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# We set when we're done

Families in dialogue with the past & the future

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ISBN SBN: 978-0-692-89905-2

Printed in USA - AYA Educational Institute

# Student Authors

Leading the dialogue with the past & the future

In this volume, student authors from AYA Educational Institute document their discovery and their dialogue with their families and ancestors during the 2016-2017 school year. The students range from 10 - 17 years old. As young authors and discoverers of their family lore, we endeavored to stay out of their way, so that you can hear their voices and appreciate their burgeoning style. I encourage you to seek to be engaged more than entertained. While Afiya and Wekesa Madzimoyo led the editing effort, this book represents the student's work. Help us celebrate these authors who have engaged their families, our school, our community, and now you in this dialogue with the past and the future.

- *Akilimali Akachi*
- *Ikechi Akwara*
- *Ndahye Aziz*
- *Allie Brown*
- *Yejide Diop*
- *Ayo Duduyemi*
- *Farouq Jeffries*
- *Ensi-Kwesi Gilliam*
- *Adetunji Gilliam*
- *Akinyemi Gilliam*
- *Addae Madzimoyo*
- *Olaniyan Madzimoyo*
- *Asaalah Muhammad*
- *Khadirah Muhammad*
- *Nia Rush*
- *Nadir Sherrod*
- *Farasha Simmons*
- *Abena Williams*

# Dedication

This book is dedicated to two storytellers that planted the seeds for this project by their careful and constant storytelling. These family tellers are Maggie Tucker-Wright and Albert Caver. Maggie is my mother. Albert is Afiya's father. Their stories carried the history and the culture that has kept us "clothed in our right minds" - our Afrikan minds.

This book is also dedicated to ancestor - scholar Amos N. Wilson who issued the charge to us as an Afrikan-centered educational institution to "heal the alienation" that oppression and mis-education promotes in us.

In this oppressive environment, the more we're "educated," the more we're alienated from our families, our stories and our culture. In Dr. Wilson's words, we are alienated to serve aliens. His challenge was for us to create new educational approaches to help us heal alienation and other pathological symptoms of oppression.

We only hope that these three ancestors are pleased.

## Acknowledgements

This has been a family and community effort. Many have labored to make this project live and this book a tangible entity that you can hold in your hands. While there have been too many to mention cover adequately, we want to give a special thanks to the contributing editors and project guides who saw the potential when others did not.

They are Aza (Donna) Smith and Iya Adeniji - Valerie Lawrence.

Also several AYA parents have been key to the success of the entire project - including publication. They are Yinka Winfrey Diop, Asha Akachi, and earlier on Ayiesha Jeffries.

Several AYA teachers were critical. Chief among them is Afiya Madzimoyo - Co-Director and Co-editor, nothing would happen without her skills, organization, caring and pushing for clear deadlines.

Ife and Sarafina, Ayinde and Mary - my children, medase for putting another set of eyes on the material and medase to you, Tafari. Son, I appreciate your graphic and photographic eyes for both creativity and detail.

There are many more. Medase Pa to you all!

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## Foreword

If it is true that the destruction of a people begins in its homes, then the restoration of a people can begin in its homes – AYA Educational Institute’s (“AYA”) Family Lore Project (“FLP”) makes an essential contribution to the restoration of our people, starting with the students’ family lines and in their family homes.

Education is a core Afrikan cultural trait, highly valued by Afrikan people wherever we may be on this planet. Currently and unfortunately, due to oppression, Afrikan people are subjected to socialization and education controlled by oppressors and imposed upon us to perpetuate our subjugation. Given this current temporary state, the work of AYA Educational Institute (“AYA”), is essential to bringing about our liberation and a just world order. This particular AYA endeavor, the FLP, is just one example of how the students at AYA are truly receiving an education for liberation — not the proverbial “miseducation” for servitude.

The FLP taps into the power of storytelling, in a manner consistent with our culture, enabling us to use our own historical family literature to empower us and solve contemporary problems. It is commonly said that if you don’t know your history you are doomed to repeat it. However, if you are subject to oppression you can know your history and still be doomed to repeat it. Knowing history is not enough to end oppression.

FLP helps us to know our history in a deeper and healthier manner than reading typical history books, films and historical documents. FLP counters a manifestation of oppressive power used against us - competent and legitimate authority as power. The student authors look to them-

selves and their family members as validating authorities – not our oppressors or their institutions. They investigate, probe, examine context (space, time and circumstances) to present truth from their ancestors that otherwise could remain buried, lost or unused.

FLP is intergenerational. To create the passages in this book, the writers had to engage with their elders and ancestors to identify and collect these stories. This volume of the FLP, is the first of many volumes to come that will enable each generation to preserve existing family stories and add additional family lore. Through this process subsequent generations can efficiently identify and draw on lessons from the past that can provide contemporary solutions. If FLP did nothing else, its contribution would be exceptional, but FLP also helps heal a disturbance in oppressed people – alienation. It brings us closer to our ancestors and family members; thus, accordingly closer to ourselves. Their story is our story. Our story is simultaneously theirs and that of our descendants.

FLP inspires action. Reading this book is not a passive act. As mentioned above, it is a strategic counter act to oppressive power, it is an act of healing wounds of oppression; and it is an act of building a repository of stories and wisdom that we can call upon in the battles to come. The students’ undoubtedly have been blessed by their work on the FLP and will continue valuing and collecting their family lore. Other readers undoubtedly will be inspired to identify and collect their family lore for publication in subsequent AYA FLP volumes.

by KeMiT A. Mawakana

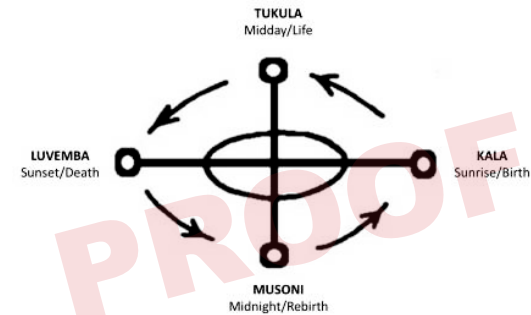
## Introduction

Welcome to AYA's Family Lore Project. What you hold in your hands is a distillation of months of love and struggle. At its simplest level it's students talking to parents, family members and elders to extract written and oral family literature - the family lore. Once collected that lore forms a basis for school discussion, analysis, writing, academic and social development. At a much deeper level, it's institutionalizing a process critical to the development of Afrikan people. For Africans, dialogue with the ancestors and descendents is a core feature of what Sterling Stuckey calls our Circle of Culture.

This circle of culture protected and helped to heal us in the face of abject physical and psychic brutality. What has this to do with education? Dominate culture education - public or private - is psychic brutality. Under the guise of "education" we are systematically moved further and further away from knowing, understanding or even valuing our families, Afrikan culture and Afrikan people. Such alienation results in our devaluing ourselves. It doesn't require an advance degree to know that such low valuation retards academic performance. Of course in an oppressive society, retardation of the oppressed is the goal. Dr. Amos Wilson reminds us that we are "alienated to serve aliens."

If the circle of culture could protect and help us heal in the face of overt brutality, maybe the same circle of culture can help us heal academic, social and familiar wounds born of today's oppression. By using strategic dialogue, the Family Lore Project seeks to recreate elements of this circle of culture to reverse the pathology of alienation just as our ancestors used the "ring shout" in days of old and even call and response today. We using education to re-member - to

bring us back together again. We believe students academic performance will increase, and that families will be healed. These family conversations will take many forms, as students seek oral and written family literature. Students have to interact and write their reflections and analysis of family stories, songs, proverbs, Face Book posts, love letters, articles, etc. This will occur over multiple school years. This book reflects the dialogues from this year's school term. Each year, we'll get deeper, and we'll document and tell the story - our story of what happens when the circle is unbroken.



## Organization

The bulk of this book is student-lead family lore and their reactions. It's organized by family sections. The sections are in alphabetical order based on last name.

## Recognition & Importance

### *The Importance of The Family Lore Project*

I was raised in a small, rural town in South Carolina nestled between the forest and the ocean. Growing up in a place where everyone knew everyone else was sometimes stifling, and most times enchanting. Oh, the stories we were told! The memories of my family mainly survives in two places: the family bible, where the names of members are recorded, and where obituaries of their deaths are stored; and our family lore. Mama learned how to garden and tend to her kitchen by annee (Auntie) Lena and uncle Boy; and Daddy learned how to fish from our ancestors before him. We didn't read a lot of books to learn how to do things—we relied mainly on the family lore.

The cultural and historical importance of AYA Educational Institute encouraging their students and families to find and record their family lore—and then for the school to publish their findings—cannot be understated. This is critically meaningful. In this era of digital socializing, many of our young people only want to know what is popular culture from social media. Many of their connections to elders whose stories of survival and struggle are powerful tools for endurance, are lost to their addictions to the latest technological widgets. Knowing their family stories is vitally important to knowing how to survive the political, social and cultural attacks still perpetuated against Black people.

I am proud to play a small role in assisting AYA Ed with this crucial project. Thanks to AYA Ed, I am learning and remembering more and more of my own family's lore.

This is a great thing. This is a blessing to my children's children, and to me.

By *Mama Aza (DonnaMaria) Smith*  
Contributing Editor and Project Guide

### *“Someboidness”*

When I consider life and living, the one constant that has gotten me through the tough times in life and prepared me for the celebrations are the family stories. Coming from a very large family, we heard many stories. It was those stories that anchored us in our someboidness and provided courage for the unknown. I so much love that these students are grounding their education in their family stories.

What a solid foundation for any venture in the world. I imagine that these students see themselves on the pages of history and now in the promises of the future. Education is not some distant connection to another's experience. Education loops them into the weave such that they become a real part of the tapestry of life. You have provided a way for these students to continue the weave with themselves and their family lore as the primary thread in the tapestry. May others be encouraged and educated by their efforts.

Osofo Kwesi Atta

### *Nation-Building*

As our ancestors proved family is the primary building block of nations. To this end, AYA's Family Lore Project is a very user friendly way for us to build the nation the ancestors have been waiting for.

Baba Kojo (Clyde McElven)

## “We’ll See Who Shall and Who Shan’t”

By Afiya Madzimoyo  
Co-Editor

This notion of family lore first caught my attention in Columbus, OH when FLP Director, Wekesa Madzimoyo, first introduced it as part of the African-centered Education portion of the Warrior/Healer/Builder Super Weekend in April 2017. Like so many others there, I was finally catching the spirit of it. And when I started reading and editing the AYA student’s lore, I decided, “Oh, we, must go forth with this”. We must do the best we can to get the articles, letters, poems, songs, stories, sayings, proverbs -- their written and oral lore published this year.” And, I started appreciating how important a person’s lore is -- it’s what builds us. It’s what we stand on.

For instance, my husband, Wekesa, often says, “It’s a po’ rat that ain’t got but one hole.” If you know Wekesa well, you know that he is an “options man.” He usually has a plan B, C, and maybe even D. He pulls on this saying from his family lore as a strength, and his doing so has contributed to a great degree of his success.

For me, when I don’t see my way so clearly and doing the right thing seems extra risky, and there is an opportunity to take a stand for justice or for what is right, I will plant my feet solidly and say, “We’ll see who shall and who shaint.” This lore of mine comes down four generations back via a story of my Great-Uncle Jake that my Great-Grandma Rhody told my Grand-Daddy (BigDaddy) and that my Daddy told me.

You see Uncle Jake had the job of weighing the cotton on the Langford Place (which replaced the plantation after Reconstruction). Jake was obviously content with weighing the cotton. Langford’s daughter married Ned, and Ned was now to weigh the cotton. Ned came to the cotton field and gave Jake the order that he was now to pick the cotton. Jake responded, matter-of-factly, that he would weigh the cotton, and that he would absolutely not be picking any cotton. Ned attempted to force Jake into the fields to pick the cotton. Jake responded by biting out a humongous plug of Ned’s jaw. Ned ran home holding up his hanging jaw and shielding the gaping hole in his face.

Bob Langford (the owner of the Place) came to my Great-Grandma Rhody and explained that Jake would have to come down to his house and let Ned whip him until he was satisfied or they (the whole extended family) would all have to leave his place. Great-Grandma Rhody made the case: “Jake you know we ain’t got “no whars” to go. We go’n’ put you on a heap o’ clothes, pad you up, so he won’t kill you.” Uncle Jake listened respectfully until she was finished and then said, “Mama, you tell Bob Langford that I ain’t coming to his house. But I will meet Ned half-way, and we go’n’ see who shall and who shan’t be whipped.”

My father’s family remained on the Langford Place. No one was forced to leave. Ned never met Jake. Jake left the cotton fields and fashioned himself into an herbalist, root doctor. He had a great skill of camouflaging when he was on the run and could evade the best as they might think he was a hog under a house or in a pig pen.

After the vagrancy laws were passed, he was eventually picked up, as he was not farmed out (on paper) to a white man (working for). As part of the Black Codes, the vagrancy laws allowed local authorities to arrest Black people for minor infractions (like not being farmed out) and commit

them to involuntary labor. This period was the start of the convict lease system.

My father, the late Albert Caver, Sr., was nephew to Great Uncle Jake. Taking his manhood from the story of his uncle, my Dad must have told me our Uncle Jake story at least 4 - 5 hundred times. He counted on his uncle Jake's example as a guiding force that strengthened him to stand tall as a Black man, challenging oppression in some real ways: building his own home (with no mortgage) and helping other Black people as best he could. My Dad challenged the segregated school system in our county, challenged and was successful at getting himself and other Black people registered to vote and fought to get a worker's union established on his job (unsuccessfully). It was his Uncle Jake's example and story that had him able to draw that line in the sand and proclaim, "We'll see who shall and who shan't."

