



About the author

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About the book

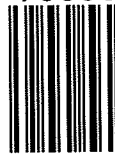
Timing is everything! The right word at the right time can make the right difference. At a time when so many young ladies are told they are somehow flawed or forever lacking, the message of their worth and potential is the right word. *Talks My Mother Never Had With Me* is well-timed! With an undercurrent of hope and possibility, *Talks* communicates the truth of personal value, dignity and purpose by telling stories of specific situations. Each chapter (*talk*) connects the great with the small—speaking universals through particularity—conveying here is what is true and here is how I know! *Talks My Mother Never Had With Me* is heart-to-heart—a book written from the heart to the heart and for the heart. It is larger-than-life truth intertwined with closer-than-close love.

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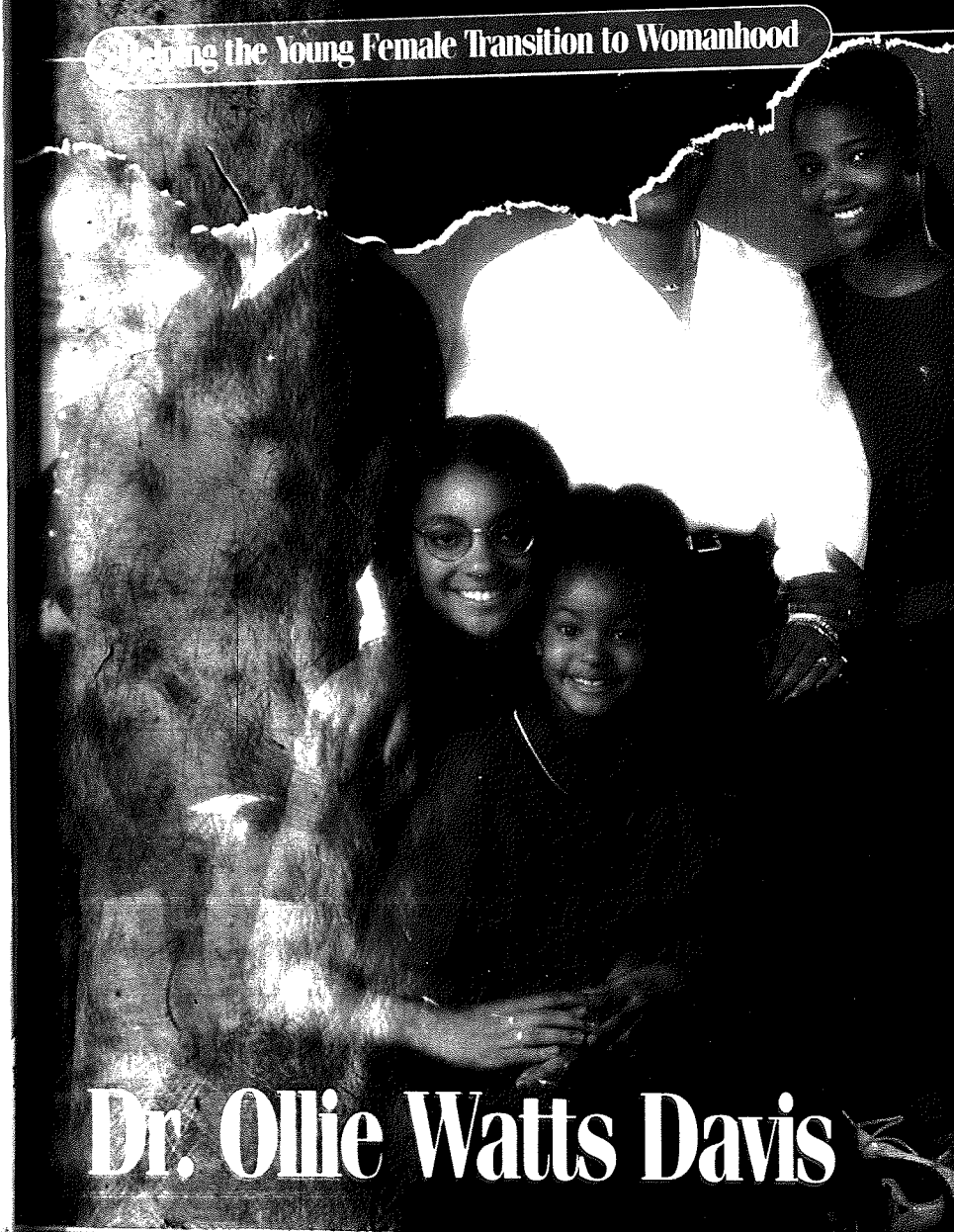


