

STEADFAST



PEACE BE UNTO YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

Greetings! After thinking a lot about a title for this year's newsletter, I landed on the term, *Steadfast*. It's defined as a state of being stable, calm, even-tempered, and unchanging, even amid one's storms. Having a steadfast spirit is important. It's translated close to 200 times in the Bible, to demonstrate God's steadfast love for us and serves as a guide for us to behave in this manner towards others.

A steadfast person is grounded and has a firm foundation. It's a person that can be depended on, at home, on the job, and as a friend. A steadfast person is not perfect, but endeavors to be faithful, loyal, and trusted, and the very best quality of their character strives to be on display at all times. Read on! WMG



Young Marichal takes a swing!

Think on these few things:

1. **Gratitude:** It's easy to be grateful for the big, material possessions that you own or the perks that you have in your life. Wise people are thankful for the intangibles, like love, creativity, internal peace, joy, good health, generosity, and happiness.
2. **Integrity:** The unwavering moral compass in a person is integral to gaining wisdom, and it is a highly valued human trait. Having integrity means that you live in accordance with your values, and that your actions in any situation are reliable.
3. **Altruism:** Becoming a humble servant has a boomerang effect. The ways in which you extend yourself to others will always come back to you, multifold. Doing selfless acts of kindness to help others for the pure pleasure of doing so is altruism at its best.
4. **Simplicity:** Removing all the clutter from your mind and other spaces that you inhabit (and that inhabit you) will lead to a simpler, more productive life, period! Find ways to let go and watch what happens. From *Getting to Wisdom* by W. Marichal Gentry

FAMILY TIME



My brother Terry firing up the deep fryer to prepare his world-famous chicken wings.

The Annette and William Howard Gentry Holiday Luncheon has been a family tradition for many decades. It's a fun day that includes spending time with family and eating good food. After Mama and Daddy died, Terry and I didn't want this festive day to end. Living in North Carolina doesn't make it easy for me to do much of the work. Terry and Amy do all the heavy lifting. I contribute by capturing unforgettable moments in some of the photos that you'll see throughout this newsletter.



Lunch is served!



My niece Ariona poses for the camera.



My cousin, Jack and his wife, Kim, with their grandson, Chris.



Visiting my cousin Michael and his wife Mary.

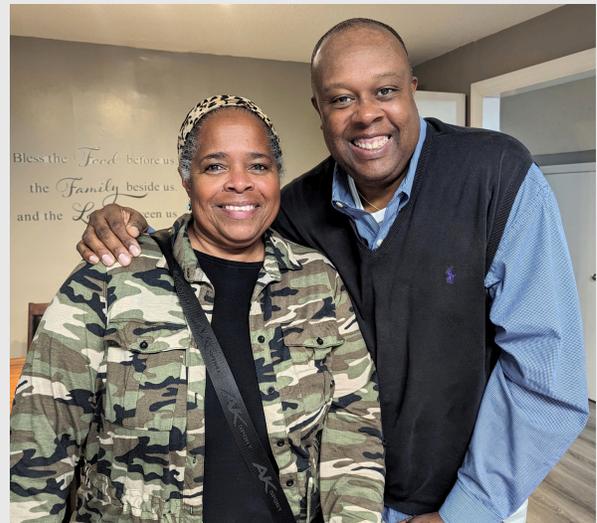
MY FAMILY



Front row: Andre, Kim, Tahj, Ariona, Amy, Tru, Kaiyanna
Second row: Nakia, Bette, Diana, Kim, J'Chante, Terrell, Taylor
Third row: Chris, Francine, Marcus, Jack, Chris, Meghan, O'Brien
Back row: Toney, Clark, Terry, Marichal



Here are Bette (my first cousin), and Andre, my fourth cousin.



With Pam, one of my favorite people.

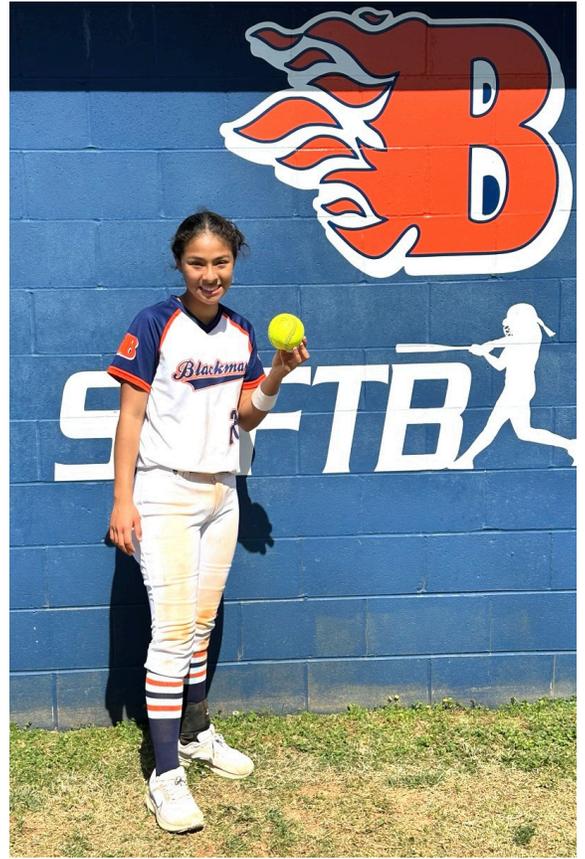
"Being part of a family means smiling for photos!"