After being arrested for vagrancy, Uncle Jake died in Kilby Prison, as his own man. I look to him as my icon for self-determination and self-sufficiency. Uncle Jake inspires me to continue as an African woman of the Market (entrepreneur) and to continue growing more and more of my own food with a goal of producing enough to feed myself and my family.

Afiya Madzimoyo, MSW / AYA Educational Institute

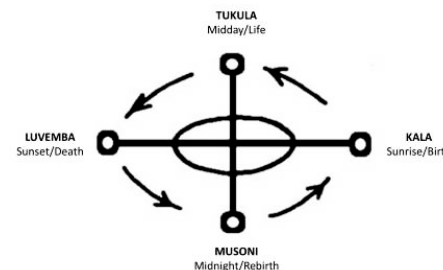
Co-Director  
Lead Administrator



# AYA Families

dialogue with the past & the future

"...Persistence of our culture is persistence of the sun. We rise when we're born and we set when we're done. Earth's circular path is our destination." *Gabriel Peoples*





PROOF

# Akachi Family

dialogue with the past & the future



Asha Akachi

Ayokunle Akachi

Not knowing our family history, not having family relationships to reach out to, and not having much time to dedicate to help with the project were challenges for us. I love the goals of the project and working through the challenges allowed us to learn quite a bit about ourselves and our family. I appreciate the experience. —*Asha Akachi*

Akilimali Akachi (15)  
Time-Traveler & Student Author



*“Truth out of season is worse than a lie”*

- Grandma Anisha Randle

This proverb refers to scenarios where one person is telling another person the “truth,” but the person on the receiving end is not in the right place or “season” in their life to be able to hear it or take it in. Instead, the person often rejects it or becomes defensive. They respond as if what you’ve told them is “worse than a lie. My grandmother and my mother both said this proverb a lot when I was younger, but I believe I heard it from my grandmother first. Growing up, my family was the family that did everything “different.” We ate different foods; we wore different clothes, we were educated differently; we were even disciplined differently.

Originally, I thought that every family did things the way that we did, and that if they didn’t, then something was wrong with them. So when people complained about health issues they had or how they needed help with their diet, I always offered what I knew as advice. Everywhere I went I told the truth, and people would get hurt and offended by it. This made no sense to me because I thought they wanted help. So I asked my mother, “Why do people make fun of me and not want to be my friend when I am just trying to help them?” Then, and every time I came to her with this issue, she’d find a way to say: “Truth out of season is worse than a lie.”



*Easter Dinner*

This picture was taken a little over five years ago at Easter time. I believe it was the afternoon. After we came home from church that day, my grandma and I started cooking up a storm. We made crab cakes, stuffing and gravy, pink lemonade, ham, mac and cheese, and my all-time favorite sweet potato pie. It’s a wonder that we finished cooking by 5:00 pm.

I remember this picture because of the Easter lilies which only bloom on Easter. They are my grandmother's favorite flower. Even though it wasn’t Christmas time, you see the tree there behind us, because my grandmother keeps her Christmas trees up year-round! My little brother Ayo was so impatient while my grandmother took one million years to take this picture. I sat by my grandpa (not only) because we have great conversations, but also to have an easy reach to the hot sauce bottle. Most of my family is from the south, so hot sauce is put on almost everything we eat. This picture reminds me of when we used to celebrate Easter.

## *A stitch in time saves nine*

From Baba Atiba Omar



This proverb comes from one of my Dad's older friends, Baba Atiba and his family - who we consider extended family. One day I was working on assignments for the family lore project, and I realized that I was running out of my own family stories. So I decided to ask Baba Atiba about his family proverbs. This one snagged my attention. "*A stitch in time saves nine.*" I said it over and over to myself - not really understanding it - until I hung on to the word "stitch." I realized that this proverb was referring to sewing.

My family is full of people who make clothes, so suddenly it made complete sense. Imagine that you have on your favorite shirt, and all of a sudden it rips. You could choose to stitch it, or you could choose not to stitch it. If you don't fix the rip in time, it will make nine. Or you could decide, "Well this is my favorite shirt, so I'm going to stitch it up now, instead of waiting for nine other rips to come." To me, this proverb is saying that life is about choices, and at the end of the day you have to decide whether you're going to fix your problems, or leave them in mid-air where they can grow bigger and cause a ripple effect. "A stitch in time saves nine."



## *Grandfather's 58th*

In this picture, my family and I are celebrating my grandfather's 58th birthday. On the left-hand side my cousin Dishay is smiling right into the camera trying to set an example for the rest of us who were goofing around. I am standing right behind her trying to have a conversation with my mom because I was so happy to see her and look at the camera at the same time.

My grandfather Larry Randle is sitting right in front of me in his birthday seat elated to see all of this excitement. My cousin Terry and little brother Ato are talking about how excited they are to eat the pecan pie my grandma made for my grandfather. My mother is laughing at all of us, and especially my grandmother because she was trying her best to make Ayokunle smile.

I love this picture so much because it shows me bits of all of our personalities. For example, my grandfather's favorite drink, Root Beer, is on the table right next to his bottle of hot sauce, which shows me personally he grew up in the south. This picture reminds me of always being at my grandma's house with my cousins, and it warms my heart every time I glance at it.

# Akwara Family

dialogue with the past & the future



Etenah (Wanda) Akwara (mom) Me, Sharmaine Adesanya, (Aunt), Chioma Akwara (sister)



Albert and Sylvia  
Hutchinson  
(Grandparents)



Me and "Poppy"  
Albert Hutchinson



Ikechi Akwara(17) Time-Traveler & Student Author

# Akawa Family

dialogue with the past & the future

**B**lessings, my name is Etenah Akwara. My son is Ikechi Akwara, a first-year junior at AYA Educational Institute. I first give thanks and respect to Baba Wekesa and Mama Afiya Madzimoyo for this institution of right knowledge and healing.

Sankofa is what comes to my mind when I think of The Family Lore Project (FLP). Sankofa is an Adinkra symbol of a bird whose feet are facing forward while its head is facing backward with an egg in its mouth. The meaning is "to go back and fetch what you forgot." We as an African people must remember our past or reclaim what was taken in order to claim our future. The FLP requires AYA students to do exactly that – my son and I have had to reflect on our family story and retrieve nuggets(eggs) from the past.

The nuggets have been found in searching, questioning, discussing and thinking about our family members who have passed on information through stories and proverbs. I appreciate taking the time with Ikechi and family members to better understand the people whose blood runs through our veins. As much as the society would want us to think we are separate, apart and independent, truth is, we are connected to our ancestors as they are to us. In analyzing the proverbs, we could see how they taught us and protected us in ways that their parents did for them. In learning about them and their hobbies or occupation we could see ourselves, it was all so familiar.

As a family we do reflect relatively often, but with this project our discussion took on new spirit. HisStory is not OurStory. The FLP encouraged us to remember... who we are, who they are (were) and that our future has a common thread.

*–Give thanks, Mama Akwara*



Ikechi Akwara (17)  
Time-Traveler & Student Author

***Ikechi's Family proverbs and meanings:***

These are my interpretations of my family's favorite proverbs and sayings:

- ***Penny saved is a penny earned***  
(Grandmother Silvia Hutchinson's saying)

To me it means that if you save the money that you have earned, instead of spending it, you will have money that you can call yours. The more you save, the more you'll have.

- ***A stitch in time saves nine***  
(Great-Great Grandmother Gassie Thomas's saying)

This proverb, to me, is very deep. Time is very crucial. Doing things in a timely manner is better than doing things carelessly. When you don't use your time wisely you can lose a lot of doors of opportunity.

- ***Don't wear your heart on your sleeve***  
(Grandmother Sylvia Hutchinson's saying)

I heard this when I started dating. This has really helped me cope with relationships. This proverb means that you shouldn't show your emotions easily, especially your love emotions. Try not to say that you love someone that you have only known for a few months. Get to know the person.

- ***Direct and to the point, ten words or less***  
(Aunt Sharmaine Adesanya's saying)

This is my Aunt's favorite saying. It means that you don't have to add big words or phrases to explain yourself. Just go straight to the point (without fluff). "Get to the point or you're wasting my time."-- Auntie Shar

- ***It's your little red wagon; you can push it or pull it***  
(Poppy's Saying - Albert Hutchinson)

He means: It's your life. Either you can make it harder or easier for yourself. The push and pull symbolizes the choice that you have. In every situation, either the pull is going to be easier or the push is; its your choice to pick.

- ***Early to bed. Early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise*** (Grandmother Sylvia Hutchinson's saying)

Mom, me and Poppy



I have heard this saying since I've been going to school. I think my mom was trying to make me enthusiastic about getting up for school at 6:00 in the morning,

but it didn't work, and it still hasn't worked. It is saying that getting good enough hours for sleep will keep you healthy, keep you focused and alert when you're doing your hustle and/or studies. Recharging your body every night at the RIGHT time can keep you alert when you need to be throughout the day.

## *My Day With Poppy*

**M**y mother sung in a beautiful tune “Good morning! “Rise and shine sleepy head.” As I lay in my comfy bed, I looked up at the stars on my wall and moaned the song back to her - not as sweetly as I had received it, “Good morning mother!!.”

I was tired and a little bit irritated, but still had my sleepy peace. Until ... ZING!!! My mother zips open my curtains. Suddenly gallons of light pours onto my face like I was the coach in a Gatorade shower. I squint in agony trying to find my glasses. Once I find them, I’m up and into my morning routine - wash, brush, make up my bed... I’m somewhat happy now because I remember what we are going to do today: Saturday at Poppy’s house. I can’t wait to play chess with him again. I think I have his strategy in the bag. Can’t wait to show off my new skills.

Once we get to Poppy's house my sister and I run deliberately straight to the back to get out the chess pieces. Where is Poppy? He’s sitting at the table drinking his morning tomato juice. EWWW!

My sister, Chioma, and I set the pieces on the table, and we play the game by ourselves at first. Without a doubt, I win. When my sister asked for a re-match, I chuckled and turned my head to Poppy and asked him if he wanted to play me. He, with a smile, said “sure.” While I was setting the pieces up for the both of us, my grandfather went into the kitchen to wash out his cup of gruesome delight, and my sister went in behind him. While in the kitchen I heard her ask, “Poppy how did you and grandma meet”? Poppy answered “hmm let me see.”

I roll my eyes cause I knew this was going to be a long one, so I sat down at the table anticipating that everybody else would follow. When my sister and Poppy got to the table, my grandfather said, “Ikechi, let’s postpone this game, I would like to tell you both a story.” Hiding my resentment, I said, “okay.”

“Well Chioma, Your grandmother and I met on the Greyhound bus in Fayetteville, NC. I was going to New York because I was supposed to be stationed there. Your grandmother was going to New York for a Nanny job. During that trip she sat in front of me, and we must have talked the entire trip. I forget now what we were talking about, but I sure made her chuckle. Once our ride was over I asked for her address so I could write to her.”

“She said that she was going to be staying for a nanny job so her address will only be temporary. So, she ended up giving me two of them. We had a few conversations going on. But then I stopped writing her. After a few months, she wrote to me once more. The note said, If you didn’t want to write to me, then you shouldn’t have asked for my mailing address. So, I sent her more letters. That’s how we met.”

“That’s how you guys met?” I said. “Yes,” he said, “Did you think less or more of it?” “Honestly, I didn’t know what to think about it at all. I never really thought about it,” I said. “Well, now you know,” he said confidently.

“Now, who wants to play some Chess?”

I was excited. I had never beaten him before and was determined. After many moves, I had his queen. Then, suddenly I hear, “check mate!” I examined the board from top to bottom. Dang! I was in his trap again. “Welp, you got me Poppy,” I said. “You sure” was his response. Carefully, I re-examined the board and ... I saw it. There my bishop was on the diagonal line bearing down on his king. He had nowhere to move. I had finally done it! It might have been the only time I was going to say this ‘cause my grandfather is too keen to lose on purpose. So, I say it with the utmost dignity mixed with excitement, “Check Mate!!!!!!”



Intro:

Youth and elder interaction is a key value in my family. I was challenged to use this key value to persuade others to adopt our family value and practice. Here goes...

*You Never Know What you Really have Until It’s Gone.*

Now-a-days it seems to me that youth - like me - pass up chances to gather loads of wisdom. How you may ask? By not hanging around their elders. Instead of asking, we are trying to figure out how things work on our own. This loss just adds to the stress caused by the mental and physical changes that come with adolescence.

“Old age is like looking down from atop a mountain,” Karen Wrolson says. “Now you’re at the top and can see things much more clearly.” Things look clearer from the top of the mountain than it does on the ground. That’s especially helpful to teens who need guidance but won’t always listen to their parents.”

A benefit in spending more time with our elders is that we are able to get great information on how to better live our lives. They can guide you every step of the way. Most of the time they have gone through what you are now experiencing. There is a back-and-forth reciprocity between all generations. “Adults provide support to elders, most often to address health or physical limitations. Elders, in turn, assist adults through experience, emotional support, and participating in the care of children,” according to [www.legacyproject.org](http://www.legacyproject.org).

