosting this year's Tout a' Fait holiday gathering in Sewanee.

Blessings to each of you, always. I hope to see you in person when I am able. You also and always are welcome to come see me. Until the next—well, I guess I should say—SEASON! With love and affection, I remain very truly yours, WMG for Last Say So Productions.