Terry, Amy, O'Brien, and Ariona on their way to church.

Terry continues to enjoy his work serving as a Sr. Engineer at Nissan. His job requires him to travel quite a bit to cities in the US and Canada, like Los Angeles, Tacoma, Vancouver, Newark, and Baltimore. **Amy** is the CEO of her own childcare center, *Be A Sport*. She runs a tight, well-oiled organization that serves families and children from Murfreesboro and the surrounding areas. She's a boss! **O'Brien** is gainfully employed and hails as the top salesperson at Honda of Murfreesboro. A milestone for him is that he recently moved out and lives on his own. We're so proud of him. **Ariona** is in the 8th grade. She's heavily involved in softball and gymnastics. More importantly, she's a stellar student, earning all A's in her classes, and she's never missed a day of school in her lifetime.

On the right, I'm posing with **Ellis Simmons**. Ellis, or simply E, or E-train, as we call him, grew up in the Paducah/Eddyville region of Kentucky. We were classmates and teammates at Sewanee. Like all sons and daughters from the state of Kentucky, Ellis had one of the best pull-up jump shots around. It was smooth as silk. I'm grateful to Ellis' wife, Capell, for capturing this photo of us having lunch when I was home for the holidays.



ARIONA HITS HER FIRST HOMERUN!



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Terry and Tahj



Toney and Andre



Francine



Derrick and Tamara



Ernelle, Faye, Terry



MEMBERS OF MY VILLAGE

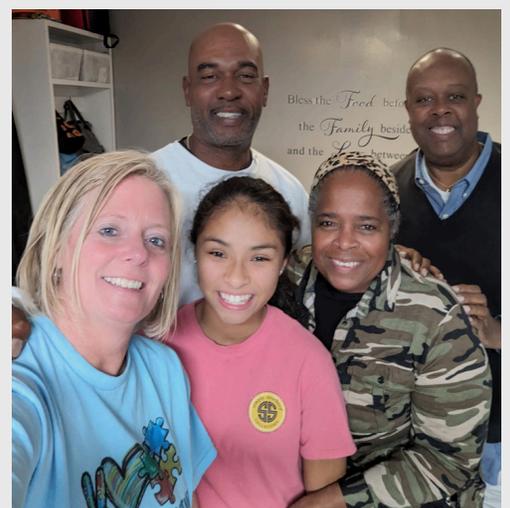
My dear friend, Francois (left), made his annual pilgrimage to North Carolina this past spring. In preparation for his visit, I prepared some of his favorite dishes, including a sweet potato pie. I also pulled out one of my fancy African outfits to match Francois' everyday haute couture. He is steadfast!

I've known Laura Fischler (below) for several decades. She is the oldest sister of my friend, Mark Peeler, my college basketball teammate. For the past couple of years, I've been her guest at several musicals being performed at the Durham Performing Arts Center. We always share a meal before the performance. Prior to seeing *The Lion King*, we dined at a place called The Counting House, which also has an art museum. Laura is standing next to one of the exhibits in the museum. She is steadfast!

Pam London (bottom right) stopped by for a visit when I was in Tennessee. She wears many hats: family, friend, sister, listener, teacher, and much more. If I were asked who are some the good people in the world, Pam is among the handful that I would name. Pam stopped in on us when I was in TN for Christmas. She is overflowing with positivity and hope. She is steadfast for certain!



Here I am posing in one of my African outfits at a retreat with my colleagues. From left to right: Bria, Christian, Kemi, Anne, and Caroline. They are steadfast!



Our Family is Growing

The Gentry family has lost many of its members to death over the past 20 years. Only recently, in the past four years, have we begun to see our family grow, thanks to my nephew Taylor and his wife J'Chante. In the past four years, they have produced four beautiful children. The first three were boys, Terrell, Thaj, and Tru. When J'Chante became pregnant with her fourth child, I imagined that it would be another boy, like the others, and like most of my cousins. There are many men in the Gentry family.