That’s how it has been in my family. My grandfather, Poppy, and I have a special relationship. I’m also able to connect with

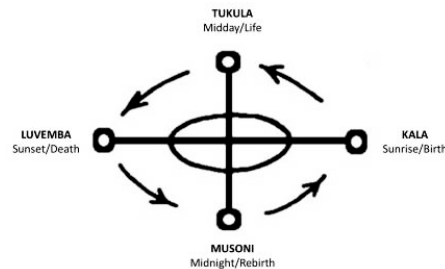


other elders, and that's a great thing.

Irene S. Levine agrees: "Friendships with older folks help us see our own future and learn ways to enjoy the years that lie ahead. Younger people tend to have more energy, a sense of adventure and a greater willingness to try new things. Each friend can offer the other something different based on their station in life."

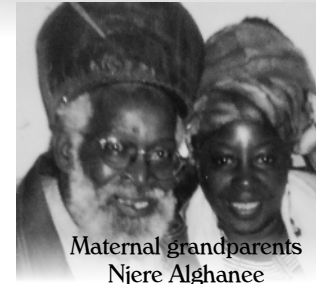
Intergenerational relationships provides more than good information and guidance, it turns out that it's also great for our health. Empowermedicaresupplement.com states that studies have shown that older adults that spend time with young children report less depression. They are also physically healthy and have higher rates of life satisfaction. Seniors who interact regularly with children have shown themselves to be happier, and have a more hopeful sense. They are also likely to live longer.

It's reciprocity - the circle of life. Both youth and elders benefit. As youth, we are a new car on this long road of life. Through our interactions with seniors, we may finally get accurate directions to get to our destination with fewer potholes or accidents along the way. On the other end of this long road, the elders can find new purpose and pleasure in sharing their wisdom with us. We both win, and the circle is unbroken.

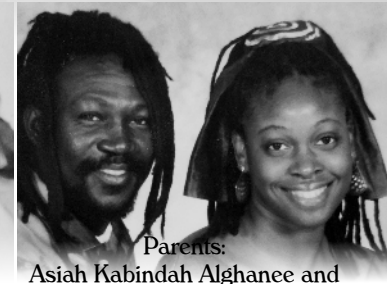


# Alghanee/Aziz/Odimgbe

Family dialogue with the past & the future



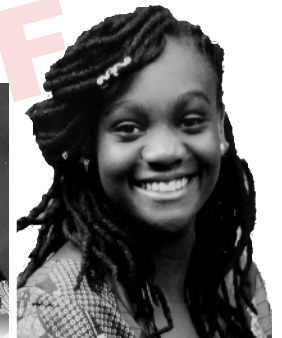
Maternal grandparents  
Njere Alghanee  
Mausi Alghanee



Parents:  
Asiah Kabindah Alghanee and  
Tabedobe Alidu Abdul Aziz



Step Father Chinedu Odimgbe &  
Arinze Obidike & Chikwelu Ikemefula



Ndahye Aziz (16)  
Time-Traveler  
Student-Author



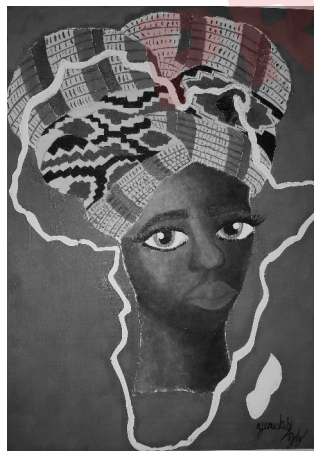
(L-R: Sekelajah, Ntianu, Asiah, Njere, Mausi Ibin, Takesta, and Aron Biko Alghanee)



The family lore project came with both challenges and rewards. It was tough at first, finding time to connect with great aunts and cousins to set up interviews between Ndahye and members of the family that we have lost touch with. Though it was difficult, it was satisfying to observe Ndahye's clear understanding of pieces that we had collected as well as her ability to relate what she found to the experiences and practices of our immediate family. Initially, I had seen this project as something that could be great for my daughter to discover stories from families past. Presently I am filled with joy after discovering tales from our family, not only for my daughter but, for myself, and my other two children as well.

—Asiah Alghanee

All artwork included are original pieces by author, Ndayhe Aziz



### *Sisi Watu*

Sisi Watu, Weusi

Watu wasuri

Pamoja tuta shinde, Pamoja tuta  
shinde

We are black

Beautiful people  
Together we will win;  
together we will win



#### REFLECTION

Afrikan people are indeed a beautiful people. We use our creativity to demonstrate our pain, struggle, happiness, and joy, and many other

expressions of our experience. We do a very good job of translating our experiences we have through all forms of art, whether it be visual, theatrical, dance, or through song. This song, my Grandmother Njeri used to sing a lot. I also remember the song from way back in my kindergarten through first grade years. My teacher at the time, Mama Ayo, used to sing it to her students. The symbolism in this piece of family lore I think is very inspiring because of the message that it sends to our people (especially the youth) about our position in the world and what we can do to bring about change. We use song as Afrikan people all the time to motivate ourselves and to remind ourselves of what we are capable of. This song was written to encourage us to do all that we can in any way that we can, and to affirm that we will win in the fight for our liberation.

We as an Afrikan people do an exceptional job at translating our experiences through forms of art. When you think of all the forms of self expression, we are revealed to be the trend setters of the world -- in all genres of music, visual art, dance, spoken word, storytelling, fashion, etc. We are often imitated by many other cultures but never effectively duplicated. We are uniquely Afrikan! Our level of creativity is constantly reached for by others, but never seems to come within their grasp. Although we are often looked at as different and inferior for the things that we do that are exclusive to our culture and style, other cultures still make it a point to copy us afterwards. Our connectedness with each other and with our emotions, I believe, gives us the ability to create in the way that we do and have it touch so many people in the same ways that it first touches us. This song was written by us for us in efforts to touch our spirits and minds with the message that we are not alone and that together we will win.

Given its inspirational energy, young children hearing it are moved to prepare and work for our future. Although it does not have an extended explanation of the things that we must do to win, how we will win, or how we must organize to come together; its inspiration and encouragement is enough to plant the seeds of liberation into the minds of our people. This is important because we talk about how hard organization and liberation of our people worldwide would be, but in this song it simply states that we are black and beautiful and that we will win. Positivity and optimism in a time that looks bleak and not so full of promise is refreshing especially for the youth who experience the present and have to imagine what challenges there are yet to come.



This song encourages us to do all that we can in the ways we can, and does this by foreseeing a triumphant win for us without giving us a how-to on how we will get there. This gives us the ability to be creative and to come up with all kinds of ways that we can to ensure the winning of our liberation. This way, we keep the thought in the front of our minds that "We will win" while still creating new strategies to get to our goal instead of defeating ourselves before we even begin. It is important to know that we have hope and to build on the idea that we will be triumphant in our battle for liberation, because in the end, no one but us will encourage ourselves to do better.

This inspirational song that acts almost as a nursery rhyme for me is so much more than it is perceived to be at first. It is a representation of the creativity, style, and influence that we have. It's the song's message that speaks to the youth of our people who may need the motivation that this song offers more than others of us. By encouraging the youth to

keep in mind that we are powerful and that we will win, we counteract any feelings of hopelessness that we may feel. The message in the song also speaks to all of us with a sense of security in our future and reassurance that our efforts for liberation will not go in vain. This song is the perfect combination of reassurance and motivation for our people to refer to whenever we feel lost or hopeless. We must always remember that we can do anything when we come together.

*"AFRIKA!....AFRIKA!"*



This was a call and response that my Grandmother Njeri used to do with me when I was little. I'm not sure where it came from, but it was probably just so that I was familiar with the fact that I was an Afrikan child. After my grandmother passed and some of my younger cousins were born, my aunts started to do the same call and response with their children as well.

REFLECTION: The Tradition

I'm not sure if there is very much symbolism in this piece because of how straightforward it is. I know that my grandmother would call out to me 'Afrika!' both when she greeted me and when we said goodbye for the day. I believe it

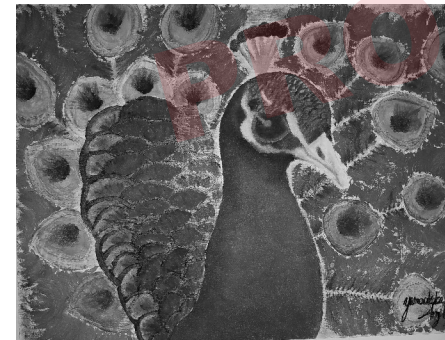
was her way of instilling in me that I am an Afrikan child and to be proud of my Afrikaness. I'm not sure when exactly she began these call and response exchanges with the people she was around, but I remember my grandmother's personality and how much she loved Afrikan people, so I believe this was just another way she encouraged those around her to be themselves and to love themselves.

It was a very hard time for our family when my grandmother passed on. One of the reasons why it was so hard for most of my aunts and uncles especially, was because they had not had children yet and their children would never have the luxury of knowing my grandmother the way that I had. I was the first Alghanee grandchild; In fact, I was the first and only grandchild for many years. I was able to spend lots of time with my grandmother. The symbolism behind my aunts repeating the same call and response to their children I think is them trying to retain the same energy that my grandmother brought to the family, while honoring her spirit as well.

This piece of family lore makes me feel both powerful and peaceful. It is empowering to be a part of a family that takes such pride in being who we are. From a very young age I was aware that I was an Afrikan child not only because of my direct lineage on my father's side, but just for the pure fact of me being a black child. It has been stressed to me that pride in yourself and who you are is necessary for our survival in this country as Afrikan people. Because of this outlook I understand that practices like calling and responding AFRIKA! to ourselves is another way to call out that we are Black and proud. This piece of family lore makes me feel powerful also because of the memory of my grandmother and her personality that comes up whenever I think about where this call and response comes from.

I feel peaceful when reflecting on this piece for the same reasons that I feel powerful. It reminds me that wherever we go and whatever we decide to do, if we stay grounded in our culture and we keep a clear sight of what we are here to do, we will be alright. The future can look very dimly lit when we are going through situations like we are now with police brutality, mass incarceration, etc. When we sit down and really think about how much there is to do, one of the most important things we can do right now is to make sure that our future generations have the power they need to make all the right changes. That power begins when we are taught repeatedly that we are a powerful Afrikan people; instilling in us a pride and belief in ourselves making us ready to create the changes we need for our liberation.

Alghanee, Ntianu. Personal Interview. 10 November 2016.



### *Help?*

**T**here have been many instances where I have needed help either with an assignment or with some other task, and I did not ask for help

when I needed it. I am a very detail-oriented person, and as a result I am very critical of the work that I produce. My friends and family tell me all the time to ask them when I need help, to ease up and be patient with myself, and to be proud of the things that I create.

An example of a time where I was told to ease up on myself and ask for help was when I had an assignment due. I completed the assignment yet felt that I did not do it properly. My Mom noticed my frustration and asked me what

was wrong. After I told her everything, she said, "Do not judge yourself so hard; remember, you do very good work. But, remember, you can ask for help." She then told me to just ask her if I need help with anything and to not judge myself so hard because I do work that is good.

Family Lore - Baba Wekesa challenged us to extract a value from our family lore and to attempt to persuade others to adopt that value. I choose my personal struggle and my mother's words of wisdom to me. If you ever find yourself hesitant to ask for help or judging yourself harshly for needing it, here's my attempt to persuade you to move.

### ***You Betta' Ask for Help!***

When frustration hits, it's best to ask for help. When we get flustered and feel helpless, asking for the aid of those closest to us should be the first response. When we get caught up with the fact that we don't know how to handle a situation or that we may not meet a certain deadline, we cannot forget that there is always someone to ask for help. Not remembering to ask for help when we need it most, is a mistake.

We don't have to suffer in silence, and when we do, it often makes matters worse. We deny ourselves the opportunity to benefit from those around us. With a little looking and less hiding, I've found that there is almost always someone around you who is happy to help, especially if they see that you need it. There are people who care about us, and want to give input. We seldom have to go through things alone.

Just outside of our comfort zone, we are surrounded by experience and expertise. Facing a situation that you are not sure how to handle? Asking someone who has dealt with a similar problem in the past can give you insight on how to handle your own issue. It also helps just to speak to some-

one about what is bothering you to get what you need to say off of your chest.

Once my brother needed help operating the computer. Instead of asking for help, he got angry and broke the computer. Not only did he suffer in silence, he got into trouble with my parents. I too suffered in middle school. My performance and my grades went down because I did not ask for help when I needed it.

I'm lucky, those who are closest to me almost always are willing to help if they are able. The good news is that in many cases those who are not close to you are willing to help too. This is good because we often hide our fears and struggles from those closest to us. When people see you struggling to finish something or understand something, they will offer their help. Your sincere effort is like a magnet. It draws them in.

Since my middle school struggles, my mother's advice to ask for help has guided me to risk more. Here's what I've discovered: when I have needed someone to talk to, or someone to ask for advice from, our friends, family members, teachers, and sometimes even strangers have been there to lend a hand.

When we assume there is no one there to help us, we make our problems worse. Not only do we have a problem we don't know how to solve, we are also alone and can begin to think that we are a failure or that no one cares about us. That's a set-up for failure not only with school or work, but also when dealing with more personal situations.

When we don't know what to do and we don't ask questions, we cheat ourselves out of the wisdom of someone who has a similar experience or the insights of a close friend or even a stranger. We end up making rookie mis-

takes because we did not seek help when making certain decisions.