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Talks My Mother Never Had With Me

Helping the Young Female Transition to Womanhood



Dr. Ollie Watts Davis

Talks My Mother Never Had With Me

*Helping the young female transition
to womanhood*

*To Annie,
Thank you
for all the
kind words
you have
said to me
I love you
Dr. Ollie Watts Davis*

Dr. Ollie Watts Davis

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About the cover

The tear-away (heads missing) is the motif of the **Talks Mentoring** curriculum series, and symbolizes the wisdom that is not being shared between mature adults and today's youth. This photograph includes Martha Bunch with her daughter, Elisabeth; and Ollie Watts Davis with her daughters: Ashley (seated left), Charity (seated front) and Kirstie (standing on the right).

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I am delighted to acknowledge the help I received in bringing this book through to completion. Many people were invaluable to this project—the pray-ers, the encourage-ers, the read-ers, the re-read-ers, the listen-ers and the hear-ers. Thanks to all who prayed, offered encouraging words, wrote letters, sent cards, e-mails and faxes. I thank God for you.

To my family, especially my four children (Kirstie, thanks for the beautiful *Introduction*, Jonathan, Ashley and Charity), who released me to pour much energy into this writing project, who provided inspiration for much of the content material and who always made mention of this book in your prayers, thank you. I was incredibly strengthened by your intercession. I am not sure that I should thank my husband, Rev. Harold Davis, or not. Writing a book under his commission is more than a notion! (I love you, dear!)


But God is faithful and provided exactly what I needed just at the right time to accomplish what He commanded—Casey Jo Ahn Robards, my principal editor. It is often said that opposites attract. In our case, we are wired about as differently as two humans can be—in temperament and talent. She is low key, I'm high strung, but we both embraced the importance of this project, committed ourselves to communicating directly and forged an unlikely partnership. It was this pure motive and purpose that made our working together quite extraordinary. Thanks Case, your timing is incredible—right words at the right time, clear vision in cloudy

circumstances and gentle strength at all times. Truly, the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above. Thanks for teaching me how to receive. I love you.

Soli Deo Gloria!
(to God alone be all glory)


Ollie Watts Davis

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Introduction



Upon being asked to write this introduction, I was elated. This was more than an opportunity. It was an honor. The privilege and fortune to fully preface this compelling compilation of indelible ideas is quite an awesome responsibility. Knowing that what I write can influence your opinion of this book, makes me think carefully about the purpose of this introduction.

Oftentimes, I think about those young ladies who grew up without a mother who talked to them. What if I was one of those young ladies? (What if you are one of those ladies?) What if an older woman were to share her thoughts on the purpose of living—how much wisdom you would gain just by listening? Who would not be blessed by such conversation?

Listen to me. The talks in this book will benefit you for years to come! You may ask, who am I to tell you this? Listen to the author's oldest daughter, to my side of the story.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce you to my mother, Dr. Ollie Watts Davis. Come with me into the wonderful world of womanly wisdom given to Dr. Davis by her mother and mentors, and gained from her methods. This wisdom is tried and true. It will give you understanding beyond your years. I truly treasure the fact that you understand the importance of wisdom because you show interest in this book.

Do you know someone who has influenced you in such a way that you want to imitate them? Think about it. Of course you do. Maybe you see these special men and women on a

consistent basis; they're part of your circle of contact. Others, you admire from a distance. My mother is that special someone in my life. She is the one I admire from up close and at a distance.

