

WHO'S THIS MAN
AND WHAT IS HE
ALL ABOUT

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I am very delighted and pleased to present myself, Kenje Delaney, as part of Mr. Ali's project. I would have never been given the opportunity had it not been for a subtle family tragedy that forced my grandmother and I to move to Champaign, Illinois. She became acquainted with Mr. Ali through his self-owned cab service; getting rides to and from work. And through her I was also introduced to Mr. Ali.

We shared a casual conversation with one another as we rode in the cab one day. This conversation led to a discussion about his desire to publish a book about his life. I explained to him that I was merely an ex-high school student in the process of pursuing my GED, but I was very interested in all different types of writing and literature. When the idea came up that maybe I should compose the book I was immediately delighted and honored. My original mindset was to finish the book much sooner than I was actually able to, but the final product is now completed in its entirety and ready to go.

So once again I'd like to note, that I was greatly honored to entail this book as interpreted by Mr. Ali about his life. I know that every reader that reads this piece of literature will enjoy it and take a little something from it to share with someone else.



Sunflower County is a county located in the Mississippi Delta and is the longest county in Mississippi. Mississippi was part of the Mississippian Culture in the early part of the 2nd millennium AD. Descendants, Native American tribes included the Chickasaw and Choctaw, as well as other tribes who inhabitant the territory of Mississippi included the Natchez, Yazoo and the Biloxi. For 45 years after the Civil War, records reflect a slow but steady migration of African Americans from rural areas to the cities of Mississippi as the futility and injustice of the sharecropping system began taking its toll. Yet the overwhelming majority stayed within the state either by choice or by necessity rather than to move up North. Freed slaves and their descendants continued to regularly suffer prejudice such as the Jim Crow Laws and violence from white vigilante groups like the Klu Klux Klan, whether they lived in rural areas or in the cities.

As difficult as it would have been for a former slave in Mississippi to return to the Upper South after the Civil War, it would still be worth the family history researcher's time and efforts to check census and other records from 1870 and later in the state and county of the ancestor's origin as indicated in the "Record Book". But the most likely place to begin the search for any of the people listed in the Record Book would be in the Mississippi counties and Louisiana parishes surrounding Adams Co., as well as counties within the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta region. Together these counties had the highest concentrations of African Americans in post-Civil War Mississippi.

Still, many changes were taking place in the decade of my birth. Some of those changes were of some good and some were only for bad. Despite all of the accomplishments, the 1930's was also a time of immense turbulence and strife in America. The 'Great Depression' began after the stock market crash of 1929. Farmers lost their land, employees lost their jobs, and many Americans lost their savings due to so many banks closing. The Depression swept over the land. By 1932, it had left about 12 million jobless in the U.S. Poverty encompassed America. Americans joined other western powers in World

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first supermarkets in the U.S. were opened. The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) was created by Congress to develop the Tennessee River region. The ear marked a period of reaction and rebellion against significant styles in modern art and architecture.

American physicist, Ernest O. Lawrence, developed the cyclotron. Scientists achieved fission when they split uranium nuclei by bombarding them with neutrons. Life and Look magazines were created. Americans enjoyed 'Big Band' music, which later branched into a different style, epitomized by Count Basie and his band. Jazz was led by Mildred Bailey, Ivie Anderson, Ella Fitzgerald, and the forever sultry Billie Holiday.

The New York Yankees dominated baseball and the World Series. Gangster films and musicals filled the silver screen with Katharine Hepburn, Humphrey Bogart, Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, and Clark Gable, as well as, many other stars. The film, *Gone with the Wind*, premiered too, and Laurel and Hardy led comedy.

At the time of my childhood, I didn't have the slightest clue as to what was happening in the 'big world' outside of Sunflower. I suppose no child really does. Your mind is filled with thinking about where your next adventure will come from. Still, many changes were taking place in the decade of my birth. Some of those changes were of some good and some were only for bad. The era marked a period of reaction and rebellion against significant styles in modern art and architecture.

By the 1930s money was scarce because of the depression, so people did what they could to make their lives happy. Movies were hot, parlor games and board games were popular. People gathered around radios to listen to the Yankees. Young people danced to the big bands. Franklin Roosevelt influenced Americans with his Fireside Chats. The golden age of the mystery novel continued as people escaped into books, reading writers like Agatha Christie. In the Great Depression the American dream had become a nightmare. What was once the land of opportunity was now the land of desperation. What was once the land of hope and optimism had become the land of despair. The American people were questioning all the maxims on which they had based their lives - democracy, capitalism, individualism.

few possessions on the back, and sought work in the agricultural fields or cities of the West - their role as independent land owners gone forever. Between 1929 and 1932 the income of the average American family was reduced by 40%, from \$2,300 to \$1,500. Instead of advancement, survival became the keyword. Institutions, attitudes, lifestyles changed in this decade, but democracy prevailed. Democracies such as Germany and Italy fell to dictatorships, but the United States and its constitution survived. The Presidents of the 1930s were Herbert Hoover and Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

The famous Dick and Jane book that taught millions of children to read were first published in 1931. These primers introduced the students to reading with only one new word per page and a limited vocabulary per book. All who learned to read with these books still recall the "Look. See Dick. See Dick run." In 1935 Parker Brothers introduced the game of Monopoly and 20 thousand sets were sold in one week.



It Don't Mean a Thing (if it Ain't Got That Swing) was the title of Duke Ellington song in the 1930's. There were popular songs such as "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime", that spoke to the hardship of the time, but the young people flocked to hear and dance to the big bands of Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman and many more. It was in 1935 that George Gershwin's American folk opera Porgy and Bess was first performed. In 1931 Congress designated "The Star Spangled Banner" as the national anthem. In 1938 Kate Smith sang Irving Berlin's "God Bless America" and made the song her own. Pluto was discovered in 1930, which in the ninth major planet. Walt Disney produced the first full-length animated movie Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs in 1937. Clarence LaVaughn Franklin, father of the singer Aretha Franklin, was the most popular African-American preacher of his generation who was born in Sunflower County, Mississippi, he was best known as a gospel preacher.

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acclaim and Oscar attention. W. C. Fields, Mae West, the Marx Brothers and Laurel and Hardy led comedy. An interest in the newly emerging field of psychoanalysis grew. The first supermarkets in the U.S. were opened. The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) was created by Congress to develop the Tennessee River region.

The 1930s saw more ownership of automobiles, home refrigerators and the availability of packaged food. There were 'New Deal' programs created by Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidential administration which included the National Labor Relations Act, the Social Security Act, and legislation establishing minimum wage, child labor laws, and a sales tax. The most successful propeller airliner at the time, the DC-3, was developed. The DC-3 could carry up to 21 passengers and was capable of traveling across the U.S. in less than 24 hours. The only flaw it entailed was the many stops for fuel it had to make.

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Although, racism showed its ugly face, President Roosevelt was progressive on the issue. He even appointed blacks to hold office during his administrations. Eleanor Roosevelt, his wife, made her hatred of racism crystal clear. Still, overt and scathing racism and segregation was pervasive throughout the South.

All of this is only the tip of the iceberg of the harsh reality of the era in which I was born. No matter how many inventions or innovations altered life for others, the lives of my family seemed to remain the same. Neither the achievement of nuclear fission or the creation of supermarkets en mass; nor the establishment of child labor laws or minimum wage had any real or direct effect on the every

day lives of most rural, Southern Blacks. Still, my family and I weathered the times with our heads held high. I come from a line of proud and capable people, who has experienced many struggles and triumphs. For many members of my family, a deep and abiding belief in a benevolent Creator made their struggles seem not as heavy, and their successes all the more sweet. Everybody needs something to believe in.

I was born into a wonderful and interesting family legacy. My ancestors were from diverse cultural backgrounds: Native American, Anglo-Saxon and African. Despite being illegal and unaccepted, love found a way. Racial mixing occurred frequently in the South. My family was no exception to this.

According to my parents, my grandmother, Sue, was of British and Cherokee descent. Her husband, Isaac II, was the son of Isaac the first. Professedly, Isaac the first was a Cherokee Indian, probably a member of the Eastern band of the Cherokee. During my childhood, Native Americans were not plentiful in or around Sunflower. Cherokees were especially scarce, though Mississippi had become home to the Chickasaw, Choctaw and Natchez nations. Perhaps Isaac was a descendent of one of the Cherokees who escaped the 'Trail of Tears'. That thought always seemed to elude my family. I was told that he worked as a fisherman. My paternal grandfather (Isaac II) may have died as a result of being drowned by a large fish as was told to me. However, that may or may not be a "big fish" story.

My maternal grandmother was named Lizzie. She was given another alias as well, "side-saddle riding Lizzie". This name derived from her superb horsemanship. She rode horses in proper riding garments including hat, blouse, straps, and boots. My maternal grandmother was a neat, distinguished black woman. From all accounts, she was a friendly person and highly regarded by others. Her husband was an African gentleman known as Ellis. He was named after the southern plantation where he lived and worked.

My parents were born and raised in Sunflower, fell in love and got married. Sunflower was their entire world. My parents only knew of a southern, rural life. They also grew acquainted with the harsh

It was later, as young adults, that they discovered life outside of Mississippi. My parents had seven children in total: Oscar, William, Lember (whom we called Sam), Bessie Mae, Cleo, Elizabeth, and myself. My two oldest brothers, Oscar and William were born in Chicago, Illinois. My parents lived there for a few years after initially leaving Mississippi. My other siblings, Lember, Bessie Mae, Cleo and Elizabeth were born in Sunflower, Mississippi, as was I.

Their relocation to Chicago marked their attempt to ride the black migration wave. This wave began around 1914 in America. The 1940's marked another wave of mass relocation of southern blacks to large metropolitan centers and other sites in the North. Like countless others, my parents left the south heading north. They hoped for a better life for themselves, but even more so for their children. Northern and urban life was drastically different from any life my parents had ever experienced or anticipated. Chicago was no small lazy town and my parents were neither urban nor northerners. My father had previously visited Chicago to see one of his brothers. Still, visiting a large metropolitan city and residing there with a family is clearly two distinctive different scenarios. While living in Chicago my family experienced an immense tragedy. My oldest brother, Oscar, died at a very early age. I never knew the cause of his death. My parents never spoke about Oscar in my presence that I recall.

My family left Chicago after my brother's death. They resettled in Sunflower, Mississippi. After living in Sunflower for a period of time, my family moved to Shaw. Shaw was a nearby town, just as Sunflower, it was also a rural and modest Mississippi community. My father, mother and older siblings worked on a cotton plantation owned by a Caucasian man named Kegger. Picking cotton was a job that many blacks could and did secure. After all, black southern people, first as slaves, later as share

croppers, tenant farmers or lay worker, intrinsically were tied to the cotton industry. Even at this time of a more depressed southern and national economy, black people could easily find jobs in the cotton fields. Though the systems of sharecropping and tenant farming served as substitutes for paid labor during this time, my parents did not engage in these practices. They realized these were non-profit jobs, designed to keep workers in perpetual debt. As a result of this fact, my family labored in the cotton fields instead.

Clearly, child labor laws had no impact on our employer, because all of my older siblings worked in the cotton fields. While living in Shaw, I recall my older brother and sisters working in the fields, chopping and picking cotton. Only my younger sister, Elizabeth and I didn't work in the fields. Both of us were less than five years old, so we were considered too small. Our family worked hard to earn a living and even harder to survive. There were times when my mother would take my younger sister and me to the fields with her. I remember how we'd play in the fields until we were happily tired and falling asleep. Once we were asleep, mother would lay us on her sack and pull us while she continued to work. The truth is, back then, Elizabeth and I thought life was beautiful. We were the two youngest children and as a result we were very close. Most of our time was divided between playing, getting on each other's nerves, napping and having adventures. Elizabeth and I had our family, health, and parents who worked hard to support us, plus the innocence of being small children. Still, we were much too young to realize the true nobility of our parents and their efforts for our comfort ability.

There were others that had less than us, so we counted ourselves fortunate for what we did have. Having jobs at this time, as my parents did, made them feel blessed even though the work was strenuous. Much was often done in harsh weather, which only made the task that much harder. My family worked many hours in the fields performing laborious work. And despite the evident truth that my father worked very hard, we had very little to show for it.

My Heritages

May 24, 1936 marks the date of my arrival to this Earth. I was born Freddie B. Davis, to the union of Oscar and Lela Davis. My parents were two hard-working African Americans (then called 'colored' or Negroes). My birth place was that of a small, sleepy rural town called Sunflower. Sunflower resides in western Mississippi. I was the second youngest child of my mother and father's children.

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My Loving Parents

It is strange to reflect back upon your parents as an adult. Still, when I recall my father I see him as I did when I was a child. Father was first and foremost a husband, farther and a provider. My memories of him are deep and loving ones. Due to the era in which he was born and reared (early 1900s) he had a difficult life. The surrounding environment gave rise to a vast amount of strength of mind and character. My father built a life of substance for himself. He provided a stable home life for his children, alongside my mother. My father made us feel proud of him and in turn, proud of ourselves.

My father was born in Sunflower, Mississippi as Oscar Davis. He had five siblings; three brothers and two sisters. As previously stated, he was the son of a Cherokee and British mother and a Cherokee and African American father. He was about 5'7" tall, with a lean build; his skin was a reddish-black. My father's hair was black and straight. I suppose some would have called him a 'beautiful' man, or at least a very handsome one.

My father had no formal educational training. He had never attended school of any kind. To a certain degree, it seemed he was opposed to school. I think that was because he had never been granted an opportunity to attend school. As a result of this, he didn't have a true appreciation of the personal pleasure education gives an individual. Father wanted us to become educated because he wanted the best for his children and education was one of many ways someone could better themselves. But for himself, personally, education seemed rather irrelevant. I believe if my father had been exposed to education at an early age or even as an adolescent he would have felt different about education for himself. I guess that's where the modern invention of head start comes in to play. Scientists probably figure the younger the better. You get someone in the habit of something at an early age and they're bound to stick with it. However, the truth is for my father, and many other poor people (regardless of race), education was considered a luxury at that time. People had bigger and better things to worry about I guess. For instance, where is your next meal coming from? Not how many times tables you can do in one minute. The quiz of the day was will you make it until tomorrow. Of course, I do not mean to imply that poor

people never attended school or did not receive an education despite the difficulties they experienced; some did. But oftentimes, children of the rural, poor community worked to help support their families, so attending school became of less importance than family obligations. Still, to me, my father remains one of the most knowledgeable and resourceful individuals I've ever known.

Undoubtedly, he was a naturally talented individual. He had diverse and immense talents. He was a self taught man, good with his hands and skilled. Father was so many things. a builder, he constructed houses and other buildings. My father was the family's barber, he kept us looking presentable. In addition, he was a fisherman, trapper, logger and handyman. I guess he prided himself on the philosophy of: why pay someone else when you can do it for yourself for little of nothing.

One of his greatest talents was his natural mathematical skills. Picture this: a child spends hours and hours inside a classroom learning math. They practiced all types of math, ranging from simple to complex. And in a lifetime they only use the basics. Where does the time go? Now, my father on the other hand, could figure and cipher numerical amounts quickly and correctly in his head without those extensive school hours. He had a lucky break, but there's always a downfall to every up rise. He wasn't able to write the numbers down, still it was definitely a sight to see him expertly calculate in his head. Father would visualize the numbers and perform whatever operation that was called for accurately. He was able to successfully manage himself and his family's lives without being able to read or write. My father's illiteracy did not burden him; instead he found ways to achieve in spite of it. There was no room to feel alone with this mishap. Illiteracy among poor, southern black people was hardly a rarity during this time. My father was a 'true' survivor and taught himself much of what he needed to survive and ensure the survival of his family. In my eyes, that became more than a tremendous accomplishment.

Another of my father's attributes was his so-called 'doctoring' or healing abilities. My father was our family 'doctor'. Hear me out, I know it may sound strange, it's true. Some people may think it's crazy to let an illiterate man do his partial practice on them, but he did them quite well. He kept our family in good health. These skills were important to our family because doctors were scarce and

expensive. Still, aside from those two big issues, most of them were also white. White doctors were under no obligation to treat black patients. Imagine how scary that could be in the event of a tragedy. You didn't have to worry about what insurance companies the hospital accepted back then, or paying an enormous fee after you were treated. At least you would've been alive to receive the bills the hospital was going to send to your house. It was deeper than that; folks had to worry about dying because they were black. And absolutely no one wanted to gamble with that notion at such a critical time as terminal illness. So my father was a real 'life saver' and I believe he obtained some of his knowledge of herbs and natural remedies from his Native American relatives. He greatly utilized this knowledge of herbs to treat illness and sickness. I must also note that some of those traditional Native American treatments my father used are still being used in present health regimes.

I recall many times when my father's 'doctoring' helped cure and even save the lives of our family. One incident I recall was when my sister Elizabeth wouldn't walk on her heel. Instead she walked on her toes. When my father noticed the change in her walking, he checked her foot and discovered that some glass had wedged inside of her heel, which had to be removed. But it sure wasn't going to be easy because that four year old didn't want anyone touching the heel of her foot. The situation called for a bit of psychology, my father gave her a cigarette (not to smoke) and the problem was half way solved. Curiosity can force any mind to wander, but it'll only last for a short period of time. So, my father went quickly to work and removed the glass. By the grace of the Creator she was healed.

My father not only took care of day-to-day scrapes and minor injuries. He dealt with the other side of the spectrum of health as well, such as serious diseases and conditions. Having to confront serious and life threatening diseases were a real challenge for my father, but fortunately for us he was always triumphant. One frightening example of this occurred when Cleo, my fourth oldest brother, contracted typhoid fever at the age of five. Typhoid fever is highly contagious which meant it could spread throughout the family. It was a very high risk disease which could result in pneumonia, intestinal

and even death. Once again, my father was relied upon to be a 'doctor' to cure my brother. And once again, my father came through for us. Of course, I also acknowledge the Creator for the major role he administrated in the healing as well. The disease caused Cleo's hair to fall out, but he was bald and better.