All in all, if you have a problem that you can't figure out, ask for help. When we ask for help we gain the expertise of whomever is willing to help us. This new knowledge could help us throughout our lives. When we need someone to talk to, or someone to ask for advice, our friends, family members, and others are almost always there to lend a hand. When we don't know what to do and we don't ask questions, our work will never be as accurate or reflective of our full potential. Asking for help gives us insight beyond our years and experience which will make our work better. Remember, accepting help doesn't mean that we are not capable, it means we're more capable together.

PROOF

## Hill-Brown Family

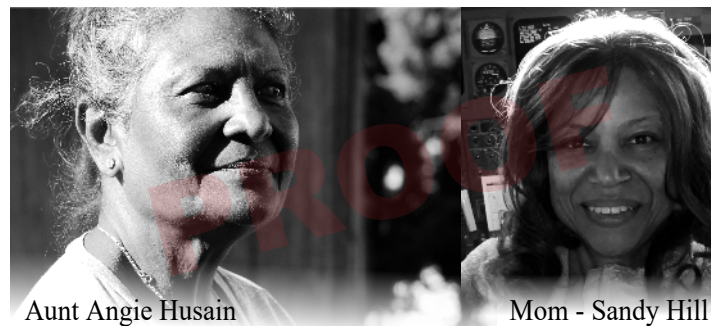
dialogue with the past & the future



"Duh"  
Great Grandma

Dad's family

Dad - Robbie Brown III



Aunt Angie Husain

Mom - Sandy Hill

We are truly grateful for the Family Lore Project. It has ignited a spark in Aille to learn even more about her family stores and history. It has caused me to dig deeper into my past to pull out stories that would have probably been lost. Now, they have life again, and can and entertain yet another generation. The circle is unbroken.  
—Sandy Hill



Aillie Brown (16)  
Time Traveler & Student Author

## *Aille's First Airplane Ride Alone*

**E**xplanation of what it has to do with my family lore: This story is my testimony of the proverb *Believe in destiny; your time will come*. When I was younger I would bug my mother every day to let me ride on an airplane because when I rode with her once we saw a little girl on the plane who was an unaccompanied minor. She got treats, airplane toys, wings pinned on her dress, extra snacks, sat in the front, and it looked like it was her birthday or something; so, since then, I begged my Mom to let me ride by myself.



Many people don't ride on airplanes in their lifetime, let alone ride one at a very young age. When I was five-years-old, I got to ride on an airplane without my parents for the first time. I wasn't scared; I wasn't sad; I was happy. This was one of the most important independent doings in my whole life so far, after talking, walking, writing, etc. You may find yourself asking, why was a little five-year-old girl going on a plane by herself? Well, I wasn't on a plane by myself.



It was about 2 o'clock on a Wednesday afternoon. I had just finished school, and it was time for summer vacation. My mother and father are divorced and live in separate homes. I spend the school year with my Mom in New York and summer vacation with Dad down in Walterboro, S.C.

Mom and I head to the airport. I'm sitting in the car with my white shirt, Winnie the pooh leggings, and tan sandals with my hair twisted to perfection. I'm jumping up and down with joy that I'm going on an airplane again. My



Mom - Sandy Hill with the pilot

mother looks over at me with a smile and tells me to calm down. "Calm down Aille, you can't be hyper like this on a plane." I calmed down as she told me to, and she stared at me for a full minute. I can tell she's a little sad and scared that I'm not going to be okay without her on the plane. As we get closer to the airport, I can hear the car horn beeps and see people running back and forth to the self-opening doors. We pull up to a parking spot, and I unfasten my seat belt. I wait for my Mom to get my bags and open my door. She comes and opens my door and I jump out and hold on to her hand.

I can slowly feel the hot sun beam off my skin as we leave the garage. We walk through the departures hall and find our way to the check-in desk. The nice lady in her Delta uniform, with her hair slicked back with a lot of gel, hands my mom my ticket folder which included the bracelet that they put on my wrist and the information of the person picking me up. The bracelet lets other workers know I'm an

unaccompanied minor who needs a flight attendant to sit with. We then check my bags. I try to write my name on the information slip that goes on the bag, but my Mom says people won't be able to read it.

After we get done at check-in, we head down a long looking hallway where a bunch of people are taking off their shoes and jewelry. We pass a man who looks at my ticket and takes my Mom's i.d. "Take your sandals off and put them in this bucket," my mother says. I place my shoes into the black bucket and wait for her to finish removing her things. She takes my hand, and we walk up to this big machine. The lady on the other side of the machine tells me to walk through. I'm a little scared because I don't want the big thing to eat me, but my Mom whispers to me that it's ok. I walk through the machine fast and feel relieved that I'm still alive. The lady puts a wand to my body, then lets me go to my sandals that I see moving past me. My mom and I walk to some chairs to put our stuff back on.

We then walk through a hallway to get on my plane. As we walk I see a bathroom, a man riding on a cart, and many many restaurants. I can smell fresh baked bread and I can hear the sound of soda opening and being poured into a cup. I'm getting lost looking at so many people and before I know it I can hear my Mom say, "We're here Sweetie." We sit down and my mom pulls out my coloring book with my crayons. I sat and colored for about 20 minutes. I then hear a very loud voice say, "Jettie Brown please come to the ticket counter." I jump up and say, "That's my name!" My mom smiles at me and packs my stuff back into her purse. We walk up to the desk and the man with the Delta uniform and a walkie-talkie in his hands takes my folder from Mom and calls a flight attendant to come and get me. When you're an unaccompanied minor you sit with a flight attendant in the back or front of the plane. I get to board the

plane first, but I have to de-plane last because someone has to escort me to whoever is picking me up.

I look up at Mom smiling and we say our goodbyes. "Ok, I'm going to call you every night. Don't eat too many sweets ok?" Mom says. "Ok, I promise," I replied. She picks me up and gives me a big hug and whispers, "I love you." "I love you too," I say back. The flight attendant gets my folder and takes my hand. I look back at Mom and wave "bye-bye."

We board the plane and the flight attendant makes sure my belt is on tight, then asks me "What would you like to drink dear?" "Apple juice please." I get my apple juice and look out the window and slowly start to fall asleep when my ears pop. I jump slightly scared and tell the flight attendant I can't hear, and she gives me a piece of gum and puts on the 'Chicken Little' movie for me. I watch the movie and look out the window from time to time amazed by the clouds. Now, I'm a grown up.



### *Family Stories:*

Auntie Angie Hasain

My aunt told me there was a very nice couple living in New York, a husband and a wife who didn't have any kids. They had a talking parrot. The husband never knew the wife was cheating on him. When he went to work, her boyfriend came over and the parrot saw them. They parrot kept saying "You have your sweet man (x3); I'm going to tell (x3)." She didn't know her husband was coming home early that day. He opened the door, and she was in the room with her boy-

friend. She realized her husband was home, so she put her boyfriend under the bed, and the parrot saw that she put the boyfriend under the bed. When she came out of the room she hugged her husband and kissed him, so the parrot said "You kissing your husband and your sweet man under the bed?" The husband said, "What? Polly what you saying?" The parrot repeated again, "Your sweet man under the bed (x2)."

The husband did not believe ,but he was curious, so he went and peeked, and he saw the man there and was so shocked. The wife started to beg, "I'm sorry, I don't know how it happened." The husband went and got his gun and loaded it up and shot the sweet man, the wife and had to shoot the parrot so he wouldn't repeat. He called the cops and said, "I came home and I saw someone shoot my wife, a stranger, and my parrot." The cops came and saw. He said he didn't know the man. He went free because no one saw what happened.

**Moral of the story:** DON'T have a sweet man and a Polly!

Explanation/Reflection:

This story was told by a family 'grandmother.' It's a nonfiction, horror, and humor story. This story explains why you should not cheat on your significant other. It's wrong and could turn into a dangerous situation. This story makes me mad and sad because the husband did not deserve that. One of my pet peeves are cheaters. I wouldn't say what the man did at the end of the story was right, but what goes around comes around.

This relates to the real world because this generation thinks two or three girlfriends or boyfriends at the same time is

okay. You're hurting someone that you supposedly love. If their parents did that to each other, they would blame that parent and think it was wrong, but it's okay if they're doing it. This story reminds me of the movie 'Why did I get married?' They state that men are leaving/cheating on their wife or girlfriends once they see the one percent their other is not giving them. Instead of talking to their significant other about it, they leave a nine for a one just because they needed attention in that specific area.

This story also makes me feel peaceful because this is a perfect story to hear at a young adult age. When you're growing up, you see and hear about relationships all the time, but no one really teaches you about love. How are you supposed to act or feel? How is the other person supposed to act or feel? Most of us don't know until it's too late, and someone ends up heart broken. Young girls should know that a guy is supposed to respect them and be a gentleman. Young men should know that girls need to learn how to respect themselves before even thinking about getting into a relationship. This generation has 12 and 13-year-olds walking around talking about love and sex, of which they know neither about.

If I were to reproduce this story on a mass scale, I would turn it into a book, then a movie based on the book. This is a short humor story, but it's also a life lesson. Young adults in high school need to have something like this to read or watch. In the movie, I would go into depth more, touching on other topics that young adults are curious about. The book will be exactly the same as the short story, with more of a background to it. Like what lead up to her cheating and so on? After the movie is made, I will recommend all teens from ages 16 and up to watch.

Work Cited: Husain, Angie. "Polly the Bird." Family Stash (1970): n. pag. Web.





This is my Great-Grandmother Mattie Mae Lary 'Du' (D-u-h):

"Back in the day my Grandma Du (left) used to go to AME Church (African Methodist Episcopal). Here's a story my mom once told that I've entitled:

### "Survival"

"In the AME church, the pastor goes to a member's house every Sunday to eat dinner. The church ladies lay out a meal fit for a king, and no one can eat until the pastor says grace. So before he got there, a fly landed on my Grandma's pretty chocolate cake.

I was 9-years-old when I took a fly swatter and moved in close and focused, and I wound my hand back ready to let go, and a hand slapped my arm mid-air, stopping the chocolate tragedy. My grandma asked me what I was doing, and I told her that a fly was on the cake. She then told me to go sit down. The cake survived, but only for a short time. By the time the minister left, I had to eat the scraps. Ever since then, I can't stand preachers coming to my house."

Explanation/Reflection: This short story told to me by my mom from when she was a little girl explains home training, and how certain family members act when they're trying to impress someone. In most southern black families, the pastor comes first. You better "be respectful," "sit up straight," and "answer him when he talks to you." This relates to today's society in many ways. Parents and Grandparents still do this to this day. Last year, in 2016, I was at my grandmother's house down south. The preacher and his wife and kids were coming over. We had to make sure the

house was extra clean; that there were activities planned for the children, and that we'd have a nice meal waiting.

This story and my last summer experience makes me feel sad because I wonder if people do this for approval. Do they think if the pastor doesn't like their house, they can't get into heaven? I understand you always want to impress him and show your appreciation for his work, but should you break your back over it? I would rather pray to God himself than suck up to the pastor. A direct message is all God needs.

On the other hand, this story and tradition teaches me how to act when company comes over. Depending on who it is, you bring out your best table settings, dishes, and clothing. Being on my best behavior is very important, and it even taught me the manners I know today. This tradition taught me to say "yes and no ma'am or sir" and "thank you" and "you're welcome." I was taught to make eye contact when talking to someone and learned how to set a dinner table - where to put the spoons, knives, and forks. Of course, I also learned "not to listen to grown folks' conversations!"

If I were to reproduce this story on a mass scale, I would let it be a scene in a movie. I imagine it in an old movie setting like the 2000's. Many families would be able to relate to it. Different generations would understand the lengths parents and grandparents go to, to impress the pastor in and out of the church.

Work Cited: Hill, Sandy. "Church Pet Peeves."

Proverbs/Sayings:



***Everybody has their own time***  
(God won't forget you)

My grandmother is very religious, so we go to church every Sunday and whenever we can't make it, it ends up ruining her day.

Reflection/Explanation: This proverb was told to me by my mom and told to her by a friend of the family. This family friend's proverb has been in his family for generations. He heard it from his dad and his dad heard it from his dad and so on. This proverb connects with a lot of people in my opinion. Many people have a very hard life. It's easy to lose faith. My mother says that "God doesn't put you through anything you can't handle, and he's preparing you for what you were put on Earth to do." In the situation at that time, it might be very hard, but it's best to keep faith. This proverb helps us do just that.

I have noticed a lot of families these days don't go to church. I go to church every Sunday with my dad's side of the family when I'm down south. When I'm in New York with my mother, I don't go at all. I still pray and read the bible. I believe going to church would help a lot of children, teens, and even adults on a personal level with their problems. Sometimes all we need is a hopeful way to look at our situation or the world.

I know that I'm "going to have my time." I know I'm going to be a huge help to my people and make a difference.

# Diop Family

dialogue with the past & the future



## Ruby Lee's (Grandma Ree's) Legacy

Greetings, I'm Yinka Winfrey Diop, Yejide's mother. I'm so proud of her work with the Family Lore Project. For many years, I've loved reading, writing, and editing; spending time talking with and learning from elders; and listening to a good, juicy story- most especially stories that offered greater insight into my family and community history and dynamics. As a child, I was a master, undercover ear hustler and detective. I clearly recall the vast swell of my

Continued...



Yejide Diop (15)

Time-Traveler & Student Author

heart and the eager arousal of my curiosity following one of my table top bellowing of "Ten Little Monkeys" at Big Mama's liquor house. After collecting my quarters (compensation for my lively entertainment), I'd disappear into a nearby corner and quietly blend in with the plants and wall. As the drinks flowed, Grandma Ree and others laughed, played cards and loudly supplied the latest 411 on almost everything happening in SE Atlanta. Or, at the very least, I'd get the latest drop on what was happening in Carver Homes and Joyland.