My mother has a standard of character that is exuberantly expressed in all she does. Her life is a wonderful witness. I know her as a wife to one, a mother of four, a mentor to many and a musician to most. I could talk about her faithfulness to my father, or her perfection in the performing arts, and go on forever about how wonderful she is in those areas. Although her marriage and career carry as much weight as her motherhood and mentoring, I will share my thoughts on what she does as a mother and mentor.

As a daughter, I have been bountifully blessed. Not just with a mother in the household, but with a friend, role model and mentor, need I say more? She is truly a treasure in my life. I've known her for eighteen years, and have not seen her do anything that did not benefit our family. In her ways and in her words, she is Grade A mother material.

I see my mother work with students on a regular basis. I see her as a mentor to both young and old college women on campus. They come see her all the time, for an encouraging smile that brightens up whatever situation they're in, to hear a helpful hint that reminds them of their purpose for going to school, or just to have someone who will listen to their problems. I honestly do not know how many women she has helped. With only an encouraging word or look, she can meet them where they need help the most. I sincerely love that about her. She helps these young ladies freely, which is such a fine attribute.

Many times I think about what she tells these young ladies. I think about the fact that I am expected to know all of these things. I think about what would happen if I slipped slightly—what would be said of her, or of me. I know that a tree is known by its fruit. I think about a lot of things, I know. Why would I go against motherly wisdom? Why would I try


to do anything that did not align with what I've been taught? To me, that is ridiculous. That's just asking for the wrath. Many young ladies have grown up as blessed as I am, but think something different and unfamiliar is better. Deep down inside they know what their mother told them was right.

Have you ever heard the phrase, *common sense is not so common*? Unfortunately, this is true in contemporary society. What was common thirty years ago, in that the young learned from their elders is not so common today. Our society has reached a point in which the old and wise do not talk to the young and inexperienced. The generations have grown apart, which makes it difficult for the young to gain understanding from the old. Many girls do now know what they are missing—that they need an older woman, a mother or mentor, to guide them in the right direction. This book provides an opportunity for older women and young ladies to regain the bond they once had in years past.

Talks My Mother Never Had With Me is comprised of personal stories and is a great source of knowledge for elders to share with our young. It is a rare realm of rhetoric with a simple purpose: to reveal what an older woman wants to share with the next generation.

I can continue to tell you how much this book will enrich your understanding, but it's your turn to read this richness for yourself. Then you will not only hear about this wisdom but you can begin living a life of wisdom. You have this book as a resource. Read this book, write in it, learn the principles and share them with others. What more can I say?

Kirstie Elisabeth Davis
(*her first-born*)




*My great-grandmama told my
grandmama the part she lived
through that my grandmama didn't
live through and my grandmama told
my mama what they both lived
through and we were supposed to pass
it down like that from generation to
generation so we'd never forget.*

Gayl Jones



Foreword



I seldom conclude a conversation without at least one reference to my mother. I will either quote her directly or in paraphrase. Her words are so much a part of me that I am hard pressed to differentiate between what I conceive and what is my mother. I am very indebted to this great lady.

Although they've never met her, my husband, children, friends and students are intimately acquainted with my mother through me. Ramona Sereta Crider Ross was a legend. She was larger than her own life. Her words are as appropriate for those I love as they were for my siblings and me.

I have used the counsel that I received from my mother to counsel countless others. For many years my husband, Rev. Dr. Harold Davis, encouraged me to multiply my efforts by making my talks available in print. I can't count the number of times I shared points with him and heard him enthusiastically say, "that would make a great chapter in your book." I would just smile and nod in agreement, but my words never made their way to paper. There was really only one thing that kept me from writing. One condition had to be met before I committed to writing a book—I didn't yet feel the need to write a book.

My writing could only be in response to my need to express myself. The need finally came. In addition, three points had to be agreed upon. First, I had to benefit from what was written. I wanted to be able to come back to the book time and time again and be encouraged by its contents.

Second, the book must reflect my personal experience. I didn't want to write an autobiography, but it had to be real. I was not interested in writing theoretically or making commentary. I wanted to add personality to the principles presented. Third, the tone must be positive, optimistic and conversational. I wanted the reader to feel like she had a private audience with the writer; as if we were talking face-to-face, person-to-person. Rev. Davis agreed to the condition and points, and work on *Talks My Mother Never Had With Me* began.