Father not only took care of us children, but he was generally my mother's physician as well. My mother became deathly ill one time; it was a terrifying time for my family. My mother had rarely ever been sick, so to see her gravely ill was difficult to witness. She was sick for about three weeks. She saw other practitioners that believed she was incurable. Every practitioner she saw relayed the bad news that she was going to die. However, my father was not about to let his wife and the mother of his children die without a fight. As the story goes, one morning my father left the house for four hours and when he returned home he had a cure with him. He proceeded to administer a dose of the 'medicine' four times daily. I am happy to report my mother recovered in about one week. We gave the Creator praise for blessing my father to do the things he did.

It may be an overstatement if I say I was doctored on the most, well, no it probably isn't. I remember several times when I had to get treatment. Most of it was due to carelessness and childish behaviors. What can I say? Oops!

I remember an incident which occurred while my father was logging. I saw my father dragging the logs in when I decided to jump on them. This was an example of me acting out those fun things that weren't fun when I would actually act them out. So, I jumped on the logs and one ended up rolling over my left leg. I screamed loudly! Luckily, my father reacted quickly. He stopped the mules and removed the log from my leg. However, this would not be the last occurrence of my father 'doctoring' on me alone. Sometimes it's hard to learn from your own mistakes.

I'm some what sorry to say, that the next incident occurred not long after the logging incident. Looking back, it's truly a pathetic confession. This particular incident strikes me as a tad bit more intense as the prior one I mentioned. As I played in the barn I got an idea. It was a rather small

configuration of mine. It didn't take long to come about. That was the biggest problem. I should've known that quick thinking doesn't always result in good things. Thinking quick on your feet only applies to those game shows. Still, I figured it would be fun to ride one of the calves. The calf, however, had other ideas, which did not include me jumping on its back for thrills. It allowed me to stay mounted for a few moments, but after that it started to go berserk. It mooed and went around in circles. The mooing and circling was a little weird to me, but not that scary. The rollercoaster didn't get scary until I was thrown from off of the calves back. That landing was not the prettiest one. I found myself attached to a piece of tin lying on the barn floor. The tin had ripped my arm wide open. My handy dandy father repaired my injured limb.

And although that incident shook me up for a while, my antics would not cease. Yet another mishap would occur and almost ended in another major catastrophe. My brother was washing clothes; he was using lye of some type. I was playing where I wasn't necessarily supposed to be playing around at, and I should've known because play time seemed much more thrilling that day too. Kind of like, when the sky is blue and the sun is out all day then all of a sudden on little drop of rain falls. And before you know it the whole town is on the brink of a tornado. Sometimes the saddest times stem from the happiest moments. Anyway, my play time jamboree left abruptly when I felt that rush of pain. I accidentally pulled the lye off the table. Unfortunately, due to the many laws of gravity I know it didn't come at me in slow motion. But it would've been nice if it had fallen very slowly to reduce its sudden impact. It would've given me more time to move or at least brace myself. The lye spilled right on my right arm. That moment of pain lasts forever! This became a horrible ordeal not only for me, but for my family as well. There was talk of my arm being amputated. Fortunately, my father and mother refused to entertain such an idea. My father definitely wasn't going to allow his little son to lose his arm. Even though I was playing around something dangerous like I had lost my mind. So he used his home remedies, his herbs and those medicines once again. Gradually, my arm healed under his care. And in the aftermath I childishly blamed my oldest sister, Bessie Mae, for my tragedy. I pointed the finger at her because she

was supposed to be watching me, but I should've known better.

As hard as it may be to believe, not every one of my ailments was a result of foolishness. Thank goodness, I have some stability to show of myself. I suffered from boils under my arms, when I was five. They were painful and highly uncomfortable. My father came to my rescue yet again. He lanced the boils and allowed them to drain. Once he got the cores out, my arms started to heal. I thanked him and the Creator with a huge sigh of relief.

Overall, my father realized he had great talents, as we all did. But there were times it appeared as if he felt less than adequate, even with those special, unique talents. Most people will wonder off into a self pity phase once or twice in a lifetime I suppose. But, I remember becoming upset when my father praised others for their accomplishments. By doing so, made his natural abilities seem so inferior. I believe my father did this because he, like many others, felt that trained or formally educated people have greater expertise as compared to someone with natural, innate abilities. I guess it was kind of like an insecurity issue with him. Personally, I feel someone who possesses natural born talents has the advantage over someone who has been taught. When you come in already knowing you can only go one way. That's up towards a level even higher than the one you came in with. But, when someone tries to teach a person who doesn't know where to begin at it can result it two ways. They can soar up and learn or nose dive down and learn nothing.

Still, I always wanted to be with my father. Wherever he went, I wanted to go. Whatever he did, I wanted to do. If he was going for a walk, I wanted to tag along perhaps in anticipation of a possible adventure with him. I was proud to be his son. I thoroughly enjoyed his company and the things we did together. Not only did my father take me fishing and trapping, which he also taught me. Little boys often revere their fathers who seem almost larger than life in their knowledge and action. I suppose that's normal because I remember feeling the same way, but as I grew older my views changed. I came to see the good and bad of his character. During my youth all I saw was the good, but I began to notice this new side for the first time. I saw a hint of bad in his character. Generally, I forgave my father for his

deficiencies for even a child realizes no one is perfect all the time.

One behavior in particular of my father's, caused me great concern, he was a drinker. My father had always indulged in alcohol, but usually only on the weekends. During the week he had multiple jobs, his family responsibilities as husband and father and much more. On the weekend he could relax more, and drinking for my father was an escape. A tunnel he created to get to the other side, where the grass appeared to be greener. Alcohol released him from the highly stressful and responsible life he led. I can truthfully say the only time I ever disliked my father was when he drank. At some point, his drinking pattern changed drastically. He began to drink more frequently; he no longer waited for the weekends. He wasn't an alcoholic, but I believe as his stress level grew, his consumption of alcohol increased as well. As you may guess, the change in my father's drinking patterns became a source of concern for my mother. My father's drinking affected our lifestyle, arguments often surfaced about my father's drinking. Our happy household slowly began to change, it was disrupted. His drinking caused him to be very argumentative, and luckily, domestic violence never came into the picture. It's strange because although my father could not control the arguing behavior, he managed to tame any physical violence. I guess every person has different reactions to foreign substances. Still, my mother would oftentimes take us children and leave my father for the night. This small evacuation gave him an opportunity to 'dry out'. We usually returned the next day.

I hated it, I hated that we had to leave our house and go somewhere else. I found myself questioning my mother about why we had to leave during those times. I wanted her to stand up for herself, and most of all I wanted my father to behave. After all who can take someone's teachings and advice seriously when you see them acting out. My father's drinking became my biggest enemy. I despised it and I disliked the burden it brought along with it. I didn't like to see my father hostile, mean, and belligerent behavior, which was due to his consumption of alcohol. I don't know if my father ever saw his Native American relatives drink in excess, but I know that alcoholism is a grave problem. I admit my father's drinking made me very angry and upset with him. However, as I grew older, I

understood more about the stress he was under. Still, drinking excessively doesn't solve any problems. Contrary to popular belief, using alcohol and drugs doesn't even temporarily solve problems. The same problem these addicts run away from are right there waiting when they come back. It's like a snowball effect. That's why people end up using more and more of a substance. And they only escape less and less each time. I really wished my father didn't drink at all. Seeing how drunkenness affected him and others (especially my mother) made my feelings skew towards him. My overall feelings for him have never changed, but the drinking just made him different.

It seemed as if he added something to himself. This addition was an ugly, monstrous demon that came to destroy things. I wanted to slay that beast, but I was powerless to do so. I realize only the addict can tame the addiction. Honestly, I would have told anyone that before my father started to drink, he was the greatest father in the world.

My Loving Parents, cont.

We often hear many African American athletes and celebrities praise their mothers. I feel as if most contemporary black men were raised in a female headed household with no male present. In my case, I was raised in a family with both parents. Though my father's influence was very important to my development as a person and especially as a male, my mother's influence was equally as significant. However, her significance was depicted and retained by me in a much different way than my father's. I placed my mother on a pedestal. She possessed a unique influence that helped to make me the type of individual I am today.

My mother was born Lela. She was the daughter of the stylish and proper, African American horsewoman, Lizzie and an African gentleman Ellis. She was one of seven children. My mother had four sisters: Carrie, Bertha, Lucille and Mary, and two brothers, Tommie and Willie.

She was a pretty girl who grew into a prettier woman. Her sense of gentility was no doubt derived from her mother. My mother knew how to treat people and in return people treated her kindly. She was what you would call typically Southern. Southern women are distinctive. I don't know much about my mother's childhood. My general conception of my mother was formed from my life experience with her, not from family history of her.

She was a lovely lady whose behavior displayed a manner which garnered both admiration and respect from others. With her brown beauty I could certainly see how she first caught the eye of my father. My memories of her are precious ones: my mother's kind touch and the small, loving things she always did for her family and others. I remember resting in her lap feeling warm and safe. I remember the way her strong, yet gentle hands felt when she rubbed my head as a boy. One of her past times was singing to us children. Sometimes I still hear the sound of her rich, melodious voice as I sit and reminisce about her. She would sometimes sing church songs. I truly believe God would lend His Heavenly ear to her ever so often as she would sing those hymns.



My Mother

Children have a sense of when they are loved and when they are not. A child will always remember the love of a mother just as a child will remember the lack of it. I am happy to say I always felt loved as a child. My parents made an effort to make their children feel loved. Love is so much more than a word, it's mostly actions. And no love in my life or the life of my siblings was greater than that of our mother. My mother definitely seemed to enjoy being a mother and wife. It's wrong to approach parenthood as a burden or something you're being forced to do. And my mother always acted as if she felt blessed she had children, and that we usually were healthy and happy. Also, I sense my mother felt blessed and thankful for my father as her life mate. Even with the sometimes harsh lives they led, it was obvious my parents loved and respected each other. Though my parents were from different backgrounds, to a certain degree, they had much in common too. I favor my opinion that my parents were a blessing in each other's lives.

My mother believed wholeheartedly in blessings. She was a deeply religious woman. Her spirituality helped her to be the kind person she was. A lot of the time, having something to believe in that you can't see shows your true character. Mother attended church regularly and took us with her. Church provided a haven for my mother to commune with other African American Christians like herself. Overall, Black Mississippians were very religious. Sadly, the churches, like other Southern institutions, were segregated. You would think that if you truly believed in something a person's color wouldn't stand in the way of that. I feel that poverty and oppression was the catalyst to a hunger for God. People needed something to help them through hard times. Unfortunately, it's hard to confide in someone on a deep level down here on earth. So, people tend to look towards the Heavens for hope and happiness. God let them know that their lives would lead to more than just more struggles. Prayer and worship were very important to my mother. They nurtured her strong belief in something bigger than herself. I believe my mother's belief in God was her greatest comfort.

The mission of most churches is to spread and share the word. It's nothing like knowing you might have helped someone else move forward. So quite naturally, my mother wanted to share her

to church on Sundays. Church attendance was about as equally important as going to school was for my father. Still, I am certain my mother was not the only wife sitting in church on Sundays with a husband at home, who preferred not to attend the sermon. It just simply wasn't imperative to my father's life. However, mother felt extremely different about religion, church and her life as a Christian. I could tell as I sat next to my mother in church that she felt comfort there. And although my father may not have noticed, my mother's religion was her personal stress buster just like his alcohol. Obviously, my mother's mode of stress relief was much more suitable.

In remembrance of my mother, I must make a confession. I would be less than honest if I didn't admit that secretly I wanted to remain at home with my dad on Sundays. I know now that this desire was a purely selfish one. I knew if I remained home with my dad he would take the opportunity of an empty house to cook up a feast and we would have fun, laughs and food. What kid could pass up such an opportunity? Obviously, there were at least six others that would. Believe it or not, I was the only one out of my siblings who wanted to stay at home on Sundays. Of course, my mother had something to say about my theory. Therefore, it was usually a church trip on Sunday instead of fun time with my father. Maybe I was confused because in some ways I liked being at church. Still, sitting through sermons and hymns that seemed to go on endlessly has its way of trying a child's patience. In retrospect, now I know exposure to religion helped to foster my sense of spirituality and belief in a higher power in my own life. Still, as time progressed I would choose a religion quite different from the one my mother practiced. But it was her religious beliefs that opened me to pursue my own spiritual path.

My mother had received a minimum amount of education. Although, many blacks could not read or write. My mother had a fourth grade education, she was rather proud of it too. In fact, she often bragged that with her fourth grade education, she could teach others. Mother's education allowed for her to be able to read her beloved Bible. It's amazing, but such a brief education paid many dividends in her life. It was highly unfortunate that she believed in education, but could only attend school for a few years. Still, I could tell those years were important ones to her. Mother wanted her children to have

better and different lives than hers and my father's. Like so many other black parents, she hoped education would uplift us and open many doors of success. Unfortunately, my older brothers and sisters had to work to help the family, so their education was neglected.

In hindsight, I realize my mother's life was hard and full of struggle. But she still rose to the occasion. She was always a responsible person and she took her responsibilities head first. Mother took her duties as mother and wife seriously and acted accordingly. As an employee and worker, mother performed her assigned and other tasks diligently. She worked hard in the fields and at other jobs. Mothers worked 24/7 and rarely got days off. Poor mothers worked 24/7 and literally got no days off. They didn't get to go to a spa or to luncheons with girlfriends. I could tell my mother was tired at times, but she very seldom showed it. She was one of those keep on truckin' types. When my mother wasn't working to earn pay, she worked in the home caring for her family. We were her little helpers as children. There were some chores and tasks we had to do. But for the most part, my mother performed a large amount of work which helped our family run smoothly. We would not have been a family without my mother. As so many mothers are, my mother was the glue which held our family together. In fact you could say my mother was the mortar and my father was the brick; they were the foundation of our family.

Mother was constantly ensuring that each child had their needs met. We had a large family and a limited amount of funds and resources, so usually the needs of the neediest child would have to be met initially. Generally, we understood this concept as a reality of life. Still, children sometimes have wants and dreams which are not realized at the moment they have them. My mother worked hard to make holidays and other special events happy ones for us. Though there were many things we did not receive as children, I am happy to say that we survived because our significant needs were met. Those needs were love, attention, instruction and nurturing.

My mom was a good mother. I didn't always believe this every moment (for example, after receiving a spanking from her), but generally, I adored her. My mother was one of the family's

disciplinarians. Much to our dismay, my father would inform our mother when he thought we needed a spanking and then my mother would administer the discipline. Still, I would have rather been disciplined by her than by my father. In comparison, my mother spanked, but my father dispensed beatings. I've only received a few of my father's beatings, but they were enough to last me for a lifetime. Don't get me wrong, mother's spankings were no walk in the park either, but they weren't as intense as my father's beatings.

It's not easy to encapsulate your feelings for your parents. It can be hard to be objective and candid regarding what you think about your parents. I am fortunate regarding the feelings I have for my parents. I have no burdensome or overtly negative feelings about my mother or father. They were role models to me despite the fact that they were not perfect. Sometimes flaws in your parents can be an example of how not to conduct yourself or your own life. Positive attributes possessed by your parents can make you emulate those behaviors, as my mother's spirituality inspired me to become a spiritual man. Also, the discipline she relayed to me encouraged me to likewise lead a disciplined life. I learned to possess respect for all women through my mother. My mother conducted herself in such a way you could not help but admire and respect her.

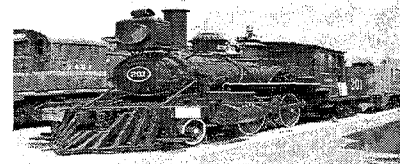
Honestly, I can state my parents showed me how to conduct myself in life. I learned to be a caring, spiritual, kind, strong, hard-working and a decent individual or at least strive to be so at all times. From both my parents, I learned to be resourceful, independent and self-reliant. I feel appreciative to my mother for all that she taught and gave to me. When I think of my mother it is with the fondest feeling. I feel fortunate to have been her son.

Relocated to Champaign County

My father realized the North had more and varied opportunities for a Black man. My father's primary goal was providing a better life for his wife and children. He sought various means to achieve this goal successfully. Increasingly, it became apparent to my father that toiling in the cotton fields and performing other menial work was not only difficult, but paid poorly. The Mississippi economy was even more depressed than other southern or northern states. The country was still experiencing financial hardship due to the Depression years and World War II continued to be waged. In some industries, the war effort had depleted the home front of male workers. Women stepped into some of the jobs and started performing work previously done by males. Sadly, racism, segregation and discrimination continued to flourish in the U.S. despite the fact that African Americans were fighting in World War II.

Though 'de facto' segregation existed throughout America, the South had a harsh, fully segregated society. Every hotel, restaurant, elevator, public bathroom, college, hospital, cemetery, prison, drinking fountain, swimming pool and church was either for white or Black people. These facilities were never for both.

Some industries would hire blacks. One of these industries was the railroad industry. In theory, this may have been due to timing and what was occurring with the railroad industry at the time. In other words, the railroad industry needed men to perform work and black men needed jobs. It was a marriage of convenience. Certainly, African-Americans had their share of problems with the railroads since their inception in the 1800s. The landmark *Plessey vs., Ferguson* legal case clearly showed what some, if not all, railroads thought about the 'place' of Black people. Years before a case of this type would never have reached the Supreme Court. With the creations of such organizations as the NAACP founded in 1909, black people were finding their voice to combat the harsh inequalities of their lives. And the voice was as loud as the rolling sea. Historically, black people had always fought against their oppression since being brought forcibly to America. Unfortunately, the battle would take decades more to change the minds and hearts of white America.



Railroads were monopolies until the early 1900s when the federal government proceeded to break them up. After 1929 (the Depression years), railroad earnings plummeted sharply and drastically. In 1937, the companies which controlled about one third of the railroad track in the nation were bankrupt, New Deal programs of the time, World War II, and economic problems factored into black men being given employment opportunities previously denied to them. Such was the case with the railroads. Fortunately, my father would be one of many benefactors of these circumstances. Of course, in select areas of railroad employment, blacks were heavily represented performing work as porters, and on the dining cars performing cooking, serving and other domestic types of work. In fact, a Black American civil rights activist and labor leader by the name of A. Phillip Randolph organized the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. The union made advances against unfair treatment of black workers. Black men also performed many of the most labor intensive and dangerous work for the railroad. Go figure.

