

TRANSITIONS

WINTER 2015

HOLIDAY NEWSLETTER: A LAST SAY SO PRODUCTION

SEVENTH EDITION



What a Privilege!

Greetings from Sewanee, TN. It is Sunday afternoon on a cool, sunny day in mid-November. I'm sitting at my desk in my house after having come in from blowing leaves off of my front porch. My new house is surrounded by trees, and there are many fallen leaves on the ground, signifying the changing of the season, and calling for me to rid my yard of them.

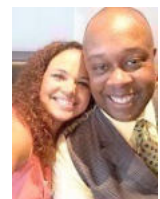
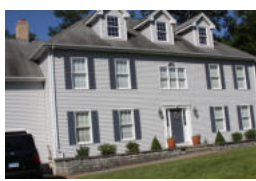
I have had a year, full of wonderful memories. I've bid farewell to old friends, and have greatly experienced life's swift transitions. Only God would have imagined that I would be

living and working in Tennessee, after having been away nearly thirty years. It's a blessing, honor, and privilege to return to work at my alma mater and to care for my mother. There is a purpose and a plan for everything.

I've always believed that whatever is happening in my current life's journey is the very thing that's preparing me for the next challenge. It's also been my experience that I am placed in the best possible position to be the most effective I can be for whatever challenges that come my way. God has prepared me

in advance of my challenges, and He has set provision in front of me, and all I have to do is trust Him, reach out and take hold to His unchanging hands.

I am grateful to so many of you for your calls (many I still need to return), your emails, text messages, and your prayers through my personal transition. I look forward to seeing you, and I extend an invitation to you to come see mom and me in Sewanee. We'd love to host you. May God bless you all. Read on at your own pace. WMG



Color Coordinated



Above: July 4 with the Peelers and friends.
From top left: Nicky with mom; nephew, Taylor, with girlfriend, J'Chante; OB; and Toya does mom's hair.

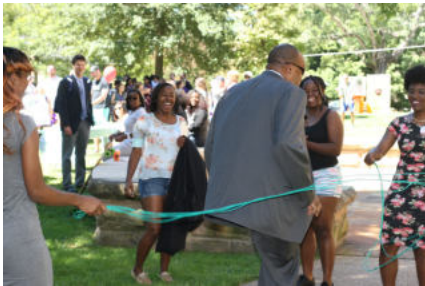
One evening, early in September of 2014, I received an email from Sewanee's Vice Chancellor, John McCardell, asking if I had time for a chat. I thought nothing of his request for a conversation, and the last thing I imagined was that he wanted me to consider taking a position at Sewanee. I have known Dr. McCardell for a long time, because he was the president at Middlebury College when I worked there, and I have a lot of respect for him. After speaking in great detail with Dr. McCardell and after taking several trips to Sewanee, I became open to the possibility of returning home. By April of 2015, nearly eight months after the

first contact with Dr. McCardell, I still wasn't sure I should leave Yale. In the end, my mom's declining health convinced me that it was time to come home.

I was asked to travel to Sewanee to give an acceptance speech. I was advised to synchronize my speech with the email announcement of my resignation from Yale, so everyone would learn the news at the same time. I never imagined the eery feeling I would have when, while at the podium giving my speech, my cell phone began vibrating. These vibrations would be calls from my Yale colleagues who'd just learned the news.

Life at Yale and Sewanee

Lux et Veritas and Ecce Quam Bonum



My mentor, Joe Gordon, who retires next month after working at Yale more than 40 years, was asked to carry the Yale mace and lead the procession at commencement. When he became injured, I was asked to carry it (**top photo**). The honor of carrying the mace would become the last official ceremony in which I would participate at Yale. **Below**, posing with Vice President Joe Biden, who was Yale's Class Day speaker during Commencement Weekend. **From top left**: On the way to my first official Sewanee convocation; learning to double dutch with Sewanee students at an activities fair; posing with a Sewanee History professor and students; attending a farewell luncheon with my long-time Yale colleague and assistant, Teri Barbuto; and meeting for the final time with Yale's Woodbridge Fellows, who came to my house for a delicious dinner.