Was I ever wrong! Taylor and J'Chante welcomed a beautiful girl, Journei, to the world (see below). I believe my memory is correct when I write that Journei is the first girl that has been born on the Gentry side of the family since Genevieve Wilson, the youngest daughter of my second cousin Kim, and her husband, Ali Wilson.

I look forward to meeting Journei soon!



Terrell



**Terry, Amy, O'Brien,
and Ariona**



Thaj



Terrell and Tahj



Journei



Brothers playing soccer



Nakia and Tru

Visiting with Aunt Sarah

My grandparents, Howard and Dovie Mai Gentry had eight children. My Aunt Sarah (right) is the only living child. A few years ago, she returned to Lewisburg from Nashville, where she had lived since becoming an adult. She returned to Lewisburg to be closer to her family, namely my first cousin Chris Braden and his family. When I'm in town, I enjoy visiting with Aunt Sarah. She lives in an assisted living facility and receives excellent care.

Aunt Sarah is 94 years old. She doesn't move as quickly as she once did (who does?), but her mind is sharp as a tack. She's quite versed in both the local and national news and is able to express her opinions about the state of our nation with considerable wisdom. When I think about it, she's lived through more than a third of our nation's history. She has seen and experienced a lot.

As I become older and think about my ancestry, I have become more curious to learn about the Gentry side of the family from Aunt Sarah's perspective. I knew my grandparents well, but I didn't know anything about my great-grandparents. Aunt Sarah was an excellent resource. After spending more than 3 hours visiting with her, I understand so much more about my family. For example, my father loved horses, and I remember my grandfather tending to his mules. Their love for equines came naturally to them, in large measure, because my great grandfather, Sam, who was nicknamed *Pap*, was known around town for buying and selling horses at a profit.

The only other photo I have of Aunt Sarah is one that someone took with my camera after my father's funeral (see the Evolving Newsletter, 2011). She's never really enjoyed having her photo taken. I was hesitant to ask when I last visited her, fearing that she'd say no. Fortunately, she agreed and allowed me to capture this beautiful photo of her. I'm grateful! She is steadfast.



Amy and Ariona



Kimberly and Chris



Toney and Clark



The Color Purple

Months before the highly anticipated *The Color Purple* film made it to movie theatres, several of my family and friends made plans to be there on opening night. I've been a fan of the Color Purple franchise for decades. I was first drawn to it after reading the book, written by Alice Walker. I was traveling in Greece in the mid-1980s, and my friend, Robbie Fisher, brought the book with her. When she finished reading it, she encouraged me to read it. Since then, I have seen the original movie multiple times, always pausing from anything I'm doing to watch it when it's being aired on TV. I also saw the Broadway musical in NYC (starring Fantasia). Earlier this year, I watched the new version in the movie theatre, twice. I first saw it when it opened on Christmas day with Masha, Candy, and their mother, Mrs. Taylor (top right). I saw it again three days later on my birthday. It was a birthday present from my friend, Cynthia (top left).



Here I am having brunch with longtime friends, Skip, Jeanne, and their youngest son, Grayson. They were in town to see their oldest son, Owen, pitch against the highly-ranked NC State baseball team. Owen got the save and won the game!



When I was in Lewisburg, I stopped in on my second cousin, **Francine**. She is the cousin closest in age to me (one year older). She happened to be hosting Sunday dinner for her children, grandchild, niece, and friends when I paid her a visit.

March Madness



Having lunch at *Noble Smoke* with Jim and Julie.

I love March Madness. It's one of my favorite times of the year. This year it was particularly special, because my friend Julie, who's a Sewanee graduate, and I drove to Charlotte to see the Tarheels play Michigan State, a game they needed to win to make it to the Sweet Sixteen. We both grew up in Tennessee, so we were fortunate to be able to watch the Vols play Texas in the second game. When we arrived at the outskirts of Charlotte, we parked the car and took the train into the city, and Jim, my college basketball teammate, picked us up and took us to lunch at before getting us to the coliseum to cheer on the Tarheels to victory.



Being interviewed before the game.



Carolina blue from head to toe!



With Julie waiting on the train to take us to downtown Charlotte.



UNC has my 



Representing my UT colors for the second game.