Around the early 1940s, my father was recruited to become a runner for the Illinois Central Railroad. Father was recruited by a young, black man named Melvin Peoples who resided in Illinois. Peoples' job was to specifically recruit able-bodied black men from the south for employment with the Illinois Central Railroad. My father would become part of a class of industrial workers uprooted from their rural homes.

The Illinois Central Railroad's beginnings date back to 1850 when Congress awarded it 2.6 million acres of Illinois land as a gift, making it the first U.S. railroad to obtain a land grant. It was chartered in 1851 to build a line between Cairo in Southern Illinois to East Dubuque and a line between Centralia and Chicago. It became the chief U.S. railroad running from North to South. The Illinois Central had connected many sections of the State of Illinois with Chicago since the mid 1800s. The

depots. With the help of the Illinois Central Railroad the population of Illinois had more than doubled in the 1900s. Railroads were a significant industry until they started a decline in the 1940s due to rules and regulations of labor unions and organizations, as well as, state and federal laws governing them.

Railroad work was undoubtedly laborious and hazardous. My father performed hard labor working on the rails and tracks. However, he was well acquainted with hard work and the danger didn't concern him. Even from my observations as a child, I knew my parents worked extremely hard. Still, my father wanted his children to grow up not having to perform the same tedious, thankless work he did. He was anxious for the opportunity the railroad offered him. I think father hoped it would mean a change of monumental scope for all of us. The job took him back and forth from the South to the North. He became familiar with Illinois and its many small towns. Later, my father's railroad job meant a change in our place of residence. We'd be moving to another part of the country.

We would be leaving the South and traveling to the North Central United States. My father was familiar with the State of Illinois. He had a sibling residing in Chicago, so he had visited several times. Also, my parents had lived there previously. Their past in Chicago provided them with a frame of reference in part for life in Illinois. We would be leaving rural Mississippi and going to a flat land with extensive farmland and industry.

Father informed us we would be living in a place called Champaign (pronounced like the bubbly drink, but spelled differently). We knew nothing of Champaign, Illinois except what my father told us. He figured it would be a good location to raise a family. Champaign grew around a railroad depot constructed in 1854. It was a town in East Central Illinois adjoined by another town called Urbana. Champaign was a mixture between rural existence and an upcoming metropolitan area. It was a mystery to my mother and my siblings. Soon, however, Champaign was to be our new home and it would be a mystery no longer.

In the year 1943 we moved from Shaw, Mississippi to Champaign, Illinois. At the time I was seven years old. I still recall boarding the Illinois Central train and taking that rather long ride. It was a

lengthy, but exciting trip for me. Everything in my young life was changing, and I was frightened of the changes. At seven I didn't really understand how big the changes would be for any of us. However, I was very curious about the new life I was embarking upon in this strange location.

After departing the train, we walked through an underpass. This underpass ran from Champaign's Main Street to First Street. First Street was an unofficial entrance to the black community. About a half of a block north of First Street was a restaurant and two big houses. After such a long trip with only some packaged food to eat, our family decided to stop and eat at the restaurant. Once we finished eating, we went directly to our new residence located at 614 North Poplar Street.

My father had arranged for housing for our family in an area in Champaign where other black people resided. Residential segregation, like other forms of segregation haunted communities. In Champaign, whites lived in the 'Whites' area and blacks lived in the 'Black' part of town. The 'Black' part of town was popularly referred to as the North End or north Champaign.

My father had rented a seven room flat for us. We lived there for six months then moved two blocks away to Fourth and Vine Street. We moved to a residence called the Tisdal building. This move was still confined within the black community of north Champaign. On the first floor of the Tisdal building our neighbors, Mr. Theodore and Mrs. Martha Briggs resided with their children. They were related to us, but I was not acquainted with them. My family lived upstairs in the residence. My brother Lember had a room upstairs. Bessie also shared a room upstairs until she moved out to marry. Incidentally, she married Melvin Peebles, the same man who recruited my father. I guess Peebles recruiting my father was fortuitous for our family for more than one reason.

My mother acquired a job as a cook at a restaurant named Katsinas. She was hired as a cook by the Katsina family. She was happy to be able to contribute to the family as she always did. She was still a homemaker and mother, but she was a worker as well. As usual, my mother balanced her work life with her domestic life. Domestic and kitchen work was still readily available for black women whether they were educated or not. Working in a kitchen, though the work could be tedious, was certainly a great deal easier than working in the cotton fields. This move to Illinois upgraded both my parents' vocations.

After our fourth year of living in the Tisdal building a fire forced all the tenants to move. However, we didn't have any place to go. We lost most of our belongings in the fire. A 'Blacks only' American Legion located in north Champaign kindly helped us with clothing and food. We stayed there for a week while my father sought housing for us. Finally, he found a residence for us on Hill Street. This place on Hill Street wasn't the lap of luxury, but it was something we called our own again. Of course we counted ourselves very fortunate anyway; none of us had been injured in the fire. Hill Street remained home for one year then we moved to a rental house. My father leased it from Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Anderson. Mrs. Anderson, a housewife, and my mother became very close friends. Moving around really can pave way towards many things. Relocation isn't always a bad thing.

The Educational Dilemma

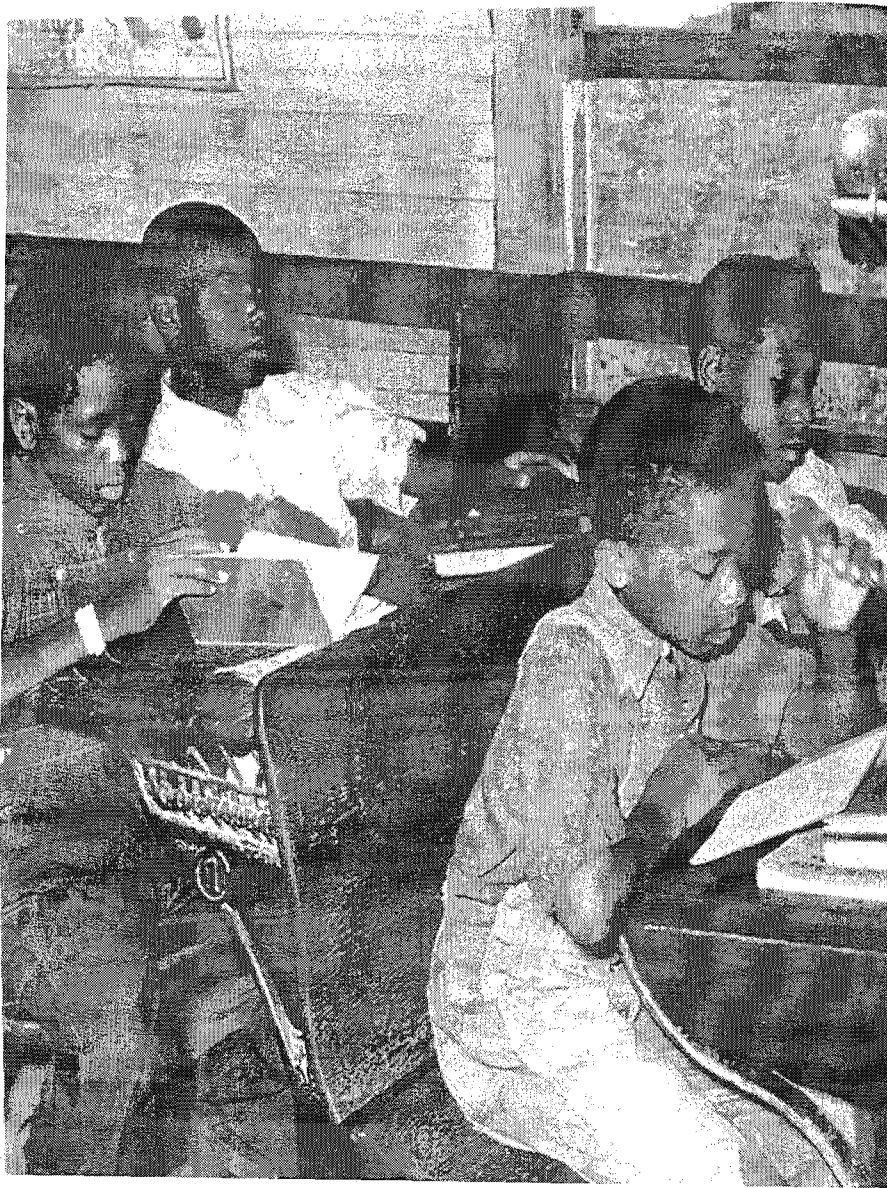
After settling in our new home my mother made arrangements for the children of school age in our family to attend school. At the time Cleo and I were enrolled in public school. I was placed in Lawhead School. This school no longer exists in Champaign. I developed a two fold problem with school. For starters, I had never attended a school, and secondly, after attending for only a short amount of time, I discovered I did not like it.

I remember my first day of class, and my teacher told us to write our first name. At this time I didn't know how to read or write. Still, instead of not attempting anything, I copied from a nearby girl's paper. I guess that deserves an A for effort.

While still residing in Mississippi, I was allowed to accompany my sister Bessie to school one day. Previously, it had rained and it was very wet and muddy as we walked to school. The mud was deep, thick and goeey. Finally, this mud attached itself to my shoes in such a manner that when I tried to pull my shoes from it the heel of my shoes came right off. My mother was upset about those shoes and that was the last time I was permitted to tag along to school with my sister. The reality of our lives was school was a luxury and shoes were an important items. I wasn't officially attending school anyway, so I wasn't missing too much. African Americans could rely only on their own communities to change their children's educational opportunities.

In the 1920s and early 1930s, they began to organize self-help groups to build and repair schools. The whole community was involved. Elderly sharecroppers, many born into slavery, donated profits to school projects. Even people with no children donated money, sometimes mortgaging their homes to raise cash. Those without money gave their time and skills. Carpenters and builders spent their free time building schools, while women prepared food for the builders and ran fundraising events. Sometimes wealthy white families gave money. Julis Rosenwald (1862-1932), chairman of Sears, Roebuck, and Company, was one prominent contributor. By 1932, self-help groups had build 3,464 schools in counties

across the South.



It became obvious to me that school and I were not going to become bosom buddies. The truth is I disliked most aspects of school. I especially disliked reading and writing. I didn't like doing my ABC's. I was painfully slow and bad at reading and writing. It was frustrating and truly demoralizing for me. Basically, I didn't enjoy things I wasn't good at. I suppose no one does. Still, I felt strange because I wasn't good at school. It seemed to me like it was something you should've naturally been good at. Still, when I took the time and analyzed myself a bit further I learned that I didn't hate all education and schooling. I did like mathematics and excelled at that. I noticed that if I liked what we were doing in school I could do well and focus on it. The only problem was everything we did wasn't always to my liking. Some may call this selective learning, to my understanding, education was important. Still, it was alien to me. Education had not been a part of my life, nor had it been a significant part of my parents' lives. It was hard to get used to, education was almost imposing on what I had been used to. However, I knew of its importance.

As if the curriculum and my learning level wasn't enough, another element made school even harder. My shyness, in the classroom I felt insecure; I didn't belong. Being around other children was strange; I had not grown adapted to that. In Mississippi, the only other children I usually saw and played with were my own siblings. Therefore, being amongst other children outside of my family was terribly uncomfortable for me. I really didn't develop much thought about how the other children in my classes may have felt. Still, it is likely some of them may have felt the same anxieties as I did. I was already trying to adjust to a new, busy location, a new home and my parents' new jobs. Now I had to adjust to my first real school experience.

I attended Lawhead School from the first through the third grade. After that I started attending Marquette School. It was located on Fourth and Clark Street in Champaign. I attended Marquette for about a year. Afterwards, I went to Gregory School for about two months. To finish the fifth and sixth grades off I was transferred to Willard School. With all of that moving around someone would've probably thought I loved school. Like I said relocation can be a good thing. A change in your

environment can definitely open your eyes to something new. Despite my previous battles with inner anxieties and social difficulties I managed to make some friends at Willard School. I was very happy over that. I became friends with three young boys. I'll never forget them, Charlie, Jasper and Robert. We became chums of sort. But truly, Charlie and Jasper were my friends. Robert just associated with us. I remember how he acted somewhat afraid of me, though he played with all of us. I never really got to the bottom of that mystery.

My school life started to change when I became involved with extracurricular activities. When I became involved in sports and athletics, a new world emerged for me at school. The games and athletic world made school truly bearable for me. It propelled me to maintain decent grades in order to remain eligible for these activities. My self esteem started to improve rapidly as I showed I could excel at other things children deemed important. Being good at games and sports made you a local celebrity.

I received acclaim in the schools for my running ability. I really enjoyed track. I became proficient at marbles. Marbles was a popular game at the time and children took their marble matches very seriously. I entered the marble tournaments at my school. I had many challengers, but all and all I excelled to become the best. I was deemed the marble king. I played a little bit of baseball and I joined the school's football team as well.

Playing sports helped me so much. Psychologists believe that the basis of most children's play is imitation of adult life. It is thus a learning process and means of adapting to or coping with life situations. As I did not achieve strongly in academics, I did excel at 'play' and recreation. During my school years, sports and athletics assisted me most. Through the love of the game I learned team work, cooperation, fair play, skill building and much more. These things served me well for the goals I had set for myself.

None of my goals happened to be academic ones anyway. I always looked at this as a very good thing considering the fact that I didn't ever succeed as an academic student. However, I did do well enough to pass from grade to grade. Deep inside I really do wish I had studied harder and become a

better student. Still, at that time my heart was simply not there. Now, I believe wholeheartedly young people should pursue education. I expressed this belief to my own children later when I became a father. Education has proved to be the great equalizer in our society, especially for low income and people of color. Sometimes education is the key out. I also believe equally as strongly that people should pursue their dreams and not allow others to deflate them. An individual must be willing to work hard to achieve their dreams, no matter how impossible it may seem to bystanders.

Truthfully, I never saw myself as a person who would become a doctor, lawyer or engineer. I didn't want to be either of those things. Instead, I dreamed of being an entertainer or a boxer. During this time, black entertainers and athletes were receiving acclaim and status in their respective fields. I observed them and admired what they did. It was difficult for black people in these careers. Racism and segregation in the U.S. continued profusely. Still, the talent of Black American entertainers and athletes remained obvious to members of the national black community. It was also becoming obvious to the larger Caucasian world. Although they didn't want to admit it, regardless, I knew what I wanted to do and by the power invested in me, I intended to pursue my goals. All I needed was faith.

Losing my Father

My father had worked for the Illinois Central Railroad for seven years in 1950. During those seven years he saw changes in the railroad system since his initial employment. There had been changes in labor and industrial practices and laws governing railroads. Metallurgical advancements markedly improved the quality of rail steel and after World War II the installation of centralized traffic control increased track capacity lessening the need for additional rail. The U.S. railroad system shifted from coal fired steam locomotives to diesel electric locomotives in 1948. Father continued to work long and hard on the railroad. My mother continued to raise us children, maintain the house and work outside our home. In 1950 when I was fourteen years old a tragedy struck our family. It struck like a tidal wave, leaving all of us bewildered in its wake. My father died. The cause of his death was undiagnosed cancer.

It was a time of great sorrow for my family. My mother had lost her soul mate and life partner. Likewise, all of us children had lost our father. I had lost the father whose presence I loved to be in as a small child. I had lost the strong, proud, talented and resourceful male role model that I looked up to. For a period of time, our family was broken and all of us grieved due to our loss. After my father's burial, life continued as life does. However, our lives would truly never be the same again. My mother bore the yoke of single parenthood. She became our primary bread winner, as my father had been prior to his death. I don't believe my mother thought of us as a burden. Still times were harsh for single parents. Our lives changed due to the physical and emotional loss of my father. Our lives changed financially as well.

Six months after my father's death, the Andersons tore down the old house and built an apartment house with an upstairs and downstairs. A part of the new house was reserved for mother, Elizabeth, Cleo and I. Cleo withdrew from school after my father's death. My mother didn't want him to do so, but he made the decision for himself. He decided he needed to in order to help our family. At this time it was quite common for an eldest child to quit school and help the surviving parent support the

family. By this time William, Lember and Bessie Mae were out on their own supporting themselves. Cleo was the oldest sibling living at home. He became the father figure of our family. He worked and helped my mother as best he could. My brother was also a gambler, who just happened to be very good at winning 'big' money. His winnings sometimes helped us remain financially afloat. My mother was provided with complete support and assistance in taking care of the family from Cleo. I admired the way he stepped into my father's shoes, even though he knew he could only fill such a small portion of them.

My mother continued to work at Katsina's Restaurant. She also started working as a cook in sorority houses. Champaign- Urbana was home to a large university, the University of Illinois. The campus stretched over parts of both Champaign and Urbana. The University had several sorority houses which employed African American housekeepers, cooks and janitors. They wouldn't enroll an African American for studies at that time. However, they jumped at the opportunity to employ African Americans in various capacities as workers. Mother also worked as a dishwasher for Steak and Shake. There was no extremity to the amount she worked for the survival of our family. Without the income from my father's railroad job coupled with the money my mother earned, our family finances worsened. The income Cleo provided still could not compare. As difficult as it was for us, we knew there were families struggling as much as we were and others struggling much more.

Mother always went to her jobs daily. She was a very diligent worker. When the bitter Illinois winter arrived that year, she struggled through the snow and ice to reach her jobs. In a way we were still adjusting to the bitter Midwest winters, which we never had to go through in Mississippi. We had resided in the Midwest for several years and our parents had made certain we had winter apparel. My mother, however, did not have proper attire. Despite the reality of her not having adequate winter apparel she continued going to her jobs. She never uttered a word about what she lacked. Nowadays we hear stories like this and cannot fathom how people could or would endure such hardships. Many people today seem incapable of understanding the concept of people doing whatever is necessary whether it is

convenient or extremely unfortunate. Still, that is exactly what people did during economic hardship. During these terrible times, the impoverished suffered even greater because they had little or nothing before the crisis had ever began. Parents sacrificed for their children. Husbands sacrificed for their wives; wives sacrificed for their husbands. And though some may find this incomprehensible, poor people helped people even poorer than they were. Still, through it all people survived. My mother believed God would take care of us and He always did.