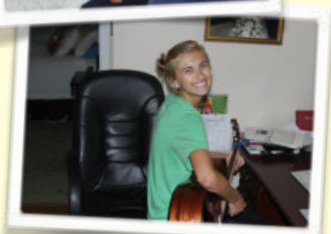
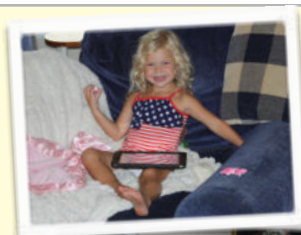
REFLECTION

I don't believe I've ever worked as hard and had as much fun as I have these past eight years. Yale is a demanding place, and due to its reputation as one of the finest institutions in the world, almost everyone sets an extremely high personal bar to excel. This is true from the president to the deans, to the custodians. The media often paints a false image of universities, like Yale—places that most folks believe only the rich and famous can attend. As an insider, this is far from the truth. Students come from every corner of the earth, rich, poor, very poor, and those who are worse off than the very poor. These students also set a high bar and work hard to become the best they can

become. I have found Yale to be a place that deliberately brings people together from all walks of life into an intellectual and social setting, so that they might learn from one another. Many students arrive believing that they have little in common with others who don't look like them. By living, eating, and learning together among seasoned professional staff who are there to facilitate difficult conversations, involving race, class, religion, and many other topics, over time, students learn that their similarities greatly outweigh their differences. This is difficult work, but I strongly believe that for our world to become better, we need to see more of this, not less.



During our transition to Sewanee, we have been fortunate to make and re-establish good friends. Before it became busy at work, we also found a bit of time to travel to visit with a few family members. Below, mom visits with her niece, Martha Ann Rose. Above, here we are with Lois, one of mom's part-time caregivers, and who happens to be the sister of Vereda, one of mom's caregivers.



Spending time at the Peeler's House in route from Connecticut to Tennessee. Charlee enjoys iPad time, and Hope serenades on the guitar.

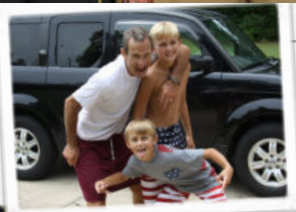
Photos from my Yale farewell party



A few photos from my Yale farewell party



Terry, Amy, and O'Brien on the mountain for a Sunday afternoon visit with mom.

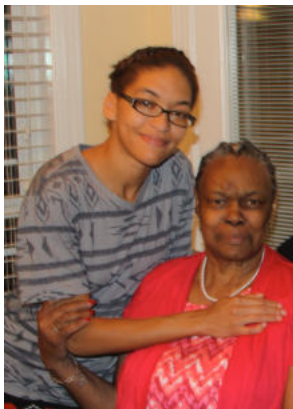
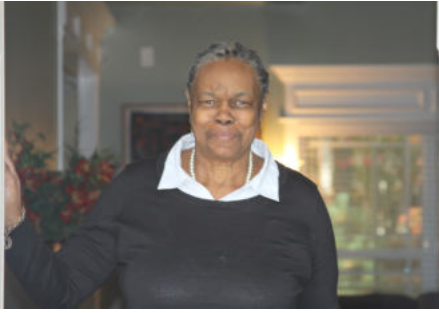


Vereda Taylor, standing next to mom, is one of her caregivers. On Halloween night, she brought her sisters to visit mom. Above, my longtime friend, Mark, poses with his sons, Jenkins and Max. Below them, Jenkins and his friend, Carson, sporting their Independence Day gear.

Vereda and her Sisters



Life with Mom



Having great fun and sharing laughs at the home of longtime friends, Lee Ann and Dan Backlund. At their house, mom enjoyed her favorite meal--hamburgers, french fries, and baked beans. On this evening, mom played the piano for us and gave new meaning to the song, "Oh, Happy Day!"