So when Wekesa explained the workings and point of the Family Lore Project (FLP), it sounded like the perfect convergence of my previously mentioned loves.

Imagine my surprise and sadness when my children, Yejide and Ayinde, balked at completing the assignment! I revoked privileges. I threatened. I cajoled. Nothing seemed to work. So, I began to ask and ration out small pieces of the stories I'd garnered. Then, slowly, they began to collect the sayings, songs, writings.

They began to recall some things themselves and to ask us questions. Then Ye visited NY and recalled the time she'd spent there visiting their Grand-Dad, Ademola. She returned to Atlanta and seemed a little more inspired to complete the assignment. At this point, I don't think that Ayinde's work will make it into AYA's first edition of FLP. I've grieved and am letting go of my sadness for the missed opportunity.

As an AYA parent, I'm grateful for the ongoing opportunity of Sankofa. Though they may not recognize it now, the FLP is a unique and highly valuable asset to their education, our family, and our communities. To Wekesa I say "Medasi! Adupe! Asante!" Thank you for the brilliant idea of marrying literature, history, and culture to the lore of our families. And publishing it! The positive impact will reverberate generationally. Lastly, I joyfully look forward to continuing this process of gathering our family stories, writings, songs - our lore, and using those collected items as the foundation for our study of literature.

—Ena Yinka Winfrey Diop



Starting in the 3rd grade, these are the words my mother lead us in reciting as she took us to school...

### *Myself*

*by Edgar A. Guest*

*(modifications by Yinka Winfrey Diop)*

*I have to live with myself and so  
I am fit for myself to know.  
I am able as the days go by,  
to always look myself straight in the eye.  
I don't stand in the setting sun  
and hate myself for the things I've done.  
I don't keep on a closet shelf lots of secrets  
about myself.  
Nor fool myself as I come and go  
into thinking that nobody else will know  
the kind of person I really am.  
I don't dress up myself up as a sham.  
I walk with my head erect.  
I deserve all people's respect.  
And here as I gain my fame and wealth,  
I am able to like myself.  
I don't think as I come and go  
that I am bluster and bluff and empty show.  
I never can hide myself from me.  
I see what others may never see.  
I know what others may never know.  
I never can fool myself and so,  
whatever happens I'll always be  
self respecting and conscience free.*

Reflection:

The poem is about loving yourself and learning to know yourself better than anyone else. It also talks about how we have flaws - but it is okay.

Like most third graders, I was just being obedient to recite the poem as my mother instructed. I was annoyed. It seemed to have no use other than just to say it. Over the years the deeper meanings have stuck with me - especially because of my mother's revisions.

Originally, Guest's lines read:

*I want to be fit for myself to know;  
I want to be able as days go by..*

which my mom turned into the more definitive

*I am fit for myself to know.  
I am able as the days go by..*

She did this throughout the poem. Her small changes helped make me believe that I can actually **“do,”** rather than just **“trying** to do.”



I am now appreciative that my mother pushed me to memorize these words that I think have helped me become *“self-respecting and conscious free.”*

Me and my moms, Yinka



### *I'd like to be like the wind*

*Even if no one notices  
- and people rarely do -  
its up and running,  
stirring, spinning, playing  
in the trees rippling across  
a rain puddle  
no matter what time it is  
or what the sun, birds, grass or  
trees maybe doing  
Because its doing the things  
that wind does.*

This is a poem that my mom wrote in 2003 or '04. At the time, she was pregnant with my brother, Ayinde. I think she means that the wind is free and does what it wants. I think people want to be like that. I know that I do, so I guess - like my mother - *I'd like to be like the wind.*



*The Family*

“The Family” was created by my Grandfather, Baba Ademola Olugebefola. The name he was given when he was born on October 2, 1941 in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands was Bedwick Lyola Thomas, something that I never knew before doing research. He and the rest of his family moved to New York when he was four- years- old. His two brothers are named Verl and Harold Thomas. I actually met Uncle Harold. They have

lived in Harlem for more than forty years. Harlem is famous for being a hub for artistic creation.

His career as an artist, designer, educator and businessman, has spanned more than fifty years. Introduced to the arts at an early age, my grandfather is one of the most respected artist of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s.



Many of his paintings are based off of lines and bringing back the art of lines. Although, he works mostly with visual arts, he has worked in all areas of art. In the 1950's while still in high school he was a jazz bassist with the Jimmy Waymar Ensemble. He also studied at the Fashion Institute of Technology from which he received an Associates degree in 1961.

Back to the painting that Baba named “The Family”: I relate it to our world today because for some people it confronts the stereotype of a “perfect” family. This painting is

kind of warped. Everyone sees it differently, and even their first impression can change. It is symbolic of how families can be different and can and do change. The world changes, and with it our ideas. I think that people should see this painting because the colors and shapes move your feelings. It makes me feel joyful and sad - at the same time. It makes me feel joyful because the artwork is so nice and I like the picture. I am also proud because I have such a great artist in my family. I feel sad because I am not close with my grandfather. Since I also like to paint, he could help me and make my work better.

PROOF

# Duduyemi Family

dialogue with the past & the future



*Baoku and Evelyn Duduyemi - Mom and Dad!*

I had a difficult time giving time and energy to the Family Lore Project, until I experienced how my family's lore is more than just stories, and how quickly even the stories can disappear. Since then, I have been learning as many stories as I can, and sharing them. Remembering the stories that I know, I began to understand what our family valued, why they made certain decisions, and how those decisions affect the decisions that I make today. Attempting to get new stories from older relatives, I discovered just how many stories are being lost, and the work I will need to do to find them. I look forward to that work, to understanding more about my family and myself, and to sharing



Ayo Duduyemi (11)  
Time-Traveler & Student Author

Duduyemi Family Sayings:

***"What does not kill you makes you stronger."***

This is my grandma's favorite saying. She named my dad Baoku after her favorite saying. Baoku is taken from the Yoruba proverb Baoku ise otan, which means if we do not die, we will survive.

Reflection

I really like the saying, and I am glad she named my dad after it. I think she did that because she thought it suited him. I think she chose a good saying. The saying fits in to some of the things she does. For example, she eats "healthy," exercises and is not afraid of a lot of things. The saying is powerful. When you think about the saying, it can help you not be scared to do something.

***"Every tub must stand on its own bottom"***

This saying was from my grandma. She told that to my mom and aunt. I think she said it at the right times when they did not want to do something that they could easily do. I like the meaning of the saying. The meaning is basically saying you need to do things yourself. I think it served my mom and aunt well. They can do things on their own and very well. I love this saying.

***"Just Like Potatoes"***

One time my grandmother and my mother were wondering what I would eat. And my grandmother said, "She can eat rutabaga. If you smash it up it will taste just like potatoes." So my mother did what she said,



and I took one bite and spit it out. My mother didn't know what was wrong so she tasted it and spat it out as well. My mother said, "This does not taste like potatoes!" And my grandmother said, "Well not exactly, but kind of - right?"

She was wrong. She said rutabaga would taste like potatoes. I think she said that because my mom did not know what to feed me. I think she was joking. Smashed up rutabaga does not taste good. I hope I do not have to eat that again. If I do, I will not like it. My mom did not do that again.

### *It is a good day to die.*

The saying "It is a good day to die" is from my grandpa.

He said the saying at the football games. Since he was the coach, he said that to prepare the players to play. He did not mean it was a good day to die literally. He meant that if you did your best work, it would all pay off, even if you did not win. There are some good days to die, though. If you have done everything you can to help your people, then that would be a good day to die!

# Jeffries-Cisse Family

dialogue with the past & the future



Our greatest challenge with this Family Lore Project was supporting family in the notion that their utterances had "literary" value. The discussions ultimately resulted in going back over generational conversations with a renewed sense of pride and energy. The new tools of communicating thoughts, ideas and story reflections were also brought into view as an archival tool. It (social media) informed us of how prolific we'd become. The Project has revived the love and respect for our stories, utterances and memories. Words whose meanings were hidden in the shadows are brought forward illuminated for another generation. The healing continues.

—The Jeffries Cisse Family

Farouq Jeffries (12)  
Time-Traveler & Student Author



### *Always Open...*

**M**y Great-Grandmother says:  
"I'm just laying here talking to my Master. "His Line is Always Open"..."



She says that when you ask her how or what's she doing. She means she can always talk to God. That He never sleeps or ignores you. She is 100-years-old and her name is Anita Brown Lovett (right).

### *"Stay Black!"*

My Nana always says: "Stay Black!". She says it when she is leaving or when we are leaving her. She means never compromise or feel ashamed of our Ancestors. She says sometimes our people choose or need to behave or talk a certain way when we're around so-called "white people," and speak or behave another way when we're together, but never because we are ashamed and never to assimilate or forget where we come from. There are things we say to each other and don't have to explain. She also says we are smart; we are capable, and we will do great things. That's so we won't doubt ourselves and to encourage us.

My Nana traveled to the Family Land of her Mother during the Summer in South Carolina when she was a kid, and she would write in her journal about it. She says she was most happy being there even with Apartheid. The difficulty of Segregation and racial bigotry made the Community more reliant on one another, and it felt safer in the South than in the North, because you knew your enemy. It was written in 1963.

### *Summer Ritual Ziyara*

Couldn't wait for school to end  
kick off my shoes in the back  
of the Black Pontiac

Couldn't WAIT TO feel the  
sand between my toes and  
knock on the wooden screen  
door to my Grandma's country  
kitchen...

Ritual figs pulled from the tree  
that purified all who entered  
...coming from up North  
brought Spirits that needed sub-  
duing in the Presence of South-  
ern Comfort

Kitchen smelled like perfume ...fresh field peas and  
chicken...skillet cornbread served in the finest caste  
iron...Aunt Leola feeding cut logs to the hungry stove in  
her finest kitchen cotton flowered dress and  
apron...Aromatherapy the smell of pine...

Hair plaited... face moist...Joy in her eyes upon the sight of  
her Sister and her little "gal"...Nita and Bill are home for  
the Summer and all is well.





My uncle is Winfred "Blue" Lovett. He's in the photo below - first man from right. A Grammy Award winner, with platinum and gold records, He was founder and an original Manhattan. A singer / song-writer and composer, he returned to Allah in December, 2014. His music is healing, and he used his influence as a famous man to speak to injustices around the world.



***Kiss and Say Goodbye***

—The Manhattans

This has got to be the saddest day of my life  
 I called you here today for a bit of bad news  
 I won't be able to see you anymore  
 Because of my obligations, and the ties that you have  
 We've been meeting here everyday  
 And since this is our last day together  
 I wanna hold you just one more time  
 When you turn and walk away, don't look back  
 I wanna remember you just like this  
 Let's just kiss and say goodbye

I had to meet you here today  
 There's just so many things to say  
 Please don't stop me 'till I'm through  
 This is something I hate to do  
 We've been meeting here so long  
 I guess what we done, oh was wrong  
 Please darling, don't you cry  
 Let's just kiss and say goodbye

Many months have passed us by

(I'm gonna miss you)  
 I'm gonna miss you, I can't lie  
 (I'm gonna miss you)  
 I've got ties, and so do you  
 I just think this is the thing to do  
 It's gonna hurt me, I can't lie  
 Maybe you'll meet, you'll meet another guy  
 Understand me, won't you try, try, try, try, try, try, try  
 Let's just kiss and say goodbye  
 I'm gonna miss you, I can't lie  
 (I'm gonna miss you)  
 Understand me, won't you try  
 (I'm gonna miss you)  
 It's gonna hurt me, I can't lie  
 (I'm gonna miss you)  
 Take my handkerchief, wipe your eyes  
 (I'm gonna miss you)  
 Maybe you'll find, you'll find another guy  
 (I'm gonna miss you)  
 Let's kiss and say goodbye, pretty baby  
 (I'm gonna miss you)  
 Please, don't you cry  
 (I'm gonna miss you)  
 Understand me, won't you try  
 (I'm gonna miss you)  
 Let's just kiss  
 And say goodbye

**Songwriters: Winfred Lovett**

Kiss and Say Goodbye lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC

This is an article on my Nana's thoughts after the election of Donald Trump in Nov., 2016. She said she is concerned but we must not fear anything and stay thoughtful and remember our Faith. We have to know the best way to defend ourselves and use our knowledge to build our communities to be stronger. Allah is aware of everything in our lives, and we should take time to make sure we are good and then we can challenge injustice and be successful..

#AFTERMATH # LESSONSLEARNED #NEXTSTEPS

### *Hard Times Call for Furious Dancing*

It is said by those much Wiser than myself, that the worst enemy is the one you don't know. America is very good at staging ...they created a narrative, a farce if you will, that America was the land of the free, home of the brave. They had us believing in post-racial propaganda even down to the propping of a Black President (not saying he was fully complicit) but they boxed him in where he couldn't do much more than talk about "our behavior" when we did get together on the Black-hand side.

I give thanks to the Divine for His Servant Donald Trump. He came to reveal the state of the American Heart. I use the heart, in this case, not as a metaphor, but literally, because the heart is the driver of being. The mind just carries out the message relayed to it and America's heart is very sick.

Since integration and in the absence of processing the National experience of enslave-

ment and its ensuing reinventions, the so-called whites have suffered the fallout of repressed feelings as much as we have, resulting in the last night's election

outcome. Their fears, anxieties, the resulting reality of the class war disguised in the superior/inferior construct, created the perfect storm known as DONALD TRUMP.