Though I was fourteen years old when my father died, I don't think I really knew the burden my mother had assumed as a single parent. I didn't understand the awesome responsibility of caring for and maintaining a family. None of us accurately comprehended the immense responsibility my mother or any woman in a similar circumstance during this time period bore. Today a single, poor mother bears a terrible plight even with state and/or federal assistance and help from her family. I believe public assistance existed during the time of my mother's financial struggle, but surely in a different form than what exists now. Regardless, my mother never did or would have considered accepting such assistance. She was an able bodied woman who could work, so that's what she did.

I knew things were compact financially. Children can be astute regarding such things. At fourteen I was certainly not a baby, I understood our situation. Sometimes for breakfast I would have beans, and then have beans for lunch and dinner. Mayonnaise sandwiches, mustard sandwiches and sugar sandwiches were also a frequent nutrition of mine. Children at our school were to go home for their lunch and eat at home then return for the remainder of the school day. My friend, Charlie Johnson, happened to be in a finance strait such as my own. We would both go home and return to school after lunch. Unlike the others we didn't have a well balanced lunch. Most days we ate whatever bit of food our family left for us. When we returned to school after lunch hour we would be quizzed by our teacher concerning what we ate. I'm sure she had the best intentions, but her inquiries put some of us on the spot. Of course I was in that small group of few, along with Charlie. I suppose our teacher was concerned whether we were eating and receiving proper nutrition. Charlie and I told our teacher what

she wanted to hear. We knew we couldn't tell her the truth. Telling the truth meant we would risk being laughed at and humiliated by the other students, who were fortunate enough to have a decent lunch.

I remember one incident when Charlie and I were so hungry at lunch time that we bullied and threatened Blackman into buying food for us on his father's account. Blackman was afraid of me and I already knew that, so intimidating him wasn't a problem at all. I guess you should never show anyone your weaknesses. It was a terrible thing to do as I look back on the occurrence now, but we did it. For the record, revenge does exist, Blackman got back at me. One day he came up behind me in an alley. I didn't notice him approaching, but I felt his wrath. He hit me in the head with a baseball bat. I survived, just as he had survived being bullied into purchasing food for us that day. I guess that made us even.

Though the meals I consumed were not the most appetizing, I can't complain. I can honestly say the children of my family never starved nor went totally without food. My mother's job contributed to this tremendously. We often had leftovers from the sorority house's kitchen. Therefore, we always had food, despite the fact they were leftovers. My mother combined these leftovers with other things we had and created meals. A steak would've certainly been nice every once in a while, but we survived on the foods God blessed us to have. Truly, asking for anything much more than that would've made anyone look like they were demanding far too much.

Many dreams

After finishing the sixth grade at Willard, I attended Champaign Junior High from seventh to ninth grade. At the time Champaign only had that one junior high. During my attendance at this school I ran track, played football and basketball. At one track meet, I ran the 220 relay, 440 relay and the 100-yard dash consecutively.



I attended Champaign's only senior high school as well, Champaign High School or CHS. CHS housed grades ten through twelve. During tenth and eleventh grades, I ran track, played basketball and played football.

For the first time, athletics were not the only things which occupied my mind during my junior and senior high school years. I became interested in music, entertainment, boxing and girls. Not necessarily in that order, but all the same, they occupied my mind. In senior high I engaged in more activities than I did prior to my father's death. Before my father's death I was allowed to attend school. Still, after school I had chores to perform including: carrying coal to the house, getting wood and

making a fire for my family, doing my homework and studying. After father's death, I was allowed to participate more in athletics and sports, as well as, have more social and recreational time with friends.

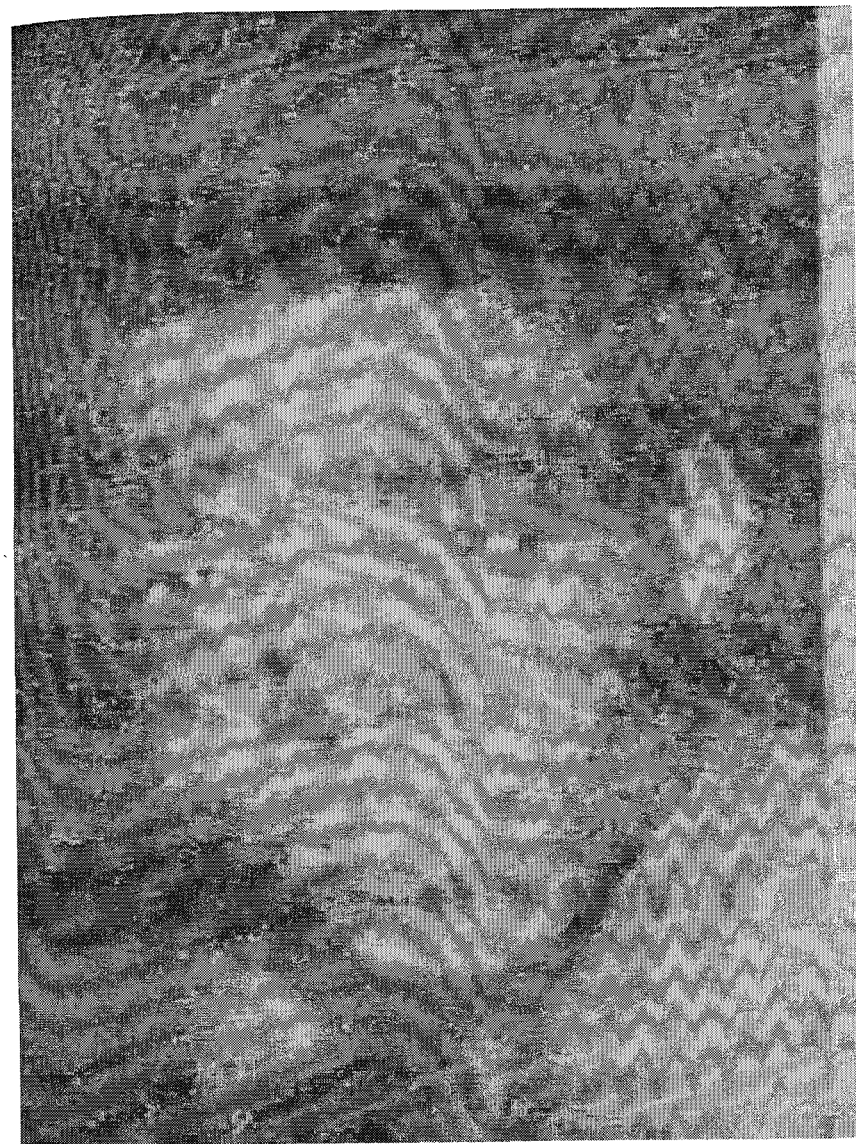
As a youth, I went to a neighborhood recreation and meeting center, Douglas Center. It was a community center for youth, as well as, adults. Dedication for the center was held on September 23, 1945. After years of fundraising and proposing, the goal had finally been reached. It was truly a day of rejoicing for the black community. This center provided recreation, sports, athletics, meetings, social events and much more. Today, Douglas Center, which is affiliated with the Champaign Park District, still exists in north Champaign as a resource for the black community. I went to Douglas Center to play basketball and other sports. It was a safe environment with adult supervision.

Unfortunately, sometimes you can't watch children all the time. Someone will always find a brief moment when they are not being monitored and take pure advantage of that. For the most part the supervision was well intact though. Still, one day I ran into some difficulty at the center. A group of four older boys started teasing and harassing me. I suppose because I was younger and they wanted to do so for spite. The teasing and harassment became physical when one of the boys challenged me to a fight. He told me he was going to beat me up and I was definitely afraid. I found myself fearing John, the one who proposed the challenge, or all of them were going to attack me. The situation was frightening, but I followed them outside of the center to fight.

I suppose my adrenaline was pumping strongly and my fear was equal to it. There was a bike rack outside of the center, keep that in mind. John continued to taunt me and before I knew it the fight had begun. I struck John very hard and his entire body flew over that bike rack without even touching it. Even I was a bit surprised and needless to say so was John and his friends. I was still skeptical about getting ganged beat, so I tried to ready myself. However, John had rose from being knocked down and decided he had enough. Surely he knew I wasn't a guy to harass or taunt anymore. It also appeared that John and his crew (whom I later met and befriended) found me to be a worthy opponent. They granted me their respect and considered me worthy of friendship even though I was younger and smaller.

That was the beginning of my friendship with John, Ralph, Wesley, Joe and Raymond. After this incident all was forgiven and I became a member of their little group. Senior high was a great time for me as I continued to excel at being athlete. I received ample praise and attention from my peers, teachers and administrators. And my interest for music and boxing also increased.

Joe Louis was my role model for boxing. Joe was a southern born black male, he was born in Alabama. I was impressed by his amazing record which included being the professional heavyweight champion of the world in 1937 and his 68 victories with only three defeats. Joe Louis inspired me to want to enter the boxing profession. Boxing could lead way to earning money and attention. It would also help me to pursue my real dream of becoming an entertainer. I knew I was capable of boxing. However, it was a dream which would be very difficult to achieve if I ever did achieve it. If being an entertainer was hard for a Caucasian (rich or poor) for a Black person of the era it was especially daunting. This goal wasn't too farfetched though, it wasn't impossible.



FRED DAVIS

As a youth I never deemed anything as impossible. I suppose that is the great thing about being young and full of possibility.

During the early 1950s, the entertainment field was full of talented, gifted and attractive black people who unfortunately still had to struggle to secure jobs in their field. Talent and beauty were not enough if you were black and wanted to enter the entertainment field. I was especially struck by the talent of black male singers. My favorites were Sam Cooke, Jackie Wilson and a local talent, Johnny Ace. I sang but not as a lead singer. I was interested in singing in a group. Black male and female groups were the craze. My dream was to be on stage and be successful. It was during high school I began singing with some male vocal groups. They were amateur performances, but it was a way for me to start performing on stage. We sang at many community and city events. We sang at the Elks Club, Douglas Center and other places in Champaign. However, we also sang in clubs located in Danville and Chicago, Illinois.

Mary Elizabeth

As I mentioned earlier, girls became of interest to me as well. I was still in senior high school and like a normal, red blooded male; I was interested in flirting, dating, kissing and experimenting. I hadn't been really "serious" about any one particular girl. Frankly, my mind was usually on boxing and singing. Still, seeing pretty girls could make my day dreams of boxing and music vacate my thoughts. Eventually, one girl in particular became a focus of my thoughts and emotions.

Her name was Mary Elizabeth Williams. I'd seen Mary many times but frankly I didn't recognize how much I liked her and she didn't seem to like me. She was a very pretty girl and received quite a bit of notice for her somewhat exotic good looks. We didn't really know each other and perhaps both of us may have had some preconceived notions about each other. My friends referred to Mary as 'mean' which basically translated into she ignored them and their efforts to impress or become acquainted with her. Mary associated with a little group of high school girls whom were her friends. They came to the same parties, soda fountains and other hang outs or group frequented. I found myself noticing the girl called Mary more and more. I was curious about her. She was mostly appealing because of her mysterious ways. It wasn't necessarily anything she did, but her rather cool distance was very intriguing. Despite my friends' feelings, I didn't believe Mary was 'mean' at all. Even though I didn't know her, I decided to come up with my own theories of her.

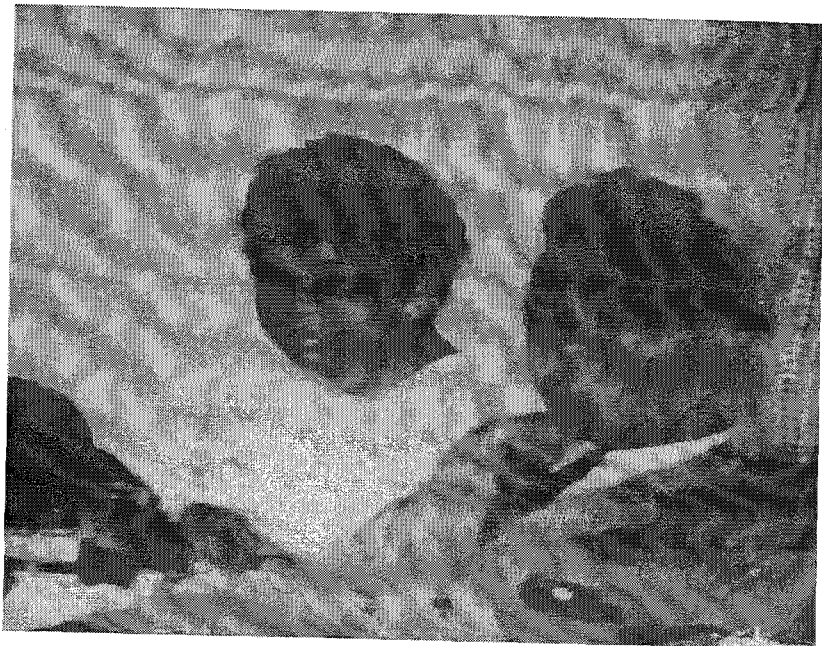
One day while we were at one of our regular hangouts, Mary and her friends showed up. I decided that I should steel my nerves and ask her to dance. Initially, I figured she would turn me down, but instead she agreed to dance. It was a simple dance and afterwards we slowly started to talk. We talked more and more at different places and events. The more time I spent with Mary, the more time I wanted to be in her company. Now, I had a dream which took the form of a lovely, young, bronze girl. I was beginning to experience my first "real" love with Mary.

She was beautiful, 5 feet 3 inch and with a 130 pound curvy frame. She was just as intelligent as she was lovely. Mary informed me that her biggest desire was to become a model. I'm not sure who all

signed up for her fan club towards this dream, but she most definitely had my vote. I thought she was perfectly capable and beautiful enough to over succeed at this goal she had planned for herself. Even during those frequent heartbreaking times when I thought she didn't like me, I couldn't help but be smitten by this heartland beauty. Mary Elizabeth Williams was rapidly becoming the object of my affection. It was hard to believe such a small person would become such a very large and important part of my life.

At this time in my life it still amazed me how Mary or any female could steal my heart. I suppose my first love was like many others, unexpected and consuming. My adolescent heart and mind was primarily filled with music and boxing. Now those two things had a rival for both my time and attention. I was a young man with focus and determination, but Mary made me think outside of career pursuits. She provided another dimension to my life. What she provided enhanced all of my dreams and pursuits.

It was official Freddie B. Davis and Mary Elizabeth Williams were a couple.



Mary and I continued to participate in the adolescent activities at our schools and community. Generally, we did these activities as a couple. We met at various events and were always together. If you saw Mary, you saw me, if you saw me, you saw Mary. We were like two peas in a pod. We were undividable and we couldn't be separated. Still, I managed to associate with my guy friends. She also made time to be with her girl friends. However, it became commonly known that Mary and I were involved and dating exclusively. Of course, this meant we were the object of the normal teenage gossip, which accompanies all known couples. It was tradition to automatically induct a new couple into the adolescent lime light. After all, people do love to talk, and most of the time, they love to talk about someone else's business. It was natural for our peers to comment on almost every aspect of our relationship. They had to input on how we looked as a couple. They speculated about our 'love life'. They wondered how we had gotten together. All types of nonsense. In light of it all, the only thing I cared about was Mary. I was very thankful and highly appreciative we were an item. I remember thinking of how proud I was to be her guy. Likewise, I believe she enjoyed being 'my girl'.

I tried hard to show Mary the proper respect, in accordance to my upbringing. I followed the teachings of my parents. Instilled my instilled learning was not specifically directed towards the proper treatment of girls. They were primarily about respect and honor for a significant one. My parents taught me that good manners were not solely the domain of the wealthy. Manners knew no specific class, race or socio-economic group. Still, some people may want you to believe manners carry those bias opinions. It was considered a hallmark of Southern etiquette to know how to properly treat a young lady. And in return, a young lady was expected to act as a lady. However, in some very sad cases, young ladies didn't always act accordingly. Unlike these days, when a young lady failed to act as such, she was still treated as one. It really makes more sense to still choose to honor and respect someone who doesn't do so towards themselves. It displays the type of individual you are when you choose to do so. Overall, showing disrespect to someone else shows disrespect towards your character as well. Though I was living in the Midwest, my southern rearing was very much a part of me. In those days, respect shown for

young ladies was considered a significant reflection of your overall good manners. I think this was especially true among African Americans as we were not normally treated with much respect at all. Respect was a very serious issue for us.

As teens, we also wanted to be cool and hip as well. For most teenagers, this becomes a severe problem. And many choose to only be cool. I found I could be both. I maintained my cool points from the sports teams I participated on and my local singing gigs. Both Mary and I met the standard of being cool and hip, but we still had well constructed manners. We knew how to conduct ourselves.

Mary was a lady in carriage and demeanor. However, she was accessible (at least to me). Like me, she had set goals for herself. She dedicated time to developing her lovely mind. That dedication showed me her true intentions of wanting to be somebody and go somewhere. I loved her for that beautiful mind she derived. I suppose the most important aspect of her character was the fact she accepted me as the person I was and allowed me to be so. To her I was just Freddie B. Davis. The only thing I could be. She never seemed to expect too much more or less. It was a hectic time for me. My life was practically full. I had dedications to all those sports teams, boxing training, singing, school, my family responsibilities and Mary. All seemed pretty manageable, or so I assumed.

My relationship with Mary grew as young love does. After a spell of being together we became sexually intimate with one another. The acts of innocents often have consequences, which the innocent are not prepared to confront. As was the case with Mary and I. Mary became pregnant with my child. This act would drastically alter both our lives in significant ways. School administrators, school boards and many parents didn't want pregnant girls in school. So, Mary continued to attend school for as long as she was allowed. Unfortunately, unwed pregnant girls were considered scandalous and certainly not suitable role models for other females. And Mary's situation was responded too much like others of its kind. Generally, school authorities and parents thought unwed mothers shouldn't be paraded before other students (both male and female). They feared it would give them ideas about engaging in sex. Still in truth young adolescents, with hormones spinning out of control didn't need any reminders of

sexuality. Young unwed mothers get more support from school officials and the general public these days.