This book is about a mother and her talks with her daughters and sons. The talks that a mother has with her children protect them, provide for them and prepare them for what is upon them and before them. My mother talked to me. I pray that I have written here my gratitude to her.

Part I

Dealing With Your Past



brother's, she will be listed as Negro or Black. The color or ethnic designations given to my mother offers a perspective on when she gave birth to me and my siblings.

People of African descent have gone through a wide range of designations as to our ethnic name. We have been Colored. We have been Negro. During the 1960s and 1970s, we became Black. Being Black signaled a significant transition—a coming of age. Being Black was more than just an ethnic designation. It was an ideology and identification. Overlapping somewhat with being called Black, was the fairly "radical" choice of being called Afro-American (around the late 1960s). We have programs at universities that carry this name. And following a press conference called by Rev. Jesse Jackson in the late 1980s, many of us became African-Americans. There was a need or desire to be connected with a place, a continent or a country. Today, we are referred to as People of Color.

I personally have been referred to as all of the above before—Colored, Negro, Black, Afro-American, African-American and a Woman of Color. During my recent visit to Ghana, West Africa, I received a new designation. Who knows, in ten years there may be a new preference, but for our purpose, we'll use the designation, Woman of Color. I like this description. It is a succinct statement. It places both sex and ethnicity in a capsule form. Before this designation became vogue, I often referred to my people as colorful people—lively, ingenious, one-of-a-kind. Colorful.

We know what a woman of color looks like. What she looks like and what she does are parts of who she is. But what is she like? What is her heart, her passion, and her mission? Women of color are not a homogenous group. They do not all think the same, look the same or act the same. Among Black women is also tremendous diversity. Whether they are conservative, liberal or radical, they are deliberate and decisive and will do whatever is necessary to preserve what is most

highly esteemed. A woman of color is passionate.

As a professor at a major research institution, many students call me for help with various assignments. Some of them share my research interest, which is, the Music of African-Americans, specifically, the African-American Sacred Music Tradition, and seek advice on their research projects. Others want to learn how to make effective presentations through the proper use of the voice, good posture and the appropriate use of gestures, etc. And others desperately need to find any professor who will allow them to conduct an interview for an impending assignment. I really enjoy teaching and working with the students and welcome any opportunity to impact their lives, whether it is for real scholarly pursuits or for a last-minute assignment.

The students approach me in a number of different ways. I have been interviewed as a member of the faculty; as a Black member of the faculty; as a female faculty member; and as a Black female faculty member. Now that I think about it, the university got a real bargain when I joined the faculty—at least four perspectives in one professor. What a deal!

The student interviewer typically selects me because of an activity that she associates me with, and is usually unaware of all of the other things I do. Their faces generally register some amazement when I share the many other things I am involved in. What I am to some, I am not to others.

In addition to being a wife (Mrs. Harold D. Davis) and mother to four children (Kirstie, Jonathan, Ashley and Charity, who all call me something different—Mother, Mama, Mom and Mommy), I perform a lot of other roles—many of which have unique titles associated with them. To many students, I am Professor Davis, Dr. Davis and/or Mrs. Davis. To some students, I am Mother, Doc, Mammadoc, and/or Ma'am. To my church family, I am Sister Davis. As a concert artist, I am Ms. Davis or Ollie Watts Davis. I answer by a lot of different titles

depending upon who's calling.

During the more formal student interviews, where I am Professor Davis or Dr. Davis, there are usually a lot of questions regarding my personal life and work. They want to know where I'm from, how I came to Illinois and how I balance having a family, the professorate and an active performing career. They are curious to find out any pointers or secrets on how to do it all.

Besides questions concerning my personal life and work, they ask a set of questions about being female and being black. There is a great amount of intrigue surrounding these two elements. This is a hot topic right now that is enjoying a great deal of interest.