I do have concerns about the man, but at the end of the day he told us unequivocally who he is and we should believe him and act accordingly. My greater concern is the impact that his call to action will have on the daily lives of my / our Grand Designs. In my case, I have Suns in Black bodies, New and Full Moons (daughters) who are African and obviously female, and we're Muslim. He has empowered hatred and unleashed it into the atma-sphere (Soul of the world). In the interim, they (the progeny) will increase their worship, employ patience and learn more about self-defense as this unfolds.

I am equally concerned about my People. Much to do here, but I will begin by giving 100% of my all to our development as self-reliant informed HUMANS OF AFRICAN DESCENT LIVING OUT LOUD IN AMERICA. This is the part that is controversial: I want to return to

an upgraded state of segregation, an existence of self-reliance and healing. I want to support emerging leaders in the creation of a new paradigm of social change and economic development. All, all happening in safe communities where we live, work and pray/play. Social movements have to be wrapped in morally sound packaging. It (bad behavior) has been the downfall of earlier movements: fornication, adultery, stealing, robbing lying and cheating on one level or another plagued our movements. Won't cite instances, but it is what it is.

In the meantime, in between time, as eloquently stated by my Gurl, Jessica, "I will widen back, connect with like-minded Souls, move, dance, share, love, breathe, pray" because you see at the end of the day ... it is Allah who will bring us through these times:



Surely Allah has placed us in these times and surely He will Guide us through them; may He increase us in all things concerning His Will, impart in us Taqwa (awe of

Him), Patience and at the very end shower us with HIS Mercy and Protection. "Say: 'Nothing can happen to us except what Allah has ordained for us. He is Our Master. It is in Allah that the faithful should put their trust.'"(The Holy Quaran, Surat at-Tawba, v. 51)

## Gilliam Family

dialogue with the past & the future



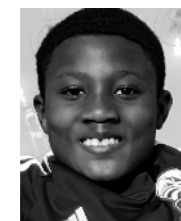
Left to Right: Dr. William Knox Flowers, Great-Great-Grandfather who founded Flowers Medical Center in Dallas TX. Bonnie Madalynne Flowers-McMillan Great-Grandmother, Amelia Perry,



Daisy Neal, Great Great Grandmother, Omidiora, Mother; Aunt Barbara



Ensi-Kwesi (14)



Akinyemi (11)



Adetunji (10)

Gilliam Time-Travelers & Student Authors:

## *The Power of Resistance*

Iya Sango Kolade Pamela Wynn

**W**hen I was a child about 3-years-old, I can remember overhearing my elders speaking in whispers about one of our relatives who shot a white man in self-defense. He was being pursued by white law enforcement. My family was hatching a plan to hide him so he could escape. The plan revolved around different relatives hiding him in their homes in several different states, including Texas, Oklahoma and California. To my knowledge, he was never caught. While there was not an extensive discussion of the incident that led to the man's death, it was concluded by relatives that the killing was righteous. Had it been otherwise, they would not have protected him because of their values. Finally it should be remembered that hiding a fugitive from white justice was an extremely courageous act, punishable by lynching of every man, woman and child in the household involved in hiding him.

As told by Iya Sango Kolade Pamela Wynn - our Iyagba (Grandmother.)



## *MD For My People:*

*A Profile in Commitment*

**C**ommitment can be a force of nature in and of itself. Commitment means being dedicated to a cause or what one believes to be their purpose. When a person believes strongly enough, he/she can apply her/his will forcefully to bring their purpose into reality. This was the case with my grandfather, William Knox Flowers, M.D.

He was born in the first generation after the enslavement on July 28, 1886 to a family of sharecroppers in Galilee, Mississippi. Maybe he would have been content to spend his life as a farmer like his parents, but that was not to be his lot. He was destined to overcome hardships, and to propel himself into the field of medicine.

The event that served as the catalyst was the tragic death of his sister, who died from complications caused by a broken arm. In those days there were no licensed Black doctors in his community, and white doctors would not treat Afrikan people, which led to her untimely death. This event sparked a desire for him to become a doctor. He vowed that never again would anyone in his community die or suffer unnecessarily due to illness or accident because of lack of medical attention.

As soon as he was old enough he left the farm to find the means to support himself and pay his way through the educational requirements to become a surgeon. He worked odd jobs as a laborer wherever he could find work and finally the railroad, all the time paying his way through the various

levels of schooling required to get into medical school. It is rumored that his clothing had so many patches, that even the patches had patches.

Finally, he achieved the educational level required to attend MeHarry Medical School in Tennessee, where he graduated with a specialization in surgery. I can still remember the copy of Gray's Anatomy on our bookshelf that was one of his textbooks while he was a student in medical school. Since he worked the whole time he was in school, he managed to save enough to buy a horse and buggy that he would need for the medical practice he planned for his community back in Galilee, Mississippi.

One day he was returning to his home on the farm, when he was stopped by a band of armed white men who said that no “nigger” should have a horse like the one he had pulling his buggy. They ordered him to get out of his buggy and give it to them. He refused. A fight began. All indications are that the band of gunslingers was preparing to lynch him. His brother must have heard the commotion, because he appeared on the scene with a gun, which he started firing into the air, hoping to scare them. The tactic worked. He was able to hold them off until my grandfather could escape. It was rumored that families had to hide him as he fled his community under the threat of death. He kept running until he reached Sulphur Springs, Texas, where he finally realized his dream of setting up a medical practice for the Black community. Interestingly, during the flu epidemic of 1919, he was celebrated for all the lives he saved.

As told by his loving granddaughter, Kolade Pamela Wynn  
December 20, 2016

## *Adetunji (10)*

### Family Lore



**W**hen I was younger my grandmother made chicken dumplings. She used to make them for our mom when she was little too. Our mom told us they tasted very good. At first, I thought chicken dumplings would be chicken inside of a ball of bread, but it was bread with chicken underneath. When I tried the dumplings, they tasted awesome! It tasted like chicken flavored bread. When my grandmother made them, my mom and I ate most of them because they tasted marvelous. It tasted so fantastic that we almost forgot to save some for the others.

***“All the Mama crows think their babies are the blackest.”***

This lore came from my mom. I think this means that all mother crows think their babies are the most beautiful. I think this can refer to humans because all mothers think their children are the most beautiful. This saying came down from my Great-Grandmother, passed down to Aunt Barbara, then to my mother. It makes me feel good about myself. I think that this saying was lovable.

***“You can't take a pig's ear and make a silk purse”.***

This saying is from my Great Aunt Barbara Williams. I think that means you can't turn something that is bad and

make it good. I do not agree with that saying because I do think you can turn something bad into something good. For example, if you want to draw and you cut your finger, you can do something else that's fun like play soccer.

***“One day Uncle Willy will fit his son's britches.”***

This saying was from Ms. Shirley Johnson, my Aunt Barbara's friend. Britches are trousers. I think this means that the boy is growing so fast that his father will be able to fit his son's pants. I like this saying because I want to grow taller than my brother, Akin.

Akinyemi Gilliam (11)

***“When God gives you rice, don't ask for soup.”***

**T**his proverb is from my extended family father, Baba Jim (James Cameron). He's the one with the gray beard above. He's an ancestor now, but he still touches our family. This proverb is one of the ways. It tells you to be thankful for what you have. For example, if you give someone something and he or she says something like, “I don't want this, I want something else,” you can just say, “Be thankful for what you have.” Being thankful

for what you have will help you. It will help you to constantly accept what you are given. When you are thankful you won't be very picky about little things like not liking a toy or zawadi (Swahili word for gift) from your family members.

***“It's an awful po' dog that won't wag its own tail.”***

This saying is from my Aunt Barbara. I think this saying has a deep meaning (to me). This means you or someone won't take self- pride for something he or she completed. If your child is not happy with what he or she did and does not take pride, then you might ask, “Why aren't you taking self pride for what you have completed?” You should always take pride for what you have done. When you take pride in who you are and what you did, that is amazing because you are awarding yourself with happiness. If you take self- pride in what you have done you will feel more happy than before.

***“When the cat's away the mice play”***

This saying is also from my Aunt Barbara. I agree with this saying 100%! You know how cats kill mice and you know how mice can make your kitchen look like a tornado

rammed through your food. So when you see your house is a mess after you left your children home alone, you would tell them to clean up. Ok let's say that the parents are the cat (not the fact that the cat kills the mouse) and your children are the mice. You watch them so they don't get into any trouble. If you're not watching them (depending on how old your children are) something bad might happen; like someone can cut himself, someone can break something very expensive, or your child can hurt so bad that you may need to take him or her to the hospital.

***“All shut eyes are not sleep”***



This saying is from my funny and lovable Aunt Barbara. I think this saying means exactly what it says. Let's say, (if you are an adult) you may hear noise coming from your children's room. When you go inside of their room, you see them with their eyes closed, and you say “Be quiet and go to sleep.” Soon enough you hear the noise again to the point that you get very very mad or you get very very annoyed. Then it gets to the point you don't even want to walk to your children's room (if you are very annoyed). Now you might get mad (but not too mad) and go to their room and say, “If I hear noise coming from this room again, you will get a spanking.”

Ensi-Kwesi Imhotep Gilliam (14)

***“If the wall did not crack, the lizard will not have a place to c***

Yoruba proverb.

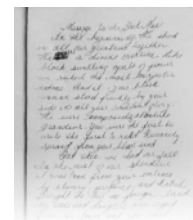


Reflection:



My Iyagba (Grandmother, left), Pamela Wynn shared this piece with me. This proverb is really important to a lot people. I think this piece means that if you do something bad and you don't fix it, it will lead to bad consequences. I agree with this Yoruba proverb. I think the lesson is to fix your mistakes when you make them. For example, if I injure myself by breaking my foot and I don't tell my parents, my foot won't heal because my parents won't know to take me to the doctor. I could injure myself again and even break my leg. I could end up in a wheelchair for the rest of my life. If I would've fixed the problem earlier by telling my parents about my broken foot, it wouldn't have led to a broken leg.

***The Message / An Excerpt***



"The Message to Black Man" was composed by my mother when she was 19-years-old. It helped her win in the Alpha Phi Alpha Miss Black and Gold Pageant. Though she did not win first place, she was awarded Miss Congeniality. The pageant took place in Louisville, Kentucky University on Novem-

ber 22, 1995. I was told that during her performance she recited the poem to Afrikan drumming.

### ***The Message to The Black Man***

In the beginning ...

We stood in all our greatness *together*  
We are a divine creation.

Like black swelling opals of power

We ruled the most majestic nations

The black woman stood proudly by your side in all your radiant glory.

We were composed of absolute grandeur

You were

the first to write  
the first to read

Humanity sprang from your black seed

Then, we had our fall ...

In the midst of our splendor

I was torn from your embrace  
By slavery, prejudice, and hatred

Brought to this foreign land

My sons and daughters were ripped from my bosom  
And you stood helpless

My black man ...

I know your plight  
I understand your struggle

For I too have had an intense struggle

But we have survived

We have survived slavery  
We have survived prejudice  
Yes, we have survived hatred

We have survived the harshest, the most painful persecutions

But not always together.

Now I say:

***“Stand with me again for  
I am your black woman***



Reflection:

I think this poem from my mother is very deep. It talks about how the black man and woman stood together when we had power over our lands. But when we had captivity, we struggled. We survived the hatred and painful times, and now we can stand together. In this poem there were a lot colorful adjectives. It made me think back to the time when we were ruling great nations as kings and queens and when we were in captivity. I think that this poem should be said to a lot of black people in the world, because we need to know about our history and who's the enemy. A lot of us are fighting each other rather than fighting the real enemy, which are white people. And in history, we also need to know that we were great Kings and Queens: smart, intelligent, architects, scientists, doctors, and many more. We can apply this now. So we all need to stand together and fight.

### ***A Song:***

*Good Morning, Good Morning, Good Morning to you.*

*Good Morning, Good Morning, and how do you do.*

*I dress up with a smile on my face,*

*Good Morning, Good Morning along the way.*

That was a short song that my Baba Medan Gilliam made up when my brothers Akin, Tunji and I were in my mom's womb. I remember him singing it to us every morning.

Reflection:

I loved listening to this song when I was little. I think the purpose of this song is to make someone happy about their day and to get ready for the day. Instead of starting your day negatively and having bad things come your way, this



## Reflection:

I think this poem from my mother is very deep. It talks about how the black man and woman stood together when we had power over our lands. But when we had captivity, we struggled. We survived the hatred and painful times, and now we can stand together. In this poem there were a lot colorful adjectives. It made me think back to the time when we were ruling great nations as kings and queens and when we were in captivity. I think that this poem should be said to a lot of black people in the world, because we need to know about our history and who's the enemy. A lot of us are fighting each other rather than fighting the real enemy, which are white people. And in history, we also need to know that we were great Kings and Queens: smart, intelligent, architects, scientists, doctors, and many more. We can apply this now. So we all need to stand together and fight.

## A Song:

*Good Morning, Good Morning, Good Morning to you.*

*Good Morning, Good Morning, and how do you do.*

*I dress up with a smile on my face,*

*Good Morning, Good Morning along the way.*

That was a short song that my Baba Medan Gilliam made up when my brothers Akin, Tunji and I were in my mom's womb. I remember him singing it to us every morning.

## Reflection:

I loved listening to this song when I was little. I think the purpose of this song is to make someone happy about their day and to get ready for the day. Instead of starting your day negatively and having bad things come your way, this song can help put a smile on your face to start off your day being positive. Remembering this song can help someone who is feeling down about their day become optimistic.