She moved from Champaign after dropping out of school relocating to Chicago where she lived with a relative. Mary lived with her favorite aunt. Her relocation was a good thing for her. It aided her to be in a less stressful and judgmental environment. As a result of the pregnancy, I too ended up ultimately dropping out of high school during my senior year. This was probably tougher on my mother and family than it was on me. My mother believed in education and wanted me to obtain my high school diploma. I was deeply sorry to disappoint her. Most of my drive to receive my diploma derived from me knowing my mother wanted me to do so. I had never been a great student in the first place. My love for school never bloomed. So, I ultimately left high school without a diploma. In all honesty, I simply wasn't thinking about the opportunities I wouldn't have as a result of being a drop out. Mary, who was a pretty good student, was probably more haunted by her drop out status than I was. Although I had left school I was still very determined to succeed. With or without a diploma, I was set on success.

The year was 1953. Mary and I were going to be parents soon. Perhaps we were not ready to be adults, but we were going to become them nonetheless. There was no other option for us. Abortion was not even a remote consideration for Mary. Yes, even then people obtained illegal abortions. The issue was not a legal one for Mary or even an economic one. The decision was clearly a moral one for her. It was a moral one for both of us.

Mary readied herself for her pregnancy. Likewise, I prepared myself to become a father. Still, I hold the theory that one is not truly ready to become a parent until they actually hold their child in their arms. Many people believe there's a right and wrong time to become a parent, but I don't believe that. I was highly mature for my age. I felt that I was better emotionally (though not financially) prepared than other young males my age may have been to assume such an awesome responsibility. I was a dependable person and took responsibility for my child. I realized my child would need certain things upon its arrival. What our child would need the most, in my opinion, were two parents who would love it.

We often hear the older generation claim things were much less complex during this period of time. In truth, it was actually the exact opposite. The social morals and norms for the early 1950s were much more repressive than today. There was a type of sexual repression which did not change until the 1960s with its 'free love' generation and even then it was scorned by most parents of the generation of 'love children' which would come later. During this era you didn't find vast amounts of pre-marital sex and teenage pregnancies, but it definitely occurred whether it was seen or unseen. It wasn't talked about openly and candidly as it is today. It was still a violation of the norm and morals and therefore usually dealt as such. Mary going away was indicative of how these situations were generally handled. Mary felt fortunate she was able to live with her favorite aunt in Chicago. This aunt provided her with much emotional support during this trying period of time. Of course, I wasn't happy she had to go away. However, not much was actually in either of our powers.

In 1954, Mary gave birth to our son whom we named Anthony Eugene (Anthony for the Roman Mark Anthony and Eugene for Mary's brother). Mary and I were still very much in love with each other. I kept myself busy with boxing, singing and work while Mary was living away from me.

The following year, Mary returned to Champaign and to me. We were married. I was eighteen years old, a father and a husband.



Golden Fists

By 1953, my interest and ability in boxing had greatly developed. I was a high school drop out focused on pursuing a career in boxing. As I mentioned before, Joe Louis, was my ultimate inspiration in boxing. Louis inspired me because he represented the breaking of barriers in the fighting game for black boxers who were my contemporaries. When professional sports became established in the U.S. during the late 19th century, black people, as always, were excluded. Although blacks faced discrimination in team sports, the most violent reactions to black participation in sports took place in boxing. After the controversial black boxer, Jack Johnson defeated white boxer, Jim Jeffries for the world heavyweight championship in 1910, Caucasians rioted and lynched black men throughout the country, I wasn't born then, but I certainly heard other black adults talk about what occurred during that period. I also realized that between 1919 and the 1930s (when I was born), Caucasians refused to fight blacks for the heavyweight champion boxing title. It wasn't until 1937 that Joe Louis was recognized as world heavyweight champion. In the 1940s, professional sports leagues slowly began to integrate. Jackie Robinson broke the "color barrier" of major league baseball in 1947 when he became a member of the Brooklyn Dodgers. Integration in other sports followed, such as basketball and tennis. The success of contemporary black athletes was influenced by many of these past happenings.

Repetition may become annoying, but Joe Louis was indeed my hero and inspiration in boxing. I knew all about his boxing career and boxing style. I didn't care about his defeats he was still my boxing hero. During the time I started boxing, Louis had a son who was boxing as well and I was a bit afraid that I would have to fight him. The possibility of fighting my boxing hero's son was quite intimidating to me.

Overall, Louis helped many other black boxers, including myself, to believe being a champion was possible. He proved having a successful boxing career was a doable venture. Also, it didn't hurt that boxing was extremely popular in the U.S. and boxing champions were among the most celebrated athletes. What teen boy wouldn't want the benefits which accompany being a successful boxer?



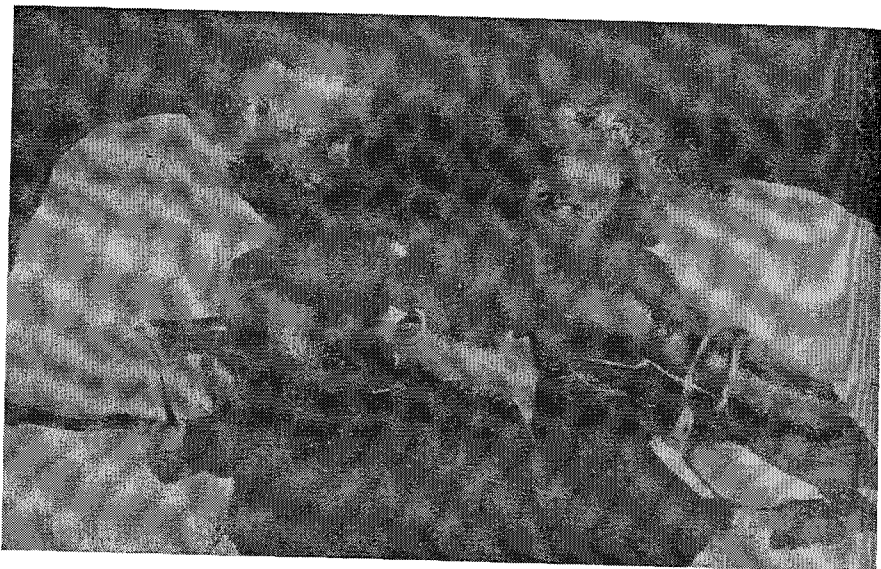
As for me, I thought more of the monetary success which boxing could garner me. In my young mind when I thought of popularity or acclaim I figured it would come from a singing or entertainment career. Still, I wanted a successful boxing career to help me secure my dream to become an entertainer. It was like a stepping stone philosophy for me. I figured I would already be a 'known commodity' to the public and as a result many other doors would be opened.

Training is a critical aspect of boxing. I trained long and hard in preparation for my first fight. My previous junior and senior high school athletics helped to keep me in shape, as well as, my boxing training. Champaign had boxing teams as did other smaller surrounding towns such as Danville and Decatur, Illinois. I heard about a man who was training and coaching young boxers and was able to contact him. His name was Sutton, a Caucasian gentleman who worked with young boxers of all races. He was a military man who was based at Chanute Air Force Base in nearby Rantoul, Illinois. I knew some of the other local young boxers Sutton was working with including Charlie Johnson, John Watson and Lenford Russell. I became a member of a boxing team which had members from Springfield and Champaign. It was my involvement with the boxing team Sutton was coaching which took me to my first amateur fight.

For the record, amateur boxing is conducted in accordance with International Olympic codes having been a feature of the Olympic Games since 1904. The USA Amateur Boxing Federation, National Collegiate Athletic Association and Golden Gloves Association in the U.S. control amateur boxing. In amateur boxing bouts prize money is not at stake as in professional boxing. Since there was no prize money involved with these amateur fights I also held a job to support myself. I was working at the University of Illinois (UI) as a food service worker. My UI employer was great about

accommodating my fight schedule, so I could keep both my job and box as well. I counted myself as fortunate because not every employer would have been so understanding or obliging. My UI job was extremely important to me. It was how I supported my wife and small son. Mary was now a 'stay-at-home mom'.

My first fight was held in Streator, Illinois where I fought as a featherweight. Mr. Sutton had helped me prepare for the fight. He provided solid boxing training and coaching to me. Interestingly, good training was sure to come in handy. I was scheduled to fight a boxer who was the tournament's champion of the previous year. I fought hard and extremely well. I believe that I won the bout, but I wasn't awarded the fight. The Streator team champion had won again. I wasn't discouraged by the results of the fight at all. My trainer and the audience saw I was a formidable young and up coming boxer. I had great faith in myself and my abilities. Boxing was something I could do very well, so I continued to train and box. In 1954, I started fighting with a team from Springfield, which was Engine House #5 Fire House. We were coached by Mr. Lockhart. I was developing as a boxer in focus, power, strength and ability. Also, my confidence was growing, that definitely helps a novice fighter.



I had set my eye on certain goals that I hoped to achieve in my boxing career. I wasn't just boxing, but I had fostered a serious plan for my boxing career. My new focus was the Golden Gloves championship. The Golden Gloves championship was a state amateur boxing competition. A boxer could advance to become his state's Golden Gloves champion and then go on to compete on the national level. There was even an International Golden Gloves championship. At the time I possessed a fire within me to excel as a boxer and I wanted to win my state's Golden Glove championship. That was my dream. I went on to compete for the Golden Gloves championship as a lightweight in Springfield, Illinois. I competed and I won. In addition, I was awarded the outstanding fighter award for the tournament. My dream had come true and I was the happiest person in the world.

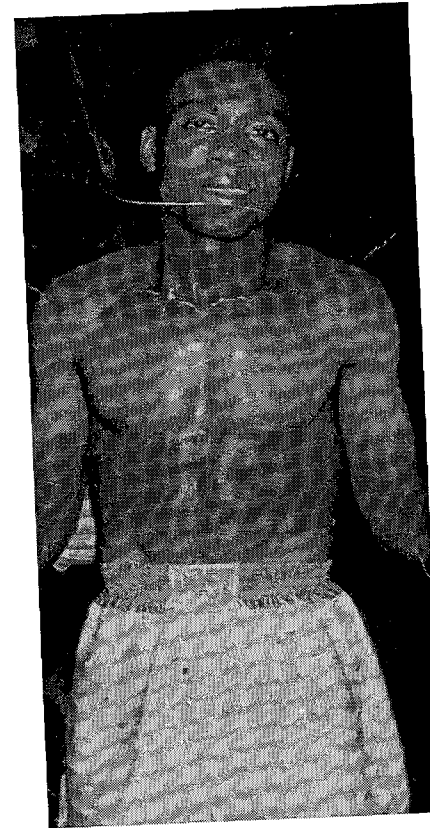
That same year, I fought in Chicago, Illinois. I lost my second fight in that tournament. I also had a couple of club fights in Springfield, and then I started preparing for the state Golden Gloves finals in Decatur, Illinois. I fought my way to the finals in Decatur in February 1955. Unfortunately, I was defeated for the state championship by a young man from St. Louis, Missouri. Still, my boxing career continued and so did my training, work outs and life as husband and father. In 1956, I fought exhibition fights in several towns including Decatur, Springfield, Champaign and Danville. In 1957, I fought the Bantamweight champion of the world in Cooling Gym at 63rd Street on Chicago's South Side. I returned to Springfield again and fought in the state Golden Gloves; winning the championship once more. After winning the state Golden Gloves in Springfield, I went back to Chicago for the semi-finals. During the course of the fight I received a cut over the eye because my opponent and I butted heads, as a result someone else advanced to the finals. It was very difficult for me because I had fought with the best of my abilities, but had not won. In turn, I had to settle with knowing I did my best, but was not ruled the winner. In the boxing game, as in life, this happens and all you can do is be a gracious loser.

I returned home to rest and fought a few club fights in Champaign, Danville and Decatur. My manager wanted me to relocate to Chicago, but I spoke to him about being in a slower environment rather than a big city. After all, I wanted my children to grow up in a safe and positive environment.

Instead, my family and I moved to Joliet, Illinois in 1958. I suppose you could call it a compromise between my manager and me. Joliet was close to Chicago, but was a smaller, quieter, more serene community for my family. The relocation wasn't the only difference in opinion which my managers and I had. My manager didn't want me to work. Of course, this was ridiculous to me. I was young, healthy and had always worked, so I had no intentions of stopping. Working was the way I maintained my independence and cared for my family. The work ethic had been strongly ingrained within me by my parents. Therefore, I informed my managers that I would work and I demanded to have a job. My boxing management team owned a material service company and I was given a job there. The company which employed me made large concrete water pipes for sewage, etc. It was located in Lockport, Illinois so I commuted to it on my work days. I worked there three nights a week. Naturally, in addition to my employment, I continued to train as a boxer.

In 1958, Bryan O'Shea was the best lightweight top contender and I beat him. I beat him, but the fight wasn't awarded to me. The audience members at the fight actually called out for the fight to be given "... to the Irishman." Of course, I knew I beat him, but that wasn't the way things played out. This incident reflects the element of racism which black fighters continued to encounter. Had the fight been awarded to me there may well have been another fight or fights as a result of the ruling. Apparently, not much had changed since Jack Johnson's fighting days even though it was many years later. Still, I didn't allow this loss or any other dissuade me from continuing my boxing career.

I had an extremely busy schedule. I started training at the CYO in Chicago. I started fighting with a team from Gary, Indiana while I was a lightweight. Tony Zel was the trainer at the CYO in Chicago in 1958 during my lightweight boxing career. It was hard to get sparing partners to work at my weight class, so I would work with heavyweights, middleweights and light-heavyweights. Some lightweights didn't want to work with me. I guess they had their reasons. Fighters can be temperamental, but all I wanted to do was train. I did whatever it took to continue to train and remain in good fighting condition.



In 1959-1960, I participated in the Eastern Olympics in Louisville, Kentucky at Freedom Hall. After the 1959-1960 Olympics, I was supposed to turn professional, but it didn't happen. Instead, I was faced with a moral dilemma. It was one many boxers face. I was about to encounter the uglier aspect of professional boxing. This was the underbelly of the boxing business. Upon my turning professional, my managers made it clear to me they were going to control the outcome (as much as they could) of my fights. It seems my managers wanted me to win a few fights and then lose a few fights. I didn't have to contemplate for one moment on what they were offering me. Every boxer knew about the corruption of boxing either through hearsay or personal experience. I'd heard about it, but it hadn't directly affected me until just now. Not every boxer, however, agrees to be a victim of such corruption. I knew I wanted

nothing to do with it. Obviously, they had the wrong impression of me. I believed if a man beat me fairly, he was a better fighter than me, but I wasn't going to simply lie down and lose on purpose. To me, this was morally and ethically repugnant. I wasn't willing to do anything simply to earn money as a boxer. I used to always say: "I make money, money don't make me." I thought these were merely hip sounding words at one time, but soon I realized they were indeed words to live by. Unfortunately, riches and fame had way laid many boxers who started out, just like I did, descent and honest people with a love for the fight game. Dishonest managers had ruined many boxers who became ensnared in their illegal and unethical maneuvers and manipulations. I wasn't going to fall victim to this trap.

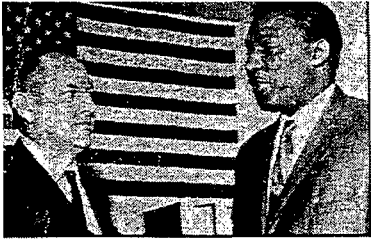
I refused to turn professional under these conditions. I knew if I ever accepted any money from the managers under these circumstances then I would no longer have a choice. In my opinion, the fundamental problem with boxing is it is the only national sport without a national commissioner to enforce rules and integrity. Professional boxing has been subject to increasing control by state boxing commissions since the 1920s. During the 1920s, New York adopted the Walker Law to rectify certain abuses, establish a state boxing commission and regulate the disbursement of prize money. Before that time there were grievous abuses of many kinds. There are official state codes governing professional boxing which cover certain things. Although these state codes are notable they can and have been violated numerous times by fixed fight, forged medical documents, bad decisions, corrupt judging, deliberate and brutal mismatches, absurd ratings and occasional deaths in the ring. Some boxers, especially skilled contenders and champions, can and do gross thousands and millions of dollars. Still, boxing as a sport does little to protect the boxer. Boxing, unlike other sports, has no labor unions and no health or pension plans for its athletes.

It has been said that boxing is a sport riddled with corruption. In the past, it was rumored boxing had ties to organized crime and other illegal enterprises. Though hearing this saddened me, I can't say that I'm too surprised. There are many people who believe the end of boxing is apparent. I'm not sure if boxing will ever completely die out. If boxing is outlawed it would probably just go underground and

turn into nothing more than human cockfighting. The problems which plague boxing such as protecting the rights and safety of the fighters must be addressed. As a former boxer, I still believe in the nobility of the art of boxing. Boxing matches, when they are conducted properly, can show the strength, character, skill and will of two opposing contestants.

I thank the Creator for giving me the presence of mind to say no to my managers even with the pressure I was under in Chicago. While in Joliet my managers tried hard to persuade me to sign a contract, but I didn't. Luckily, there wasn't anything they could do about it. Truly, I was greatly disappointed because I hoped boxing would lead me towards other dreams I had, but that wasn't to be. My boxing career was going to end because I chose not to be an unethical person. I chose to be true to myself. And I turned away from boxing having fought a total of 107 fights. I had won 99 of those fights; lost 7 of them and 1 was deemed as a draw. It was a lot of memories to turn away from and throw in the towel. Still, right is right and wrong is wrong. That was the end of boxing for me.

I had my last fight in the ring in 1960. After the Eastern Olympics I was officially out of boxing. Leaving fighting wasn't easy for me, but I knew I was doing the right thing for my family and myself. During this time I was gaining ample attention as a good fighter. My picture and name were often in various state and regional newspapers. I received a great deal of media coverage, yet in my home town I couldn't get a descent job to support my family. That just goes to show you how your life can change so quickly.



Anderson Epps and Judge G.R. Skillman



THE CHAMPAIGN-URBANA ATHLETIC CLUB

In the late 60s and early 70s two men in Champaign-Urbana thought they would try to do something for our youth. Mr. Khair Azaad Ali (a.k.a.) Freddie Davis, with the help of Anderson Epps, started a Boxing Club.

The first facility, leased from the Champaign Park District, was an old garage behind Washington School the Park District used as storage. They charged \$1 .00 per year for the men to lease the garage. There was also a grant given to the men from the Volunteer Illini Project at the University of Illinois, an organization that is still active today. The grant was used to purchase equipment. Francis Nelson Health Center offered free physical examinations to each youth who had permission from their parents to participate in the club.