MY BROTHERS, MY SISTERS, MY KIND OF PEOPLE



DEE stands for Diversity, Equity, and Engagement. Years ago, Durham Academy (DA) replaced the more familiar term, *Inclusion*, with the term *Engagement*. It was a philosophical and practical move to change the name, and it made sense. One would be hard-pressed to find any school whose enrollment didn't include students from diverse backgrounds. What was lacking, however, was that many students from these various underrepresented groups were not actively engaged in the life of the school. I've often heard underrepresented students say that they didn't feel as if they truly belonged. It's one thing to be included on the team, but it's not a meaningful experience when you don't get to play with the ball. It's a much different experience when you are on a team, expected to take the ball, and are encouraged and empowered to shoot, kick, or run with it. At a time when state legislatures are removing highly essential Diversity and Inclusion offices from colleges and universities, DA is committed to making certain that everyone, from its students, faculty, and staff, from all racial, ethnic, religious, geographic, and other backgrounds, feels empowered and are actively engaged.

Here I am, above, with the DEE Coordinators and their capable leader, Jason Mundy, who's standing next to me. I serve as the liaison to the DEE Coordinators on behalf of the Enrollment Management Division. The DEE Coordinators are responsible for coordinating all the DEE programming that takes place on DA's three campuses. They educate, advance initiatives, plan for major cultural celebrations, and support the faculty and staff's DEE endeavors.

First row: Pamela, Jazmin, Kelly, Kristin, Sloan, Dan

Second row: Zakia, Jason, Me, Cindy, and Uma





We became teammates, classmates, and friends starting in our early years when we attended Vacation Bible School, played pee wee football, and then high school sports. Here we are together again after paying respect to our mentor, teacher, coach, high school principal, friend, neighbor, and supporter, Deacon Coach Roy Dukes, who's proudly looking down on us from heaven. Pictured here with me are Tim McClean, Colby Biggers, Terry Gentry, and Shon McClean.



A small gathering of Tout a' Fait members assembled to fellowship with one another. Here I am with Yolanda Anderson, Deidre Grippin, Boyce and Kim Johnson, Tanya Johnson, and honorary member, Mike Grippin.



Here I am with friend, Gil Ciocci, on our way to UNC's first home football game of the season.



Durham Academy has a mentoring program for new employees. I was assigned to mentor Dr. Adrienne Villagomez. She is a child psychologist and serves as the school counselor for the preschool.

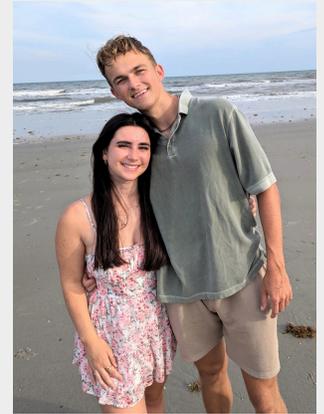
Cherry Grove Beach 2024



In July, I spent four days at Cherry Grove Beach in South Carolina with my long-time steady friend and college basketball teammate, Mark Peeler, and his four children (pictured above). We stayed at Ellen and Jimmy's beach house (Mark's sister and her husband). It was great to see them all and catch up. It was a lazy four days for me. I hung out at the beach house, cooked gluten and dairy-free meals for everyone, and did some writing.



Hope and Charlee



Jenkins and his girlfriend Cayli



Here I am posing with Mark, friends for 42 years.



Charlee is wearing my apron and posing as a sous chef, as she waits for her cookies to finish baking.



Hope and her boyfriend Logan



Mark and Charlee enjoying a Cherry Grove sunset.



ON THE JOB



I'm well into my fourth year at Durham Academy (DA). It's been a fantastic, progressive working experience. When I moved to NC, I didn't plan to be as busy as I am, but I'm not complaining. I enjoy my work. No place is perfect, but DA has been a special place to work. The students in this photo (above), who are flanked by DA employees and the founder of 321 Coffee (a company that actively hires people with disabilities), participated in a Capstone Project, where they were tasked with creating a solution to an accessibility problem and then pitching their idea to a panel of experts. As a panelist, I was thoroughly impressed with the level of professionalism that the student groups demonstrated when they presented their projects. Each presentation created a solution to unique problems that negatively impact people with a disability.



Emma is a new fifth grader at DA. I met her this summer at a reception, and she told me about her love for reading books and writing. When school began, she found me and asked if she could stop by my office and read some of her stories. Here she is in my office reading a short story from her collection, with some of her classmates looking on. There are others in the room listening to her story, but my camera frame couldn't capture them all.



Here are Carter and Olmer, students at Durham Nativity School (DNS) with my colleague, Caroline Farrell and me. DNS is one of DA's partner schools. Caroline and I attended their 8th grade graduation. They were DNS's top students. Now they are 9th graders at DA, and we're pleased that they selected us to continue their education as active and engaged students.