# Madzimoyo Family

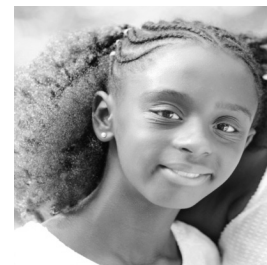
dialogue with the past & the future



The Family Lore Project (FLP) experience has been impactful for our family. As a blended family, there are multiple ancestral lineages and stories represented in our household. This project has allowed all of us to learn stories from these lineages. Our children also have been able to learn more about their parents. It made me feel good to read the reflections and analysis of my son after he read my reflections of my first trip to Haiti. It was affirming! FLP has truly deepened our connections with each other and our ancestors and has reinforced for us the notion of family as a circle that connects those passed on with those living and to those yet unborn.

—Ayinde & Mary Madzimoyo

## Madzimoyo-Rush Time-Travelers & Student Authors



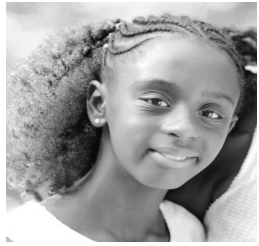
Nia Rush



Addae Madzimoyo



Olaniyan Madzimoyo



### Nia Rush's Family Lore Reflection

Hi! My name is Nia. I'd like to tell you a story that my Great-Aunt Jacque told me about my great-grandmother, who was the oldest and a mother figure, and her younger brother.

One day my aunt's brother and some friends skipped school and stole a huge pot of spaghetti from the neighbor's house. When my great grandmother got out of school herself, she pursued him and he ran back to their house. He knew she was coming and he thought that she would whoop him. He raised a large red brick over his head to hit her with. By the time she got to him there was no need to whoop him. He had been holding a brick covered in red ants. He was bitten all over his body!

#### Reflection

I think there are multiple morals to this story that all tie together but still have very distinct meanings to me:

1. Treat other's the way you want to be treated. This is a double loss or double win situation. It depends on what you do, not anyone else. Also, it doesn't apply to only the little things. For example, if you hit me, I'll hit you back. It could be as serious as your life. If you ruin someone else's life over something small, they are going to make yours as miserable as possible. If they don't, karma is going to turn around and do it for them, charging you down like an angry bull.

On the flip side it could be the exact opposite if you help someone out in a big way, costing yourself something you wanted. While they're not in a space to help you out, the universe will have your back. It's a "both-and" situation.

2. What goes around comes around. What goes around can be good or bad, happy or sad, depressing or uplifting. The connection between it all is that it depends on what you give, and you can only control what the universe sends out to you in one way: by putting in what you want to get out.

3. Respect your elders as much as you respect yourself because you wouldn't be here without them. Respecting your elders is taught in my family as one of the most important things that you have to learn to do. This is because without them, you would not be here. When you disrespect them you disrespect yourself as well. Really, if you think about it, it's a double loss.

Addae Madzimoyo



One thing I like about this project is that it asked us to find both the written and oral literature of our family. I really love to read and I got to read my father's 4-part series about his trip to Haiti and about my grandfather's early life. In between, I squeeze in some words from my mother. These are selections I've chosen to showcase my family lore collection. My reflections follow. I hope you enjoy them.

### *My trip to Ayiti (Excerpted)*

*By Ayinde Madzimoyo*

Aight I'ma do this in increments. I traveled to 3 areas of Ayiti. Port au Prince in the central region, Port de Paix in the Northeast region, and Cap Haitien in the Northwest.

The flight over was wild! It was full of Haitian folk.

And if I didn't know better I would've thought that they all knew each other. From the initial boarding folks were engaged in lively, passionate, and loud conversation. A sista translated some for me. She told me they were debating bout the world cup. I'm talking bout they was loose with it! Yelling and everything. On the airplane! I loved it. Black people being black people. There was a level of comfort and identification with each other that was beautiful. A few snooty folks was trippin' off the loudness, but nobody paid them attention (lol).

Port au Prince was overwhelming on a number of levels. Initially it was sensory overload. I had never seen so many people outside, moving, working, hustling at one time before. The traffic and driving seemed frenetic! It seemed that every available piece of land was built upon.



Concrete structures abounded. Everybody seemed to be selling something! Water, drinks, mangos, phone minutes, snacks, shoes, clothes and a seemingly endless amount of other products.

Evidence of the earthquake was overwhelming. Rubble was everywhere. Pancaked buildings. Buildings partially collapsed. Buildings totally collapsed. Big buildings and small buildings. Churches, schools, stores, and homes. It was a lot. Draining. Tent cities abounded. Everywhere we went in the city we saw them. Many of the tent cities we saw had corn growing in between the rows of tents. People had installed doors on their tents. Folks tryna make what they can out of what they have.

What I did not see a lot of was depression, complacency, or hopelessness. One of the feelings that I get when I walk through some hoods in America is despair. As if hopelessness has latched

onto our communities. I did not feel this in Port au Prince. It was inspiring! Against the backdrop of indescribable wreckage folks were making moves. Living. With resolute spirits. While there, I heard deeply painful and personal stories of the loss that the earthquake caused. Its hard to imagine myself enduring such pain. It hurts me to think of the millions of people who had to endure it. I was joyful to see so many living, loving, laughing, and working in the pain's aftermath.

I saw a large UN presence. Their occupation force in Ayiti is called the Minustah. They drive throughout the streets in a myriad of vehicles, from small cars to military trucks. Always armed with high powered weaponry. The red cross has a strong presence. US AID has a strong presence. They clearly have plans for Ayiti.

We were hosted by a grassroots organization based in Ayiti called Ujamaa Works and an elder, Mama Mawiyah, also known as Valerie Waden. We were grateful for all they did for us during our trip. The work that they have done and are doing in Ayiti is considerable and needs our support. Their work addresses needs in Ayiti spanning from education, housing, food and water, mental health, to traditional Haitian culture and the arts. Mama Mawiyah is originally from Houston. She has been living in Ayiti for 5 years and working there for 23. She works in collaboration with a cadre of committed, activist minded Afrikans from Ayiti. We learned a great deal from this crew of folk. We tried persistently to get up with a couple of other activist folks we know, but were not able to connect.

Our living conditions were nice. We were comfortable. We didn't have running water and electricity most of the time there. The running water depended on the electricity because it pumped from the bottom of the well to the top of the house. Apparently, for the most part, I adjusted well. I didn't go to Ayiti for a vacation, after all. We used well

water for bathing and flushing the toilet. And we went to the street to buy drinking water every morning from a pump. Over time it became clear that I really don't need running water or electricity. They are luxuries that over time have become dependencies for many of us. Not having those things made me feel a little more independent. In fact just being in Ayiti made me feel more independent. More at home even.

The people are beautiful. Deep, deep chocolates and browns. The features were striking. The eyes. Did I mention the deep chocolate? Like midnight. The sistas? Man. Smh. Thas all I'ma say about that.

I have not yet been to Afrika. And... even on this first, urban leg of the trip, Haiti felt like Afrika. On so many levels, it felt like I imagine urban centers in Afrika to feel. The markets in Ayiti were wild! Talk about sensory overload. It felt like the entire city was a market until I actually saw the market. So much goin on. Organized chaos like a muhf... Throughout so many people carried loads, large and small, on their heads. Animals were everywhere. I mean everywhere. Chickens, pigs, goats, mules. Chickens and pigs seemingly ran free. I asked if they had owners and was told that they know their owners and go home at night.

## ***Part 4***

I arrived in Cap Ayisyen on a Tap Tap, a Haitian taxi filled to capacity. A group of moto taxis was waiting for us as we disembarked. They damn near fought over me. I was bein' pulled in a couple of directions. It was cool though. It wasn't hostile. We finally got two motos that took us to where we were staying.

Cap Ayisyen, or Okap, as it's known in Ayiti, was an altogether different experience than Port au Prince. Okap is the second largest city in the nation. The history of this city and the region that surrounds it is

powerfully rich. This region was the birthplace of the Haitian Revolution. Makandal was held hostage on a plantation just south of Okap and escaped to mountains overlooking the city. Boukman was a commandeur, or overseer, on a plantation in the region. Both Boukman and Makandal were executed at a public square that still exists in the middle of Cap Ayisyen. Bwa Kayiman, the site of the ceremony that sparked the revolution is but minutes outside of Okap. Most of the major battles of the war for independence were fought in the Northeast region. I could go on and on. The city and surrounding mountains and countryside are, themselves, monuments to this history. Landmarks and memorials abound in this area. The architecture creates a feel of being transported into times past. I swear it felt like I was in New Orleans two hundred years ago. The French colonial style buildings, cobblestone and dirt roads... it was wild! Okap is a bustling city but is not as heavily populated as Port au Prince. It has a more relaxed feel about it. I loved this place! Another noticeable contrast was the absence of earthquake ruins.

We stayed in what looked like an old rooming house. Seriously old. My room was on the second floor and had a balcony overlooking the street. There was a well that we had to draw water from to bathe and flush the toilet with. It was a cool spot.

We arrived in the evening on the first day. We laid our stuff down and went to the public square which was a block away from where we were staying. This was the square where Boukman and Makandal were publicly tortured and executed. Makandal was burned at the stake. The story is that he turned into a bird or fly and flew out of the flames that had seemingly consumed him. Remnants of his body were not found in the ashes. Boukman was beheaded. His head was placed on a post and displayed as a deterrent to others who would follow his example. The square is now a social gathering place. There is a plaque in the corner of the square summarizing the story of

Boukman's exploits and execution. What's wild is that directly across the street from the square is a huge church that has at least been there since the time of Boukman, 1791. Flanking each side of the entrance to the church, and overlooking the square are two huge statues of white men in robes with their arms outstretched. I was told they represented Peter and Paul. The disrespect! I felt like burning the place down. This was sacred ground that Afrikans fought and died to liberate and avenge. It saddened and angered me that we would allow such a symbol of our terrorism at the hands of these people to remain there, of all places.

The next day we arose early and caught a tap-tap to a town outside of Okap called Milot. We were heading to the Citadelle. The Citadelle is a fort commissioned by Dessalines after the Revolution was victorious in 1804. Henri Christophe, one of the generals of the revolution and 2nd president of Ayiti, oversaw its construction. The rationale behind it was to prevent the reconquering of Ayiti by the French. So Dessalines commissioned the building of these forts in strategic positions atop mountains. I went with a few Haitians. My traveling partna suggested that we take horses up to the Citadelle. I didn't want to spend unnecessary money so I said "na I'll walk". Bad move. The path up the mountain was steep and long. And it was hot as... shit I 'on't know. Just hot. 30 minutes into it I was like what have I gotten myself into lol. Luckily one of the folks I was traveling with let me get on one of the horses. I rode for the next 30 min then let him get back on. I realized that the problem was that at first I was tryna keep up with the horses. Humping it up the mountain. This time I paced myself. As we walked up the mountain there were homes built with wood and earth, family yards, little children playing all along the way. There were a number of small waterfalls where folks bathed and gathered water. There were so many fruit bearing trees. We saw a houngan's house. It was identified with a red and blue flag and bottles atop the flag post.

After 2 hours or so we reached the summit of the mountain. Incredible!! The Citadelle was gargantuan! It was made up of what seemed like countless sections and rooms and nooks and pathways. At the top there were hella cannons pointed out away from the Citadelle. Piles and piles of cannon balls of different sizes were piled at various locations. The view from the top of the Citadelle was paralyzing! We could see for miles and miles around. We could see cities in the distance. Flat plains and rolling mountains. As I watched over this sacred land from this monument to Afrikan victory and sovereignty, I was overcome. I felt free. In a different sense than I had ever felt before. Hard to put words to it.

The next day we met with an organization called Dawo. The organization was founded in Port au Prince. A sista from the original chapter then moved to Cap Ayisyen and started a second chapter. They were primarily young people. Ages 20-40. Mostly 20's and early 30's though. They were on-point! The organization is dedicated to the embrace of Ayiti's traditional culture (vodun) and the application of the culture toward the liberation of Ayisyen people from foreign and enemy interests. My partna was translating for me as they spoke. They asked me why I came to Ayiti. They asked what we're doing in the states consistent with the mission of Dawo. They were serious. We met outside under a tree in a residential area of the city.

That same day we went to Bwa Kayiman. Two sistas from the organization went with us. The sista we had met waiting for the boat and the sista that founded Dawo. We caught a tap-tap and moto to get there. The moto dropped us off at a clearing. There were homes and little children playing in the vicinity. In this clearing there were remains of a tree that I was told was a tree of significance in the Bwa Kayiman ceremony. Reportedly the tree was killed by a white missionary. I also heard that Papa Doc took the tree and planted it at another spot to create a second "Bwa Kayiman" to validate his authority.