Anderson Epps, a former boxing champion, wanted to do something to help some of the kids who had gotten into trouble at the Douglass Center with the law. After there had been a "brawl" (as Epps called it) at the-Douglass Center, Epps took time off his job to go to court to talk to Judge G.R. Skillman. He spoke about offering a boxing program to these young men to show them there were other things to do besides get into trouble. Judge Skillman agreed something needed to be done, and believed Epps deserved a chance to try to do something with these youths.

The first two matches were held at the Douglass Center, and one was held at the Champaign Armory on Park Street. Milton Norwood and Oscar Gipson were referees and timekeepers. Epps was a Golden Gloves fighter who fought in Chicago. In 1958, as an airman at Chanute Air Force Base, he won a Chanute Boxing Championship and a championship in the Great Lakes Tournament. He also won one match in the national tournament in California.

Khair Azaad Ali (a.k.a.) Freddie Davis was a Golden Gloves fighter. He ended his boxing career with ninety-nine wins, seven losses, and one draw. One of the former boxers who helped AH was Fred Newbill, a professional boxer fighting out of Cincinnati who was in line to fight Sugar Ray Robinson until he lost a fight earlier to disqualify him.

A few local men who fought with the Golden Gloves were Edward Johnson, John Watson, Wardell Briggs, Charlie Williams. Linford (Duke) Russell, Leroy Knox, Jim McClain, Jasper Osler, and the very first national champion from Champaign, Anthony Jones. Snapper Johnson and Rudy Evans would referee and assist with boxing matches.

Singing a different tune

Eventually, I was again employed by the University of Illinois in food service. My wife remained a housewife and mother. I didn't want her to work and she wanted to take care of our family as a stay-at-home mother. I thoroughly supported her desire and right to not work outside of the home. Of course, this made me the sole breadwinner of the family. I had to work to support my family, but I also wanted to start working on entertainment.

My dream to be an entertainer had never left my mind. While still boxing, I also performed with a singing group named Latois, I was Latois' baritone and leader. The other group members were: Richard Know on piano, Joe Allen and Phillip Williams, tenor singers. We cut a record named "Thunderbirds" with a flip side song entitled, "I Will be Forever Loving You". In 1957, I sang with a group called "The Gleams", which were based in Champaign.

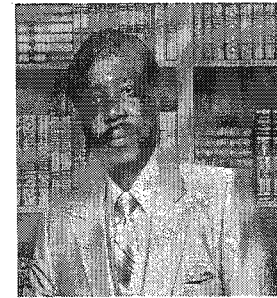


Appearing at the AMVET (managed by George Tinsley) were THE GLEAMS featuring Milton Howard, Tommy McMillan, Willetta Hassell (Donaldson), Freddie Davis and Gerald "Candy" Foster.

The Gleam's group members were: Milton Norwood (nicknamed Butterball), Thomas McMullen, Ossie Briggs, Willetta Hassell and I. We traveled to other cities performing in talent shows and we traveled to different cities over night to perform. Willetta ended up leaving the group to sing gospel music. After she left, the band folded. We'd been together for about two years. After the group broke up, a fellow entertainer, Leroy Knox and I decided to start another group. Leroy was not only a fellow musician, but

a friend as well. He was younger than I was by about four years. I knew him and his family from the neighborhood. In fact, Leroy and I remained friends practically all our adult lives until the time of his death from Lou Gehrig's disease in 2000. He was extremely talented with a keen musical sense. Like me, he enjoyed being a musician and entertainer.

We needed a lead singer for our new group. Another singer we knew as Brother William told Leroy about a man he heard singing in the bathroom. Though this sounds strange, according to Brother William, the guy had a great voice. So, Leroy took his suggestion and indeed met the 'bathroom singer' and heard him sing. Leroy concurred, the 'bathroom singer' had a great voice and he became a member of our group. We formed the singing group, which we originally called Freddie and The Dynamics. Later we renamed the group to just the Dynamics. So, Larry Welch (our bathroom guy), Leroy Knox and I made up The Dynamics.



Khair A. Ali



In Time - The Dynamics



Leroy Knox

Although we were singers by night, we were just regular guys by day with families and jobs. Larry was an orderly at Burnham Hospital, and Leroy and I were both food service workers. After work, until about 7:00 p.m. the group met at my house and practiced singing. We practiced hard and were each very serious about our singing. As a result, we obtained some pretty good musical gigs. However, there was a slight problem. The gigs paid well, but most of the money went to the band. We didn't sing without musical accompaniment, so we needed the band. Still, we eventually became tired of coming up on the short end of the payment stick. So, we decided to form our own band to keep the money in the group. Leroy was the lead singer; Larry played the bass and I played drums and was a lead singer as well. The group was very professional and committed. We practiced and practiced. Finally, we were ready to cut a record. The song was entitled "In Time" by The Dynamics. We were on the USA record label.

Radio DJ's helped to promote a group or single singer's music by playing their songs. This publicity allows the public to become greatly acquainted with new talents. Initially, the group was playing locally at such places as the Elk Club and Pirtle Club in Champaign. Our performances extended to Gary, Indiana, as well as, Chicago, Illinois. Later we played out-of-state in Mississippi, Tennessee and other locations.

We sang from 1957 to 1963 as The Dynamics, and then each one of us went to different groups. Leroy left to sing with Eddie Lane and the Gay-Poppers, who were family members. Larry started singing and playing the keyboard with the Soul Brothers which consisted of Ernie Hite, Elzi Howell, Gerald Foster and Clyde 'Sweet' Perkins. In 1966, I joined a group named Count Demon and the Four Members. The group consisted of Chuck Fields on tenor sax; Chuck Morris known as "High Priest" on keyboard; and Lemont Parsons on guitar. Count Demon was a drummer, comedian and singer. In actuality, he was quite a character, as well as, a talent. I was his backup drummer and lead vocal singer.

We performed in Indianapolis and Lafayette, Indiana. From there we went to Waterloo, Des

Moines, and Iowa. Later we traveled to Omaha, Bloomington, and Nebraska and also to Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. Once again, I was on the road performing and away from my family for long periods of time. I traveled with Count Demon's group for three years on the road.

On our off days we would go home to our families. Life was hard on the road performing. I missed my wife and children. It was very difficult being absent from my family, but I was earning a salary that supported them. Children change and grow rapidly during certain periods of their lives. It was hard missing out on them maturing and becoming big people instead of small ones. Perhaps this is the most difficult aspect of being a performer on the road. You leave behind your family and they must go on day after day without you. Even though you speak on the telephone and write letters it just isn't the same as seeing them daily. When I did see my family our reunions were spectacular. I was very fortunate to have a devoted, loving and loyal wife. Mary and I had been through a great deal and our marriage was solid. She always supported my dreams and I tried to repay her with my respect, support and love.

Another group that I performed in that I forgot to mention was the Quantrells. The Quantrells consisted of Freddie Davis, Joe Allen, and Richard Knox and also Philip Williams.



A Change in Beliefs

My life had taken another significant turn as well. One of the most significant changes in my life occurred in 1964. That was the year I began practicing Islam as a member of the Nation of Islam. We were referred to as Black Muslims. Though I was raised a Christian and wasn't the most devote one for that matter, I became interested in the religion Islam. It was largely due to my wife's interest in the teachings, which she heard at a meeting. She had attended a meeting sponsored by Black Muslims. They had come to Champaign from Chicago to spread their message. At the time, Chicago had a large Black Muslim population and The Honorable Elijah Muhammad resided there. After attending a meeting that was held in the home of a woman Mary knew very well, she asked me to attend one with her. I wasn't reluctant towards this idea.

That following Sunday, I attended the meeting sponsored by the Muslim group. I really didn't know too much of what to expect from this meeting. But, I attended it with my wife and her sister, Velena Know anyway. We heard the teachings of Islam, as given by The Honorable Elijah Muhammad. A Muslim minister, David Dahu Ali, delivered the message. Dahu Ali spoke about how Black people had been taken from our own land of Africa. He clarified that we were brainwashed by evil men who were referred to as "white devils". Relating back to my boxing career, entertaining and working with Caucasians, I could see what was being conveyed was true and it had merit to me. I believed that Dahu Ali was correct in his appraisal of the lives of Black people. I was drawn into the spiritual because my life lacked spirituality.

Black Muslims held that the white person is a devil, who enslaves all nonwhites. Also, Black Muslims advocated the establishment of a separate African American homeland in the United States. The Nation of Islam established schools in numerous American cities, owned farmlands and sent produce by their own trucks and planes throughout the U.S. They created bakeries and restaurants, which could be found in many large cities. In addition, The Nation of Islam created a national newspaper founded as *Muhammad Speaks* (currently known as *The Final Call*).

One important aspect of The Nation of Islam's work was the rehabilitation of convicts, drug addicts and alcoholics though it's 'doing-for-self' philosophy.

When I became a Black Muslim, I was dedicated to the belief. I didn't convert due to anyone else's opinion or to please anyone else. You have to become a Muslim because you think its right for you. Personally, the belief in unity and brotherhood attracted me most to the religion. A true Muslim wants for his brother what he wants for himself. In Islam, you're not a believer unless you do so. I found many features of the Islamic faith very intriguing to me. Islam teaches that no man is considered better than another because Allah has created them all. Overall, the primary concept is that all blessings come from Allah and not from a human being, who lives on Earth. Islam was a religion which my family was starting to accept as beginners. It was a new type of faith.

However, to completely embrace it meant we would have to make changes in our lifestyles, as well as, our religious practices. One change was a literal one. We were required to change our names. These names were considered to be slave names given to us. Due to the American slavery system, which existed in the past, no African brought to America was allowed to keep his African family name. Most times (though not always) these names were lost. Majority of African American names derived from the names given to Black slaves by their white masters. My wife and I accepted Islam and discussed our name change to benefit our new life. Instead of the last name Davis, our last name was now X. The X represented the unknown African tribal name of our ancestors, who were renamed when they were sold into slavery. The children's names were changed as well.

Islam provided me with the closest sense of unity I have ever experienced. When I became a Muslim my life became more disciplined and more devote. I have a deep and strong belief in Allah from whom all blessings come. Allah knows our needs and provides them accordingly at time appropriate for us to receive each specific blessing. Much has changed since I first started practicing Islam.

In 1975, Wallace Muhammad, the son of The Honorable Elijah Muhammad, succeeded his father. The changes in The Nation of Islam were apparent. Wallace Muhammad downplayed Black

Nationalism admitted non-Black members and stressed strict Islamic beliefs and practices. The focus was now primarily on the Islamic religion and not on Black Nationalism. Some Black people left The Nation of Islam. Others followed Louis Farrakhan who reasserted the principles of Black separatism. I continued to support the Islamic religion because it offered me a belief system. It reflected my values of good morals and respect for human life.

Like other Muslims, I have heard many terrible comments about Islamic faith. Most comments arose after the September 11, 2000 tragedies. To eliminate my portion of opinion, terrorists do not represent the Islamic faith or Muslim people. I urge people who know little or nothing about Islam to learn about its teachings. It's not very fair to pass judgment on a religion or people based on inaccurate and misleading information, racial stereotypes and religious bigotry. A good Muslim is like a good Christian or a good Jew. He follows his religious teachings, humbles and enlightens himself by prayer and treats his fellow human being with respect and honor. Islam is my way of life.



Khair Aazaad Ali

Being Alone

Mary and I had three children: Anthony, our first child born in 1954; Jelius, another son, born in 1955; and our only daughter, Deccar, born in 1956. Mary was an incredible human being and woman. I had utter love and awe for her. She was my "first true love", and no one ever completely forgets their 'first love'. In my opinion, everyone should experience a one, great 'true love'. Sometimes these relationships can be the most painful or the most rewarding ones.

I was always a hard worker, and a wife and family makes a man want to excel and work hard to provide for them. The absolute and unconditional love, which can be derived from a loving family, is one of the greatest aspects of a man's life. I felt I was blessed. It certainly wasn't because we had great riches or material wealth; we didn't have either of those things in abundance. But we had love and respect for each other. These days in time it may sound strange, but the love of a good marital partner and children is beyond price. A good family life remains the hallmark of a society though nowadays it seems family and family values have vastly diminished. Where they've gone I could not tell you.

I had various jobs while and after boxing and my entertainment careers. One of my first jobs was in a restaurant and after only six months I was laid off. I left there and started working at a junkyard owned by the Brown brothers. I received on the job training at the junkyard by a gentleman named Mr. White. After that job, I began working for a construction company called Champaign Asphalt where I worked off and on for about two years. I consistently worked going from one job to another as they ended. I was very ambitious and had to do so because I had three children and a wife to support though still a young man. I would end up being employed in food service by the University of Illinois for fourteen years.

One must remember back in the 1960s (and even later); the employment arena was quite different than it is today. Then, it was important for a person to be a responsible, willing, and good worker and often that would be enough to obtain a job. I refused to allow not having my high school diploma thwart my efforts to succeed. If that meant I had to be a better and harder worker than others

then that is what I would be. I worked hard always because I had to do so in order to keep a job. Mary knew she could always count on me to secure employment. I would not allow my children or wife to go without shelter or food. Mary didn't mind that as a father and head of household, I bought for the children according to what they needed. I took care of our children's material needs first and then my wife's. We both understood that as parents our children's needs would always come before ours. This is the way Mary and I conducted our family. We were a very strong family unit and I believe I took good care of my family and I was proud and happy to do so. My family came first in my life.

During 1953-1954, Mary started experiencing health problems. Over the next four to five years Mary's health problems would worsen and her health began to deteriorate. At times her health seemed to improve only to decline. After many doctor's examinations and appointments we were told she had kidney disease and would probably live only another five or so years with her current health status. Mary even had to go to a TB- sanitarium because she had contracted tuberculosis. She consistently refused to have any operation which was her personal choice. Of course, I wanted my wife to live, but I also believed she and Allah only had control over her body. I suppose eventually I accepted that I might lose her much sooner than I wanted. By this time, Mary and I were both devote Muslims and we prayed regarding her condition, but we knew it was in the hands of Allah. It wasn't meant to be. Mary Elizabeth X., loving wife and mother, died on December 5, 1969. Mary had been my "first love" and now she was gone. She was a part of memory not substance any longer.



She remained firmly entrenched in my memory as she was in my heart.

Now, I was a widower. I was a father with three young teenage children. This meant I had to become both mother and father to them. Mary's and my relatives wondered what I was going to do with the children. What a silly question. Of course, the answer was an obvious one for me. I was going to raise our children on my own. I had to continue working full time to support my family but also was a full time parent.

The children and I lived in Burch Village, a public housing complex in north Champaign. These apartments were clean and rented for \$200 per month. They were not fancy, but they were suitable. I can't say challenges didn't arise (small and large ones). Still, we endured as a family. I could comb my daughter's hair but I couldn't braid it. There were things a young girl maturing clearly needed a woman to confide in about. And I couldn't fully compensate for that. Still, I had always been a central part of my children's life so my relationship with them was always close. My children knew they could come to me to discuss anything.

And so it was I had to raise my children without Mary and I tried hard to ensure them the type of upbringing Mary would've approved of. There were times when my children and I didn't agree about certain things. After all, I was raising teenagers! Once Jelius wanted to have a girlfriend live with him in our home. Another time, Anthony grew angry with me and moved out for six months only to encounter a roommate situation which drove him out from his 'new' found home. In still another incident, at the age of sixteen Deccar came to me about getting married to a young man, Charles, she had fallen in love with. We discussed the subject openly and a year later, Deccar and Charles returned to speak to me again about marriage.



I counseled them regarding this important move and eventually the two were married. My children made mistakes during their teen and young adult years as many young people do, but they also came to me freely for counsel and advice.

It took many prayers, much patience, total commitment, and a great deal of love to raise my children without my partner, but it did happen. I was rewarded by my children growing up to be decent human beings. Each of them graduated from high school (something that neither Mary nor I had accomplished). Deccar became sickly in high school requiring her teachers and me to find her a tutor. Anthony graduated from Centennial High School and received a basketball scholarship. Jelius graduated from high school and started attending school to become an architect, but later decided he didn't want to pursue this career. My children were very good children. We worked as a family getting things done. Our family was a disciplined family, but we loved as well. My children practiced Islam as long as they lived with me. I know Allah was pleased with this.

A New Love

After Mary's death in 1969, the raising of our three children and my work filled my life. I had always thought my life would be with Mary and when she died that dream died too. Mourning is a profoundly private experience and each one mourns in his or her own way. I have often heard others criticize a mourning person as to how the person mourns as if there is some type of formula you are supposed to use when mourning a loved one. It is my belief that there are many ways to mourn and express feelings for the loss of a loved one. Nowadays, we know mourning is a process with different stages. What I found was each day that passes after a loved one dies is a stark and separate reminder that the person you loved will no longer be a physical part of your life.

One finds themselves turning to touch the loved one in bed only to discover that they are not there. When you have a bad day at work or have some exciting bit of news to share, their absence is a harsh reminder you will never be able to share these experiences with them any longer. I've heard of people who momentarily forget that a loved one is dead and picks up the phone to call them only to encounter the grim reality that that loved one can not answer the phone because they are no longer in the physical world. I felt Mary's presence around me many times. I saw her in our children's faces and mannerisms. I thought of her when I went to places we used to go to together.

I thought of her when I was about to attend the mosque where we shared our spiritual lives. I missed Mary and I quietly mourned the loss of my soul mate. I knew eventually there would be other women in my life because this would be normal and natural. But I also knew there would never be another Mary or another love or relationship like the one we had. We had grown up together in a way. We were little more than children ourselves when we became parents. We had learned much about life together. We had shared our dreams and struggles together. There would never be another like her.

I was not only a father alone, but a man alone. I wasn't a monk but I didn't date seriously for a few years. I was always a friendly man and enjoyed talking to people. As a cab driver, I enjoyed working with the public and often talked and listened to my fares. In 1972 as a manager for Central Cab

Company, I was dispatched to pick up a fare at a grocery store for transport to her home. The fare was a light-skinned, African American woman with an attractive diamond-shaped face and slightly slanted brown eyes; she was thinly built and was about five feet eight or nine. Also, she had a lot of groceries. I helped her into the cab and we struck up a conversation.