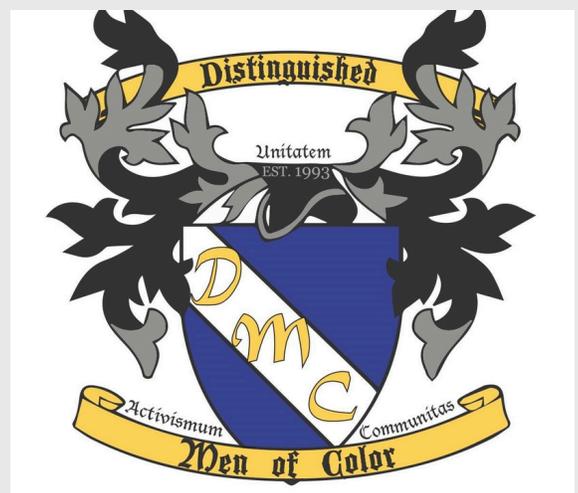
IMPACT AND INFLUENCE: Mentoring our Future Leaders--Past and Present



Yale's Freshman Counselors



Durham Academy's Peer Educators 2024



Distinguished Men of Color at Middlebury College



Durham Academy's Student Ambassadors



Yale's Black Men's Union

Drum Corps 2024



In August, I traveled to Indianapolis for the Drum Corps International (DCI) finals competition. I saw 30 corps perform, and this is a photo of the top 12 corps awaiting their final scores.

I've been a fan of DCI since 1979, when my friend, Michael Pigg, took me to my first DCI competition in Birmingham, Alabama. I consider Michael one of my first mentors. Following his graduation from high school, Michael went on to college and played trumpet for the Governor's Own Marching Band at Austin Peay State University. During the summers, he'd come home and work with our high school marching band and greatly improved the quality of our performances. For many years, Michael also served as my youth choir director at my church. I consider him steadfast.



I met longtime friends Laura, Kenny, and Jackson Fischler for a lovely dinner at Uncle Julio's Mexican Restaurant.



Terry, Amy, Ariona, and Tahj enjoying the UNC game sporting their custom-made UNC T-shirts.

PHOTOS FROM MARICHAL'S GLUTEN AND DAIRY-FREE KITCHEN

As far back as I can remember, I have loved everything about food--its distinct smells, its textures, and the various flavors that fill my taste buds when I take a bite of something delicious. I thoroughly cherish the times when I'm with family or friends enjoying a good meal. I admit that I always think about food, whether it's when I'm composing my weekly grocery list, or planning a meal when I host a dinner party. I'll forever remember a time when I was no more than 10 or 11 years old when we were sitting at the dinner table having one of my mama's fabulous meals. As I took a bite and savored one of her culinary creations, I innocently asked her what we were having for dinner tomorrow. Mama gave me one of her looks (IYKYK) and tersely told me not to worry about tomorrow, because *"tomorrow is not promised."* Perhaps I asked out of anticipation, expecting that it would be as tasty and enjoyable as the meal I was eating, or perhaps it was my way of reciprocating the love she shared with us through the meals that she prepared.

Seven years ago, my doctor and I agreed that my stomach didn't digest dairy products well, and he suggested that I stop eating any foods or ingredients that contained dairy. His suggestion hit me hard because I knew that all the foods I enjoyed that contained cheese would never taste the same. That is until I began researching alternative food products and converting recipes into dairy and gluten-free foods. So far, I've converted more than 200 recipes into dairy and gluten-free dishes, including some of my mother's recipes. Recently, I converted Mama's banana bread recipe and made two gluten-free loaves. I took them to work, and my colleagues ate every slice, leaving no crumbs.

Below are a few of the dishes (all dairy and gluten-free) that I have prepared for family and friends, most of whom didn't know any different, until I told them. Ask, my brother, who loves a good pecan pie a' la mode. He never knew until he asked for a second slice, and that's when I told him that the golden-brown, flaky crust was gluten-free and that the ice cream actually was not made from cow's milk, but oat milk.



Crab Cakes



Smothered Pork Chops



Pineapple Upside Down Cake



Jerk Meatballs



Cajun Red Beans and Rice



Chicken and Shrimp Fettuccine Alfredo



Gnocchi with butternut squash, kale, and sage brown butter sauce



Egg and sausage breakfast bites



Strawberry Shortcake Bowl



Sausage and hash brown breakfast bake



Herb-crusted Cornish game hens



Field Pea Salad



Watermelon, corn and cucumber salad



Seafood Platter



Corn Tortilla Casserole



Peach Cobbler



Pecan Pie



Sweet Potato Pie



Bacon-wrapped asparagus

SERVED WITH LOVE



THE END