The questions about being a woman of color are usually similar. The students want to know what specific challenges I have faced that I attribute to my being black and a woman. I try to use these opportunities to set crooked records straight. My response always includes a historical, as well as a contemporary perspective. I remember the shoulders that I stand upon by citing the legacy that I am committed to. I remember my ancestors, those heroes and sheroes from the distant past and the not so distant past. I passionately herald how important it is that our generation carry the torch that lit our paths, and guarantee that the torch is passed on to future generations. I generally close my comments by issuing a challenge for the students to seize every opportunity before them, always give something back to the community, build into the life of someone else and never forget the shoulders upon which they stand.

In my more than ten years as a professor, there was one interview that I will never forget. A young Caucasian student, studying broadcast journalism, appeared at my studio one afternoon. Her mission was to conduct an interview for an assignment on Black female faculty members. After some preliminary dialogue, she got down to the business at hand. Her

leading question to me was "How has being a woman of color served as a disadvantage for you?" She wanted to know "how being a woman of color had held me back in my personal and professional life." I remember taking some time before answering her. I needed to digest all of what she was saying. After gathering my thoughts, I remember beginning with something like this:

I have never considered being a woman of color to be a disadvantage. On the contrary, I regard my sex and my ethnicity among my greatest assets. I received both distinctions at birth. I view them as gifts that I gratefully receive. I have a unique perspective because of this that others need to learn from. My invitation to join the faculty of this University was not because they were seeking to hire a disadvantaged individual. Conversely, my appointment came because of what I could contribute to the intellectual life of this institution. You, as well as every other student I come in contact with are beneficiaries of my womanness and my blackness. Through my unique gifts, abilities and perspective, you are enlightened.

The interview proceeded rather nicely, but I'll never forget her opening question. This was the first time anyone had ever suggested to me that being a woman of color was a disadvantage. I grew up in a home where I was regarded as a gift. Period! My mother loved her sons and she loved her daughters. I was not expendable because I was a Black female. I had never entertained the idea that my being a woman of color placed me at a disadvantage. It never occurred to me to have an inferiority mentality.

At the time I graduated from high school, I found myself in a unique position—I was considered a double minority, Black and a woman. I was told that there were many opportunities such as scholarships and nontraditional fields of study for me to

pursue. I was encouraged to capitalize on everything. And I did. I never liked the term minority, but I intended to enjoy this coveted status for as long as it lasted. (Some people believe that because you are black and female, you have to be better than everyone else. This is emotionally exhausting and not at all possible. I believe that you should be your personal best. This is attainable).

I don't deny that there are challenges to being a woman of color. I am more often misunderstood than understood. People want to know "What does she want?" On a daily basis I contend with the various isms—racism, sexism, classism, etc. that plague my day and time. But I am not consumed by the ills of the world in which I live. I was born for such a time as this. I call an injustice out by telling it like it is. I offer an appropriate response and keep on pushing. I know my work. I do it well. I also know my rights and responsibilities. I don't make issues unless I need to. Then I make sure that others know that I know how to handle whatever situation I need to handle. I see myself as well-able to meet all opportunities and obstacles that come before me with strength and dignity.

I was created to be a woman of color, for such a time as this. I am here because the world needs a woman of color. There is a void that only I can fill. There are services that only I can perform. You are also exactly who you are because of a purpose that only you can fulfill. You have your own area of influence. You are created for your time. I receive being a woman of color as a gift. I wouldn't have it any other way.

I have known the women of many lands and nations. I have known, seen, and lived beside them, but none have I known more sweetly feminine, more unansweringly loyal, more desperately earnest, and more instinctively pure in body and in soul than the daughters of my African-American mothers. W.E.B. DUBOIS (1920)

Questions

1. What ethnic designation or name do you prefer to be called?
2. What kind of culture or ideology does this name represent?
3. How many different names do you answer to?
4. Do you celebrate your ancestors?
5. How do you view your ethnicity, as an advantage or disadvantage?
6. Do you have an inferior or superiority mentality in any area?
7. How well do you feel you understand or relate with people from different ethnic groups than your own?
8. Are you consumed by the ills of your world or are you an overcomer?
9. Do you feel that there is a void in this world that only you can fill?
10. Are you happy with yourself just as you are?