I sort of teased her about her groceries and whether she was a good cook or not. The woman was confident, open and cordial. Soon we arrived at her destination and I assisted her with her groceries to her door, and she paid me. After leaving her home, I found myself musing about this attractive woman. I also found myself wondering if I would see her again. And sure enough I did. She used Central Cab Service and each time we talked and I playfully teased her. When I transported her to or from the grocery store, I always teased her about what she was going to cook for me for dinner. After about three months of transporting her in my cab, my teasing surprisingly landed me a dinner invitation with this lovely woman.



Khair & Ernestine (Tina)

I looked forward to my dinner date with this confident, good-looking, young woman named Tina Meeks. We ate and conversed and Tina told me about herself. Tina told me she had relocated from Chicago. It was apparent she considered herself quite the 'city girl'. As Champaign is just a larger version of a small town even though it is the home of a Big Ten university.

Tina found life in Champaign to be drastically different from that which she was accustomed. Though Chicago offered more social and employment opportunities, Tina wanted to leave there. Though

originally. Tina was from Mississippi like me, she had lived in Chicago since the age of sixteen years old. Now in her mid-thirties, Tina was living in Champaign-Urbana with her four children from a previous marriage. Like me, she was a single parent raising children. We both had teenagers. Tina had two boys and two girls; the youngest was twelve years old and the oldest was fifteen. At the time, Tina was employed by Mercy Hospital as a nurse's assistant and she worked part time at a local Burger King. Mercy Hospital (now called Provena Covenant Medical Center), was the Catholic hospital in town operated by the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Mary order. Tina seemed self reliant and strong which I found appealing. I felt we had much in common.

She had made a lovely and delicious meal for us that night. The meal was only superseded by the company and the conversation. I felt nice and comfortable eating and talking with her. In general, I enjoyed her company and I felt a mutual attraction between us. I think she felt it too. Tina wasn't a Muslim woman but she was well aware I was a practicing Muslim and I talked openly with her about my faith. She was a Christian but neither of us considered our differing religious beliefs to be a problem to us becoming better acquainted. After all, no one was attempting to convert anyone. After our initial date back in 1973, we started dating casually. Actually, we dated off and on from 1973-1978. For a few years it was simply casual dating, but later it became serious. I started occasionally staying at her home at night, but was careful to leave before her children awoke. I had fallen in love with Tina and she loved me. However, Tina was cautious and practical. Perhaps this was because of her prior marital experience. Tina was a very good mother and I think for that reason, she was cautious with men in her life. After all, her children were her primary concern and responsibility. Personally, I greatly respected and admired this about Tina. At the time my own children were 17, 18, and 19 years old. My children didn't require my attention the way Tina's children did because they were younger and all still living at home. Because my children were so close to adulthood they readily accepted my dating as normal. After all, I had been a widower for three years when I started dating Tina.

After a few years of dating Tina, she started working at the University of Illinois in food service. Tina has been a full time worker and a full time mother ever since I've known her. She had a full plate

and had kindly made room for me on it too. Tina and I both were respectful and careful with the children's feelings regarding our relationship. However, I was concerned about my relationship with her children realizing that she raised them according to her values and standards, but I had my own as any individual. Personally, I couldn't see myself exercising any sort of parental control over Tina's teenagers nor did I feel Tina would desire or allow me to do so. This concerned the both of us and we had discussions about it. I was used to being the head of my household and performing that role as father and husband. Likewise, Tina was accustomed to operating her own household where she was the final word with her children.

A dating relationship with two previously married adults who have children can be tricky because not only do you have feelings of your dating partner to consider, but her children's as well. I knew in my heart I loved Tina, and I cared for her children but they were not mine. They already had a father and Tina was already their custodial parent. Tina had her household and I had mine. I did a great deal of reflecting and thinking a bout Tina and our future together and which course of action to take regarding it. In 1978, I decided to propose marriage to Tina. However, Tina declined my offer explaining to me that she didn't feel I was ready to marry her. What Tina meant was she didn't feel I was ready to become a family with her and her children.

Tina knew me well enough to know it would be problematic for us to marry. I probably wouldn't be able to deal with the manner in which the children were allowed to act and conduct themselves. Even though they were teenagers, I felt they were permitted too much latitude in their comings and goings and in other ways as well. We had discussed the topic several times in the past because it was a great concern to us. I couldn't tell Tina how to raise her children or impose my values or standards on them. Tina wasn't willing to jeopardize her relationship with her children. I suppose in my heart, I begrudgingly agreed with her in regards of her children. I understood and even respected her position but it was still painful for me. Though I knew I loved her, I had to accept that our relationship wasn't going to reach another level as I had hoped it would. I believed the Creator had a plan for me and I tried

Married Again

In 1978, I decided to relocate to Albuquerque, New Mexico to make it my home. My children were grown and self sufficient. I thought the change would be good for me. I called an old childhood friend, Chester Carter, to tell him of my plans. Chester and I had known each other as kids in Champaign. As an adult Chester joined the military but was now retired from it and he was still a relatively young man. When Chester retired from 'the service', he relocated to Baton Rouge, Louisiana where he lived with his family. Chester extended an invitation for me to stop and see him in Baton Rouge on my way to New Mexico. I hadn't seen him in so many years and appreciated his kind offer. It would be good to see my old friend again. As I was pretty much on my own timeline concerning Albuquerque, I could take my time driving there, enjoying the scenic route and making stops as I pleased. I agreed to visit Chester for a couple of days.

When I arrived at Chester's house in Baton Rouge, I found my old friend had done well for himself. He had a beautiful family and home. I met his wife and children and stayed in his home as a guest for a few days. Chester and I enjoyed catching up and it was good to see him again. And on the day I was to continue my journey to the southwest, surprisingly I was contacted by my oldest son's employer. He informed me that he had been involved in a work related accident. It seems chemicals had splashed in Anthony's eyes while he was at work and as his next of kin, I was notified. Needless to say,

I was concerned for my son and decided to return to Illinois to see about him. For as we parents know, regardless of our children's ages, when they are injured or in need, we are usually the first ones to come to their aid to see about them. I told Chester my plans had changed and I needed to return to Illinois for a family emergency. As a father himself, he understood why, but he wanted me to do something before I left. In actuality, there was someone Chester wanted me to meet. When I discovered it was a female, I let Chester know I wasn't interested in finding anyone at the time. I had talked with him about my relationship with Tina and her declining my marriage proposal, so he was aware of where I was standing emotionally at the time. Also, I was in the midst of relocating to another state and all

which it would entail. Chester informed me the woman was his wife's cousin, Myrtle and it was intended to be an innocent introduction. He simply wanted me to meet her. I agreed to meet Myrtle Smith before I departed for Illinois. We went to Myrtle's residence and I was introduced. Myrtle was an amiable, young woman in her thirties. She was a light skinned African American woman who was about five feet six or seven with shoulder length, brown hair. She was born and raised in Louisiana. She was a southerner like me. She worked as a cashier in a grocery store, but had managed to purchase her own house and had a new car and appeared to have a comfortable life. After we talked for a while, I informed Myrtle that I was returning to Illinois due to a family emergency. Out of politeness, I exchanged telephone numbers with Myrtle who informed me that she was going to Chicago on vacation to visit another cousin. Once again, out of politeness, I told her to let me know when she was in Illinois and maybe we could have dinner. After all, Chicago was only about two to three hours away. After our conversation, I said my good byes and started my drive back to Illinois. Frankly, I didn't think anymore about Myrtle Smith though I did think she was a nice person.

Back in Champaign, I was relieved to discover that Anthony was fine. He suffered from no permanent damage. As I had no residence of my own there anymore, I went to stay with my daughter in Mahomet. Mahomet was a nearby small town about 30 minutes driving time from Champaign. I remained with Deccar for a few days and one day upon returning from being out, she informed me I had received a phone call from a woman named Myrtle. She had left a message from a Chicago telephone number. Though I was a bit surprised, I returned Myrtle's call. She told me she was vacationing in Chicago and would be there for about a week. I stated that we should have dinner, but I had an errand and would be going to Racine, Wisconsin. I told her that after I was finished there I could stop in Chicago and we could have dinner. She agreed and after completing my errand in Racine I stopped to see Myrtle. Myrtle was staying with a cousin. I rang the door bell and she answered. We ended up going to Salaam Restaurant; and then to a well known Black Muslim operated restaurant in Chicago. We had a delicious meal and talked. After our date, I told her I would take her home. I needed to get my car's sun roof repaired by one of my cousins who owned a glass company on the way of her destination. Myrtle

stated she didn't have plans and asked if she could accompany me. I was agreeable to her idea and called my cousin to let him know I would be stopping by.

We went to my cousin's residence to wait for him, but I was telephoned later by him. He let me know that he wouldn't be able to do the repair until tomorrow morning and he told me to come by then. I let Myrtle know about the change of plans and then proceeded to take her back to her cousin's house. As I left Myrtle at her cousin's home, she told me how good of a time she had with me. I concurred. We had a very lovely evening together. I made my good byes and left for my daughter's home in Mahomet. I remained there for a few days before getting back on the road to Albuquerque. Myrtle called me after my return to my daughter's home to let me know she had returned to Baton Rouge. I informed her I was about to leave for New Orleans to see the Leon Spinks- Muhammad Ali championship fight being held there. After the fight, I intended to travel to Albuquerque as planned. She requested that I come to see her in Baton Rouge since I was already going to be stopping in Louisiana anyway. Also, she graciously informed me she would leave a key under the front door mat of her home for me just in case she arrived home later than I did. I was little shocked by this as she didn't know me that well, but I complied and indeed let myself into her home having arrived before her. I was, however, a bit self conscious being in her home alone. After a short time, she arrived home.

We talked and had a nice time visiting and then it was time for me to get back on the road to New Orleans. As I was leaving, my car stalled and wouldn't start. The battery had died. Surprisingly, Myrtle offered me the use of her credit card to get another battery and told me I could pay her back after the fight. I was overwhelmed by her generosity but hesitant, I accepted her kind offer. We went to get a new battery, I installed it and my car was road worthy again. She also offered me a key to her house to take with me, which I could give back to her upon my return to Baton Rouge (to repay the loan for the battery). Her kindness and trust greatly impressed and surprised me. Though Myrtle's behavior was a mystery to me, it seemed truly genuine.

I departed for New Orleans, but had missed the fight due to car problems. I was able to attend an after set. I stayed in New Orleans for a brief period of time. I returned to Myrtle's home to repay the

loan and to give her the key back. As it was rather late, she invited me to remain as a guest of hers and I accepted her invitation. It was strictly platonic and nothing more than that. The next day, Myrtle extended another invitation for me to remain a few more days as her guest and I accepted. During the time I remained with her we talked, had meals together and learned about each other. I learned Myrtle had never been married, but did have a young teen nephew who she was raising who lived with her. After a while, Myrtle expressed she liked me as something more than platonic. I must say the feeling was mutual. I did feel at ease and comfortable with her. Then Myrtle stated again how much she really liked me and she proposed marriage. My response to Myrtle was that she really didn't know me to which she responded she knew all she wanted to know about me. I found all of this amazing and a bit surreal.

After a brief time which included me returning to Illinois again and then back to Louisiana, Myrtle proposed marriage to me again. Though this was the second time she proposed to me, in my mind I still didn't believe she was serious, but she was very serious. No woman had ever proposed to me before so I was a bit dumbfounded. I think many men can probably say the same thing. It's mostly traditional for the man to ask the woman into partnership. But the woman I had gotten to know changed traditional ways. Still not taking her too seriously at all, I jokingly responded to her marriage proposal by saying "name the day". She did name a day. Like I said, Myrtle was serious. And after putting all of my joking aside I suppose I was serious too. I said **yes**.

A New Beginning



Myrtle Smith and I were married in 1978 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana

where we were to live. Our marriage ceremony was conducted by her uncle who was a minister. Obviously, I never relocated to Albuquerque. It's strange to fathom how a little side trip to Baton Rouge to see a friend resulted in me becoming a married man, but it did. Perhaps this is what occurs when the Creator has a plan in mind for you but you envision another plan. Myrtle seemed to believe I was her destiny. In fact, after our marriage, her sister, Helen, confided in me that Myrtle had told her before we even met that she believed she was going to meet a man from Illinois. She went on to say that she felt that she was going to marry whoever this mystery man might have been. I guess Myrtle knew something which none of the rest of us knew. Aside from being correct, it was also a little creepy.

So, I was a husband yet again. Myrtle and I settled into our home and our way of life as a newlywed couple. Marriage to Myrtle wasn't the way marriage to Mary had been. Honestly, I knew better than to expect for it to be. We had a comfortable marriage. We respected, honored and cared for one other. She was a good and dutiful wife, and I was the same as her husband. We were both in our late 30s and didn't have any illusions about life or love. By your mid-thirties the cows have already come home and the games have ended. So, we were very focused and serious as it related to our relationship. I knew Myrtle loved me and in my own personal way I loved her as well. After about a month or so after my marriage, I decided to contact Tina to let her know that I had remarried. I called her on the telephone and told her about it. It was a rather strange conversation. My intentions were not to upset her, but the news that I remarried did hurt Tina. Although she had declined my marriage proposal to her, my new marriage left her unsatisfied. I told her I understood why she had turned down my proposal and that she

was probably right. I didn't speak to Tina again for a long time after that conversation.

I settled into my life in Baton Rouge. It was quite different from what I had become used to in Illinois. After all, Baton Rouge is a capital city. A city life wasn't what I was used to at all. Also, I had a certain reputation and contacts in Illinois which was beneficial to me in business and employment. All of this was non-existent for me in Louisiana. But, I had always been a get-out-and-get-it type of man. So, I knew I'd get a job eventually. As predicted, I did get a job. I started working on the docks in Louisiana. Louisiana is on the Gulf of Mexico and the Mississippi River so shipping and docks are a major part of the economy and work force there. I wasn't a union member which means I didn't receive the financial or benefits which unionized workers did, but I made a living. It was hard, manual labor. I loaded and unloaded ships. It wasn't the type of work I wanted to do but I needed a job and it paid well. At one point, Chester and I started a carpet cleaning business which we called C & A Carpet Cleaning. We had the business for about one and a half years. The carpet cleaning business was much more to my liking as I was co-owner, as well as, employee. I was however, rather unhappy and unfulfilled because of the employment situation. I never liked working for other people. I always wanted to be my own boss and operate my own business.

Myrtle continued her employment as a cashier and also did home interior decorating. Our home life was satisfactory and we were both happy in our lives. Myrtle and I lived in Baton Rouge for three years. After that time, we agreed to come back to Champaign. My main reason for returning to Illinois was so I could start and operate my own business. Myrtle supported me in this endeavor and we relocated to Champaign in 1981. I know it was somewhat difficult for Myrtle as she had been a lifetime resident of Louisiana. Still, she did have family in nearby Chicago. I understood Myrtle was leaving family and a way of life which she had always known. I appreciated that she cared enough for me to support me in my dreams and endeavors.

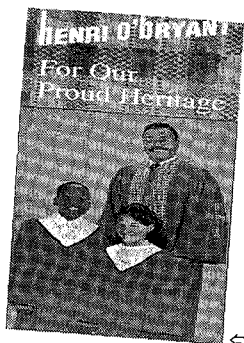
Back in Illinois, I started working with Central Cab Service. It was an African American owned cab service. I was familiar with the livery service as a past driver and manager. I considered myself to be a solid businessman and by now had owned and operated a few businesses of my own. I was happy to

return to a work life which I enjoyed; one which simply wasn't toil, grind and a paycheck. Most people just stop at that, but I couldn't see my whole life span wasting away in those simple steps. I derived joy from public contact work and being an entrepreneur. It made me happy. And it's nothing like doing a job, getting paid for it and enjoying yourself all at the same time.

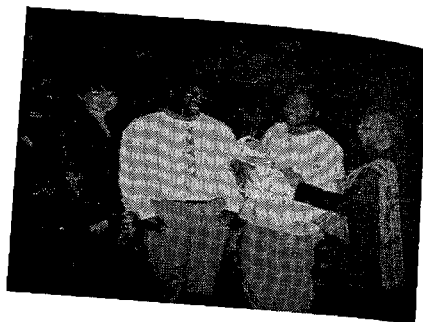
We settled into life in Champaign. It was a slower pace than Baton Rouge and I welcomed it. Slow and steady wins the race. In big cities, the people rush to get to places and aren't really moving anywhere. In a smaller environment you have enough time to look around at your happenings and observe your next few steps. Myrtle did pretty well at adjusting and she settled right into our life there. I was closer to my children and though they were adults it was good to be near them. Myrtle had always had health problems though not extremely severe ones. Her health, however, did prevent her from doing something she wanted very much to do; get pregnant. After some reflection on her part, she approached me about adoption. It was obvious that Myrtle had thought a great deal about it and we have had previous, but brief discussions about the matter. She loved children, and had always wanted one of her own. Since she was unable to get pregnant, it was the only option for her if children were ever to be a part of her personal life.

In 1983, five years after we were married, Myrtle and I adopted a five week old, beautiful, African American baby boy. We named him Bilal. So at the age of 47 years old, I became a father again. Myrtle was ecstatic over the reality she was now a mother. She wasn't only a mother, but a mother of a newborn. It had been some time since I had a newborn baby in my immediate life. Myrtle and I became the parents of a newborn baby who would fill our lives with love, wonder and change. As a father I can honestly state, the responsibility of a new life always seems to put one's existence and purpose into perspective. Parenthood is a marvelous journey to embark upon.

← Bilal Khair Ali & Father Khair A. Ali



← Bilal in a advertisement



Bilal, Amy (wife) & Myrtle (mother) ⇒



← Bilal, Myrtle (mother) & Khair (father)

A Marriage Gone Astray

Eventually, I started my own cab service. It was called K & B Cab Service ('K' for Khair -my name and 'B' for Bilal- my son's name). An African American resident, Zelma Mable and I bought a failing cab service called United and merged it with K & B Cab Service. I felt very capable of operating my own cab service because I had experience as a cab driver and as a past manager of a cab service. Needless to say, being an owner and operating is different than simply working as a driver. There is a lot more work and dedication involved. This is especially true if you want your business to succeed. I was, however, accustomed to paper work and bookkeeping. Although it certainly wasn't my favorite part of the job I still managed to follow through on it and get it done. I worked extremely hard as most self employed people do. Of course, I still made time for my family and home life. Operating your own business can and does cut into family time, but I did the best I could to keep my family happy and the business going. I had to work many hours to maintain the business and keep it a successful venture. All of those hours paid off. Still, behind every triumph there is an underlying mishap occurring at the same time.