Life has been made a bit easier with the love and care of many of my Sewanee friends. Shirley Taylor, in the second photo to the left (far right) has been there from the very beginning. She enjoys cooking and taking care of folks, and she has been taking care of me since I was an eighteen year-old freshman in college. She now takes good care of mom by stopping by on a regular basis to bring her a loaf of banana bread, mom's favorite. Not a loaf goes eaten without a fresh loaf appearing in the house. Shirley is one of a kind, and the world is better with her in it. Shirley also arranges for her niece, LaToya, (pictured

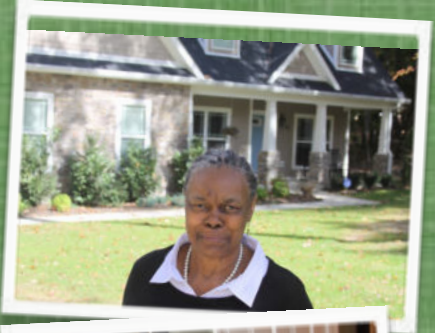
in the bottom photo with mom), to come by to do mom's hair. Mom loves it when Shirley brings LaToya to the house. Penny, standing next to mom in the third photo, was the first caregiver we had when we first arrived. Penny was so patient with mom, and for good reason. Penny took care of her teenage son for years before he died earlier this spring of a rare disease. Penny also did more around the house than she was hired to do. On some days, I'd get home to learn that Penny had taken mom home with her, because Penny knew that mom would enjoy seeing her grandchildren. Penny is a special, exceptional woman.

A Tribute

Our family dealt with the death of several family members this year. My father's oldest and only brother, Uncle Joe, died after a prolonged illness. The fondest memories I had of Uncle Joe took place on his land hauling hay and at his dairy farm, where we'd watch his sons, Mike and Bobby, and him milk the cows. I knew of no other African-American man who owned a dairy farm. I still don't. As a young child, Uncle Joe was larger than life to me. I admired his work ethic. He also was a generous friend to everyone who knew him. He always was so proud of his sons, grandson, niece, and nephews. When I came home on school breaks to visit, I'd always chuckle when he would tell me how he'd bragged about us to folks he'd run into when he was out and about town. He'd always wanted me to bring him a fresh business card to replace the crumbled one he showed to everyone

who'd asked about me and where I was working. Uncle Joe was a special man, and we miss him dearly.

Days after losing Uncle Joe, we said goodbye to his sister and my aunt, Patsy. Owing to her being the youngest of eight, she was the only sister of my dad and Uncle Joe's six sisters whom we didn't refer to as Aunt. To us, she always was either Pat or Patsy. She was the fun aunt, who always had something interesting to say. She was proud of us and full of compliments and encouraging words. My first real memory of Patsy was when I was nearly four and a half. We lived on Jones Circle next to Jones School, the all black school where my parents attended. One evening in April, Patsy ran into the house clearly upset, asking my parents if they'd heard that Martin Luther King had been killed. This night also would mark the moment when I began learning about MLK, the man, and about good, evil, bigotry, hate, and injustice.



Above, Mom enjoys an afternoon stroll. Below, Nailah and Lexie stop by for treats on Halloween night. From bottom left: Cousins, Francine and Salica, share a laugh at Labor Day cookout; Carson, Max, and Jenkins enjoy fun and games; mom enjoys the comforts of her recliner; and mom plays bingo.



Gone, but not Forgotten

Now that I am home, I am able to attend family gatherings again. Below are scenes from our annual Labor Day family cookout. This is the first time in nearly 15 years I've been able to attend. As I thumbed through photos I've taken through the years, I found one of two of my relatives who recently died. I took this photo during a family Christmas dinner in 2010. Sitting on the sofa in the photo to the right are Pastor James Rose (left), who died this past

spring. His wife Martha Rose, appears in a photo with my mother on page four. Sitting next to him is Pete Crutcher, who died after Christmas last year. I had the honor of officiating his service. Rest in peace, Uncle James and Pete.



Mom with Vereda and Lois Taylor at our home. The generosity of the Sewanee community is abundant with folks like Vereda and Lois.