It isn't easy to admit when your home life is changing. And it's even harder to admit that it begins to change in ways you didn't expect them to. But my life was changing. Initially, it was not changing in obvious ways but it was changing all the same. Perhaps I only knew of these changes because I was the main source of the subtle changes which only I felt or was affected by at the beginning. Later, Myrtle would sense these changes as well. I was very busy with my business many hours during the day and night, but at the same time, something was happening in my personal life. I willingly admit I must've wanted them (even if just on a subconscious level) for I was the one creating the scenario which would eventually alter my life with Myrtle. You're probably wondering what this change could have possibly been. The change was Tina, my former love. It started little by little like many affairs. Without Myrtle's knowledge, I continued to see Tina. I saw her for some time before Myrtle picked up on any of my

behaviors. Finally, she sensed something was different in our relationship. I didn't plan to



K & B Taxi

leave my wife. At least that's what I was telling myself. But what was I thinking? I didn't stop seeing Tina either, and the past feelings I had for her came rushing back to me. It made me wonder if indeed those feelings had ever truly completely left me. Yet I cared very much for Myrtle and the life we had made together. Or I really assumed I did. I still didn't plan to leave her.

It's funny how even when a woman doesn't have an overwhelming body of evidence or any overt evidence her husband has strayed many times they still seem to know. Often, women have a sixth sense regarding these situations even when they don't want to face the truth about the situation. Don't

get me wrong, sometimes their random thoughts about cheating are actually random and just illusions in their mind. But, sometimes, these premonitions are proven to be correct assumptions. As for me, I wasn't facing the situation in an honest manner at all. I didn't see me leaving Myrtle and ending our family life together, yet I intended to continue to see Tina. I knew juggling a lifestyle with both wouldn't go on forever. I had placed myself in a situation that I really didn't have to be in. Still, I continued to have strong and deep feelings for Tina. And despite the obvious decision: stay or let it go, I just added a third option to the quiz. Let it solve its self.

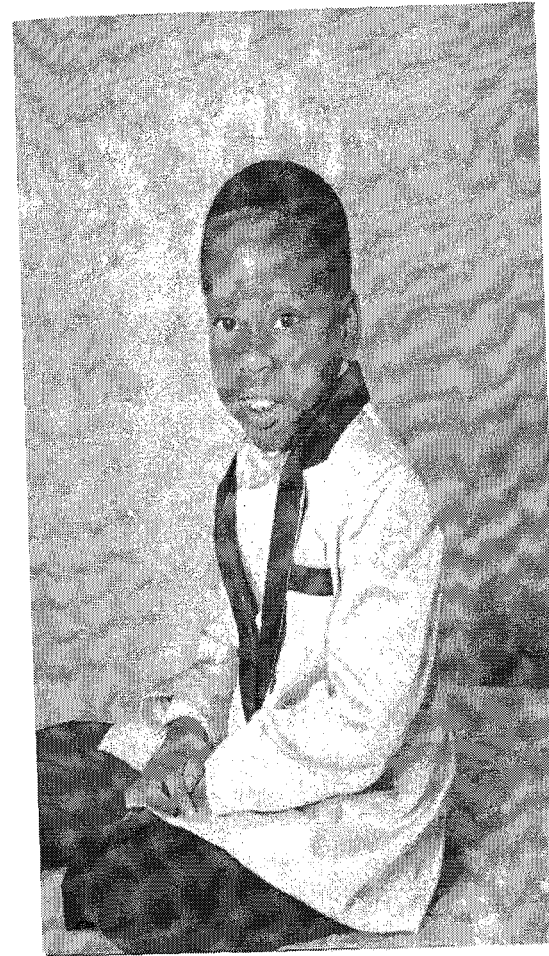
It was definitely an emotional rollercoaster for a while. I knew it had to have been a terrible time for Myrtle in her heart. I suppose Myrtle's little premonition didn't lead her to this outcome that she was faced with. As a result of heartache and secrets, Myrtle and I had disagreements and arguments almost all the time after these suspicions grew. I suppose that's no surprise. How can you get along with someone you feel has totally annihilated your trust? After all, Myrtle sensed she was losing me and had to feel totally betrayed. We had commitments to one another. And she had obviously upheld her commitments to me from her side of the marriage and I had laid mine aside. Most of the pain comes from knowing you've done all you could do to secure a happy relationship with someone only to feel they haven't done the same by you. Even if I hadn't been in an affair with Tina, Myrtle sensed my feelings and thoughts were not only about her. I totally understood her demeanor.

No one only wants half of anyone. Finally, after avoiding the issue so many times, she told me how she really felt. A person can interpret arguments and changed personas in many ways. But, when someone tells you directly how they feel, it's no denying that. I was in love with someone else and Myrtle told me she knew that. Unlike the barely there decision I had made on the subject, Myrtle came up with a solution for us. Like the proud woman she was, she couldn't continue with our relationship. Eventually she decided to end our marriage. And just as she had asked me to marry her, she asked me for a divorce. It was finalized in 1988.

Most of the time when marriages end, there is very evident hate and disagreements between the ex-spouses. The two parties in a marriage had lived so beautifully together, but when they decide to

break it off it's like an explosion. What once was all about us turns into all about me while there was an us. And Heaven have mercy if there are children involved. It already takes a long time for the little one to get used to their parents not being together all the time. But when you force a child to choose who they'd like to see more is hard and unfair. The poor child is oftentimes very confused and distraught in their choosing. The child may choose their mother because mommy always gives out treats at a certain time of day. The child may choose their daddy because daddy tells the best jokes. And as mature adults, we knew that there was no way our little son would be able to choose. It would've been too much. Even though Myrtle and I had our disagreements, we both decided we weren't going to see lawyers and create a horrible, legal mess.

A legal mess would've affected Bilal tremendously. He was only about five at the time. We also didn't want to further hurt or humiliate each other. And we definitely didn't want to do so publicly. However, she did make it clear to me she wanted physical custody of Bilal and he was to live with her as the custodial parent. She informed me I could see Bilal any time or as often as I wanted. I agreed to these terms and we had a good divorce. That sounds like an oxymoron. I suppose there is no such thing as a good divorce, mainly because everyone wants their marriage to succeed. But there's nothing wrong with a divorce if it's for the best of both parties. Both Myrtle and I were out of the horrible love triangle I had created and on to more relaxed mind sets. And although Myrtle could've been dishonest about our divorce agreements because there was no legal documentation, she wasn't. She was very honest and true about our dealings.



Bilal Khair Ali

I did get to see Bilal as much as I wanted. Still, I was very respectful of Myrtle's time with Bilal and any scheduling she had already set up for him. Divorce is rarely a great thing for children. Bilal was still very young, but he did understand his mother and I would no longer live in the same house together. I accepted I wouldn't be living with him any longer too. Of course, on one level Bilal was sad I didn't live in the same home with him, but he knew I loved him and that he could see or call me anytime he wanted. I was happy that he knew that. Bilal even accompanied me to work at times. In this regard all

Words cannot express how sorry I was that I had hurt Myrtle. It truly wasn't my intention to do so, but my feelings for Tina had resurfaced very strongly after I returned to Illinois. And you can deny things through lying as much as you may like, but the truth will always surface and make itself known. I thought I was controlling the feelings and I found that evidentially I was only fooling myself. There still aren't any excuses for my behavior. I did behave improperly. I had taken vows with Myrtle and didn't keep them. I'm very sorry Myrtle was hurt by me. When I married Myrtle I was happy and content with our relationship. I was happy and content when we made an addition to our family with Bilal. I have nothing bad to say about Myrtle who remains in my mind a wonderful lady and an excellent mother.

However, I continued to be involved with Tina after my divorce from Myrtle. Tina and I dated for about three years and married in 1991. I introduced Tina to Bilal and after time they developed a good relationship (which they currently have). As a young child there were some minor problems and rivalries as both Tina and Bilal wanted my attention. I reassured Bilal that I would always be his father and loved him very much, but I had another wife and I loved her too but in a different way than I loved him. At times, Tina did tell me she thought I loved Bilal more than I loved her, but the love for a child and the love for a mate are quite different loves to love. Now, Bilal and his step-mother and I have a good relationship which has developed over the years. It takes some time to grow and adapt. To date, Tina and I are still married and I still love her very much.

I guess destiny takes its time to get you to where you will ultimately end up. I honestly figured my relationship was over with Tina when she declined my offer of marriage. And to end up back where you started is something even deeper than déjà vu sometimes. She had been only one of my dreams before I married her. Then she became my reality. I suppose the love I share with Tina will never be forgotten about. We have seen many times with one another. Good times and bad times and even times of doubt.

Still, we ended up together for the long run. Bilal grew into a very respectful young man.



← Bilal Khair Ali & Father Khair A. Ali

Champaign Central senior Bilal Ali is a football player by fall and wrestler in the winter. A four instrument musician, who's heavily involved in singing through school and church. He's also a 20 hour a week grocery store employee, and most important a father of 11 month old Alexa. A father's obligations can scramble his schedule at a moment's notice.

That same determination has served Ali well in the once foreign sport of wrestling. The wrestling novice decided to give it a shot, then ended up being on the receiving end of more than a few himself. I got pinned a lot; it was my first year, so I just tried to learn a lot. Hooked on the sport, he launched into a serious off season training regimen. Ali was holding his own during his sophomore year. At his junior year Ali was sidelined for most of the season due to an accident during practice with a teammate.

Ali also lends his voice to Central's jazz choir and to a men's cappella group. He's excellent, top notch, stated Central music director. That's what I plan to major in (in college) "Music Education.

But that's the future. For the present, I have some unfinished business on the mat. Like making it past sectionals and wrestling in his hometown's Assembly Hall. I'm hoping it's a possibility," I think it's a good possibility.

Touch-Less Dancing

I consider myself to be a man of many talents. I continue to keep a positive attitude and a level of acceptable professionalism. I've seen many years come and go. But for the most part, I've seen them and weathered them according to my own adaptations. Some may wonder what became of that good old dream of becoming an entertainer. Many may seek to ask was boxing and singing enough for me. Apparently, the dream never died and boxing and singing wasn't enough. It's no secret. I continue to encourage and pursue that everlasting dream of mine.

My most recent attempt of entertainment comes in the form of movement. That's right, dancing. I've designed and originated a dance of my own. I've named it, The Touch-less Dance. The Touch-less Dance is symbolic of poetry in motion. This dance is far from the average dances you see so many people doing in the world today. I figured it was about time someone comes up with something new. This dance is more than just swaying your body to the beat of a tune. It's more than just the hip hop generation's example of groping one another in public places. The Touch-less Dance displays true quality and demeanor. It illuminates the dancer's style and physique. Overall, it is a captivating and beautiful dance. I designed this dance mostly in the mind frame of the single couple. That's the nice way to address the dateless individual that still chooses to attend the event. But it's no shame in being alone. Sometimes your greatest times come in your moments of solitude. And when a person demonstrates The Touch-less Dance to a crowd, everyone will be able to see that. However, the dance can be done by anyone interested in trying it out.

In 1999, I met Mary Whitener of Elkhart, Indiana. At an early age she aspired to become a dancer. Sadly, her parents couldn't afford this dream of hers. Somehow, years later, her dream would still manage to come true. She attended Arthur Murrey Studio of Dance. At this studio, Mary took notes on the dance routines being practiced there.

And Mary kept her dream alive.



Mary Whitener

Attending a dance studio is good for any dancer I suppose, but a real dancer does more than just rehearse shared dances. The key to being a good dancer is one that practices originality. Granted, repetition towards some things is hard to avoid, because a person gets used to what they've already seen and they strive to invent something no one has seen before. It's hard, but it's possible. Mary had that true dancer mentality in her. She would indeed practice the dances that were taught at the studio she attended, but she would also add variations of her own style on to them. By doing so, she made the dance routines something new. And Mary's determination and motive to be a dancer came in handy on my test drive of The Touch-less Dance.

I considered Ms. Whitener to be an eligible contribution to The Touch-less Dance. I asked her if she would be interested in being my partner in this dance. I was very thankful that she agreed. So, she co-starred in both my training videos for The Touch-less Dance. The first Touch-less Dance video was shot in 1999 and the second video was shot in May of 2001. The Touch-less Dance is a dance of great respect between the opposite sexes. I would highly recommend teaching this dance to small children as a tool to teach self respect. It's not too complicated and it isn't too simplistic. I truly believe that anyone who puts their mind to succeed at doing The Touch-less Dance would be well over qualified to do so. My dream for The Touch-less Dance is to have it grow from being locally known to being globally known. I intend to follow up on those two training tapes that I produced. I'd like to shoot a music video of some sort actually demonstrating all age groups doing The Touch-less Dance. It's one of my dreams that I look forward to following through on. Who knows how far it could truly go. Dances are some pretty trendy things.

Reflections

I believe everyone has some form of philosophy of life. Over the years, I've made it my personal goal to create one for myself. Granted, most of us don't write our philosophies down on paper, but they influence our individual pursuit of meaning in our lives. They affect the way we choose to conduct ourselves in this society that we live in. Everyone searches for meaning in life in general and in their own life more specifically. I personally believe we must have knowledge of self before we can obtain knowledge of other outside, less internal, sources. Don't get me wrong, education and training is highly important. But if you lack an understanding of yourself, all of the education and training means nothing.

What I mean by 'knowledge of self' is examination of our beings. The examination of our beings includes our actions, motivations and beliefs. Though I am hardly perfect, not by any stretch of the imagination, I feel good about myself as a person. I would like to believe I haven't mistreated anyone even though I have made my share of mistakes. Still, I've had the best intentions in dealing with people and conducting my life, but sometimes I have fallen short of the intended mark. For those times and in those situations, I asked for forgiveness, and I believe that this forgiveness has been granted to me. None of us can honestly say we are without fault. Anyone who believes he is faultless is only fooling themselves. And that truly gets you nowhere in life.

I believe we must engage in self examination. Self examination leads to self knowledge. We must be honest and open with our evaluation of ourselves. It's always difficult to face unpleasant truths about ourselves, but it's necessary for us to do so in order for us to achieve a sense of peace and tranquility within ourselves. Self examination helps us to achieve real freedom in life. An individual's mind can't be held captive if it practices self examination. A person's body can be held captive, but their mind can still be free. We have seen countless examples of this very thing. For example, though Nelson Mandela was held in a horrible prison for many decades in South Africa for no legal reason, his mind was never imprisoned. He believed in the cause he fought for. And he never gave up or strayed away from that cause. He practiced daily self examination.

I believe life is a wonderful and beautiful mystery. I also believe life is way simpler than many make it out to be. It's the people who complicate the life experience. I suppose what makes life simple to me is my belief in the existence of a power greater than myself, which I can tap into to assist me with the 'complications' of life. When I speak of the existence of a power greater than me, I'm referring to Allah. However, whatever term you chose to identify the God source in your life is up to you. I think it's very sad that people who claim to be religious or spiritual spend time arguing about which religion is better or whose spiritual text is more authentic. The entire notion of people believing that there is only one path to God is ludicrous.

Though life is simple, it is also a struggle. For some people it seems the struggle is greater than it is for others. I believe each and every person has different path to walk in life, everyone is given a different amount of struggle to suffer through and overcome. We are not on the same path, even if someone's goals or objectives are thought to be the same. I think this theory accounts for what otherwise seems to be completely random and totally unknown. Why some people endure so very much and others seem to lean charmed existences.

Life is a process and so is our understanding of it. In order to be true to ourselves, we must understand finding answers to so many important questions in life takes time. Nothing just comes to anyone overnight. The longer we live, the more we learn and know. Perhaps that's why it seems wisdom is often found much later in life. Mostly after much learning, absorbing and experiencing life first hand. I certainly feel this way about myself as I approach my later years of existence. I look forward to the rest of my life and all I will continue to experience discover and learn as it comes. I believe we should all look forward to our lives regardless of age, for life is the miracle and gift which God has given to us.

My hope for all people is that they live fulfilled lives which are touched by God, as my life has been touched by God. There are many problems, conflicts, and challenges in the world today. However, I believe we can all make a difference in the world by being the best person we can be and treating others as you wish to be treated. Worth and dignity is innate to all people regardless of race, color,

to strive to do is simply be the best person that you can possibly be. What a difference alone it would make if we all treated each other with the love and respect which each of us desire and deserve. While we live we can make a difference if we chose to live by Godly principles. I am but one man, but any man, woman or child can be a force in the world if they decide to do so.

Through this book, I've willingly given the public a glimpse into my experiences. Some of those experiences happen to be much happier than others. I've revealed the sad aspects of my life, as well as the truly happy moments that occurred in my life. In this tale of myself, I've showed you my journeys of dreams and heartaches. I've shown you a bulk of my past dealings and a trial of my current standings. I hope that you've enjoyed your readings and you'll choose to keep the knowledge spreading. And not only that, but create some dreams of your own to follow up on. Also, if it wouldn't be too much of a burden to you, I'd like for you to spread the word. Let someone else know about what you've read and possible what you may have learned from within the pages of this book. For the most part, I want to be sure to thank everyone that I've encountered that has been a contribution to me making it to this level where I am today. I also want to thank the Creator for blessing me with the opportunity to be able to share my story with you. I hope that you can walk away from these pages holding on to at least a little piece of something that you are willing to share and discuss with others that have not had the pleasure to be acquainted with my story just yet. Thank you once again.



Khair A. Ali

Freedom,

Justice

&

Equality!

Who is this man has a very inspiring true story of a man, husband, father that tells about his struggles and accomplishments through life. Mr. Ali (AKA) Freddie Davis has told of some sad but loving memories of his life coming up as a child he also shared some of the ugly truth of racism. Being guided by the love of his father and mother God blessed Ali to write this book to show and share with you that even through these time he was able to accomplish many things on his journey.

SUN, MOON, STAR

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