From the clearing we walked up a hill about 20 minutes. We crossed a river and spring to enter a cave. Along the way, one of the sistas, named Ayida, was leading us in song after song. Songs for Boukman and Dessalines. Songs for the ancestors. Songs for the Lwa. Sad songs. Happy songs. She knew songs for days. It was from her that I realized that, in Ayiti, the songs tell the story. From Afrika to the present. The songs invoke a deep, vibrant, and living memory. They are containers that hold the collective memory of Ayisyen people throughout time and space. They are powerful beyond measure. Below is one of the songs that she sang:

Boukman o,  
Father Bookman

Lan Bwa Kayiman,  
Of Bwa Kayiman

Nou nonmen non w,  
We call on you

Nou pa detounen w,  
Never to bother you

Papa Boukman o ,  
Father Bookman

Lan Bwa Kayiman,  
Of Bwa Kayiman

Nou gen ase.  
We have suffered enough

Mwen rele  
I say

Mwen we ase , mwen rele  
I have seen enough, I say

Nou rive lan to bout o,

We cannot tolerate anymore

Peyi a divize  
The country is divided

Lafanmi dozado,  
The family is disunited

Nou pat fè Bwa Kayiman  
Bwa Kayiman was not held

Pou n sèvi etranje  
For us to be subservient

We poured libation and prayed in the cave as we sang. Leaving the cave Ayida sang a hauntingly powerful song that translated to: Boukman you have left us, you did not leave us the secret. Dessalines you have left, you did not leave us the secret. There was some other lyrics to the song that I don't remember. The brotha I was with was in tears as we made our way back down the hill.

The next day I flew back to Port au Prince and the following day I flew home.

I know that Haiti will play an important role in my development for years to come. I was called there. I am called to return. There is something for me there. It is my doorway to Afrika. It is most appropriate that I traveled there before going to the continent. I am grateful to my "people" for getting me there. They definitely had my back.

*Ayinde Madzimoyo*

## My Reflections

Thanks for reading parts 1 and 4 of my father's 4-part series. Here are my thoughts on it. I hope you enjoy.



So, first, I liked the way he told the story. He went to Port au Prince, Port da Paix, and Cap Haitien (more commonly known there as Okap). I liked the detail in which he described each of the places he had been. I felt like I was there, or I was looking at a photo. Compared to America, I feel that Ayiti is more interesting, both the place and the people. As he described it, even the plane ride there was more lively. From the way he described, the city is very active and bustling, and everyone had something to sell. I thought the city was interesting. It seems like the type of place where you would be there for a short amount of time, but you could have many experiences. From what I could tell, there was a sort of untamed feel to it, like everybody was doing their own thing. I think I would like to visit.

I liked the way he talked about his ride from Port au Prince to La Pwen de Palmes, the Palace of the Palms. You could tell the difference between the land hundreds of years before and currently - just bare land everywhere. This is a huge problem because trees produce oxygen. What will we do when there are no trees?

Then, when he was closer to his destination, there were more trees and greenery. I liked imagining the transition from a modern feel to a more rural feel. Even for me, as he rode through, it felt like traveling through time -- like he went from bustling city to a sort of village type of vibe. It was a different type of interesting.

When he arrived I could imagine all the palm trees, along with all types of fruit trees. I always thought it would be nice to just walk up to a tree and pick a mango to eat. It seems like an interesting experience. When I read that he stayed on someone's family land, I thought, "cool." I wonder how it feels to be standing on the ground and know that it is yours. You own it. Even imagining it gave me a feeling of power.

Through the words he used, I could see the place. It felt like the type of feel you would get from an African village, at least how I imagined it like you were connecting to the past. It seemed like the man Baba stayed with had a whole lot of family. They had their own land as well. I thought that families seem a lot more connected over in Ayiti than we are in America. I have a lot of family, but I barely know most of them. Some I've met, and I don't even remember their names. The sense of togetherness felt a lot stronger with all families in the area.

I thought that it was cool that when Baba sang a vodun song, everybody recognized it and joined in. Here, you get weird looks if you sing too loud, because they have no idea what you are saying. The reaction is very different.

I liked how he talked about the view throughout the series, especially on his ride from La Pwen to Okap. I could imagine the almost ancient feel.

I thought the part about the shrine to Erzulie Danto was interesting. He met a lady that had stayed for two weeks. I thought it was weird that the shrine was like shelter for people. But maybe I would be considered unusual, as the culture is probably different there. I thought that the debates about christianity vs vodun were cool. The lady

was saying stuff Im sure that a lot of black people would agree with.

I feel like Okap was the place most connected to the Haitian Revolution. What with Bwa Kayiman and stuff, it was most rooted in the fight our ancestors waged. I thought the experiences in the fort built by Dessalines was cool. I thought it was funny how he tried to walk up a mountain while keeping up with horses. Then when he went to the cave and prayed and sung, I thought it was cool. The whole experience seemed cool. His writing helped me experience it like I was there. I hope you all enjoyed it too.

Now, lets turn to the words of my mother - Krista Madzimoyo.

That's her on the right.

Your beauty is authored by eternity, headlined amongst the brightest stars, never to be edited , redefined, or bound by this week's current issue because you are bold, you are beautiful, you are timeless! - *Krista Madzimoyo*

My mother wrote this in response to a picture of an African woman reading a magazine. The photo showed it almost as if the woman was comparing herself to that magazine. I think my mother wrote this as encouragement. I liked this because it was like she was raising the spirit of the woman in the picture.

Here's my grandfather's writing that I promised:

## *"Speaking in Tongue"*

By my Grandfather Wekesa Madzimoyo



This is my Uncle Hervie and Aunt Rosie. They have passed on to the other side, and few will know how much these two meant to me. My mother (Maggie Tucker) was young, rebounding from a failed marriage with my father. She decided to give the Big Apple a go for it. But the Big Apple could gobble you up and spit you out. Many became disillusioned when they found out that NYC was just "Up South."

Fortunately, her oldest brother, Hervie, and his wife, Rosie, were already cutting a path. Hervie was one of the Uncles that was "Dad" when I was away from my Father Chisulu (Cornell Geddie, Jr.) back in NC. He gave me my first "job" working with his landscaping company in Long Island. He'd tried his hand at boxing. Though, I never watched him fight in person, there was this iconic photo of him in the ring that I just loved. He was the "Brown Bomber" before I ever knew of Joe Louis. Even today whenever I put up my "dooks" I'm imagining I'm him in the ring - Bem, Pop, Pop, BEM!

Now, Aunt Rosie, besides being one of the most beautiful women on the planet, was a prayin' kind of woman. When you went to prayer meeting with her, you knew that you and your knees were going to be there for a while - a long while.

She was also a strong woman who felt deeply and loved hard. Her hugs were full of love and energy - they'd make a man out of you, too. I never remember her sittin'. She always took action.

She took action after I was hit by a car on Gates Ave. in Brooklyn. They called the ambulance and waited but ambulances were in no rush to get to a Black child lying in the gutter in the ghetto. Though I was



only 5-years-old, I remember the neighbor who shouted, "look out" from her second floor window across the street. I looked up at her, then heard the screech of the tires, twisted my head just enough to see the car's shiny bumper. I don't remember the pain, just the gutter.

Talkin' about it later, my mother said that I would repeat a phrase over and over. In a voice to imitate mine at 5, she sang: *"If I got to die, take me down South, If I got to die, take me down South, If I got to die..."* Down South was Fayetteville, NC. where we'd moved from. Where our people were.

They weren't waiting any longer. Uncle Mack, who had been a medic in the army, put me in the back seat of his car and rushed me to the hospital. The ambulance caught up with us at the first one, but I was taken to another, then another. Aunt Rosie was there with me and my mother at each hospital - as they searched for "what I needed."

When one physician announced "internal bleeding and a fractured skull," I heard Aunt Rosie cry out in anguish *"Oh God!"* Then she starting singing, rocking and doubling her prayers in both volume and intensity. She started "speaking in tongue," as we used to say.

Many, many, many years would pass before I would hear that "tongue" again. By then, I'd graduated from college, and was working in Montgomery, AL. I had organized and financed a four nation photography and research tour starting with Kemet (Egypt), then, Kenya.

I was on the third leg outside a church service in Harare, Zimbabwe on a Sunday morning. I'd been across the street taking photos in the park, when I heard these sounds. They came through the window of the YMCA building. Was it Shona? Ndebele? I hadn't been in Zimbabwe long enough to distinguish them, but I could here what sounded like my Aunt

Rosie - many times over. Their voices called to me.

Could my Aunt Rosie really be in Zimbabwe? No, she wasn't, but that "tongue" she was speaking sure was. I crossed the street and sat on a bench just under the window so I could hear and experience being home - in more ways than one.

When I returned from my tour, I couldn't wait to talk to Aunt Rosie. Not over the phone, though. This had to be face-to-face. I told her what I heard and experienced in Zimbabwe, told her how it sounded and felt just like what I heard and felt at Uncle Johnny's storefront "Tabernacle."

Then I asked: "Aunt Rosie, could it be that when you used to "get the spirit" and start speaking in "tongue" when I was growin' up, you were actually connecting to and speaking an ancient Afrikan tongue?"

I didn't know what to expect.

She and I had been separated since I was in the 7th or 8th grade when my moved to Willingboro, NJ - just outside of Philly. We'd never had any Black power, Black culture conversations, so I hoped that she could hear what I was saying without dismissing it, or worse - dismissing me. She didn't surprise me. We still had a special connection. She could feel my sincerity. She listened. She thought about the question, and with an approving hint of a smile dancing in the corner of her mouth, said, "You know, Wekesa, it could be. It just could be." That was good enough for me.

### Reflection:

I really liked this story. I liked the last part the most. How Aunt Rosie was sounding like those people praying in Zimbabwe. I thought that was cool because it connects people that live in completely different places. I also

thought it was cool how Uncle Hervy tried boxing. Just imagine being like Joe Louis or Muhammad Ali. I think that would be really cool.

Olaniyan Madzimoyo

**M**y parents don't like oppression. That's clear from my mother's writing that I've entitled:

### *Head Wrap in the Hen House*

Let me say that the US Government never wages war out of a kind heart. This war ain't about the poor children. It is ALWAYS over LAND, POWER, and/or RESOURCES. Even if the US military protects a country, it is because that country will be indebted to the US for a century to come or they need that country for access to resources. All of this is usually following US backed coups, assassination attempts and/or providing weapons to the current regime's oppositional forces. This happens time and time again, each war with a new name & new propaganda machine. Will the US media show us the number of children murdered from the missiles sent? Probably not! And... folks really erk my nerves by making comments like, "this ain't the black man's fight so it's none of my business" because when chickens come home to roost, folks ain't gonna give you a pass because you've got a head wrap on in the hen house.

*-Krista Madzimoyo 7/16/17*



### Reflection

I think this will show people what white people in America are like. I also think it is telling us not to just sit back and watch while all of these things are happening to our people. We need to be more active in terms of taking our freedom and I think that is what this writing is trying to convey. It will be a good message to show to future children in our family that we should actively take our freedom instead of waiting and passively asking for it.

Here's another selection from my mother:

I hope I'm alive when NASA thinks they make a historic "discovery" of life on a star/planet in outer space. They finally get there and they see highly advanced African people with highly advanced African Culture. There is no disease, everyone is living in Maat, no pollution, and they have highly advanced technology built and used at harmony with the environment. Then NASA ask them how long have you been here? Their guide, Imhotep says "Funny you don't know about us. We laugh about that all of the time. In fact, we sent an expedition there before 3,400 B.C.E. to inhabit the earth. Some decided to stay and some decided to return. I've visited myself a time or two. We estimated at that point when your technology would be advanced enough for you to visit us. We've also estimated that your culture is not advanced enough to comprehend our existence and therefore you cannot fully understand your own."

*-Krista Madzimoyo*

### Reflection:

This is good for our family because it will greater teach us the importance of African people. It will also make us want to learn more about the things that African people have done throughout history and the significance and impact we have had not only on America but on the world. It will also give us a greater understanding of the love and respect that she had for African people and for her family.

***It's a poor rat, that aint' got but one  
hole***

*-Family Proverb from Tucker side*

Reflection:

This proverb I heard from my Aunt Sarafina. She learned from her dad who learned it from his mother, my Grandma Tulenagwe (aka Maggie Tucker Wright). It means that you should plan ahead and always have back up plans and multiple people that are willing to sacrifice for you. I think this will be a lesson to future people in our generation because I think they would realize how much their family does for them. It is important for our family because we will not make the same mistakes our ancestors did. This will also help people make better choices in their life that will greatly impact their family and the people around them.

My last selection takes excerpts from my father's FaceBook post called "25 Truths About Me." that he published in 2016.

***25 Truths about Me***

(Excerpts)

1. I'm seriously considering deleting all of my social networking accounts i.e. Myspace, Facebook, ning sites, etc. For multiple reasons.
2. I have a fear of not fulfilling my mission/destiny on this planet before my death.
3. I often envision my funeral. Ironically in my head it always looks like the funeral of a friend of mine that passed a year ago. In fact, I didn't start envisioning it until he

passed. I'm not scared of passing soon. I just think about it alot. And what people will remember about me.

4. I LOVE AFRIKAN PEOPLE. This reality contextualizes my entire existence on this planet.
5. My father is the yardstick by which I measure myself. I'm scared I won't ever measure up. If he knew this he would say something about not using self to other comparison, but to use him as a source of information and inspiration.
6. My last name, Madzimoyo, means water or essence of life. It is from the Ngoni of Malawi. The Ngoni migrated to Malawi in the 19th century from South Afrika where they existed as clans of the AmaZulu. Shaka Zulu's oppressive exploits in the region precipitated their exodus along with others in a period termed "mfecane" by Afrikans in the region. Mfecane means "scattering."
7. I wish I was closer with my sistas. I love them dearly. I'm confident that our relationship will grow closer with time.
8. I got in a fight on prom night my senior year at an after party. I didn't want to. I hit him once and the fight was over. I broke my finger when I hit him though. Had to have pins put in it to hold the bone together. I wonder who got the best of that one?
9. I often envision my progeny having a family reunion 150-200 years after I pass. In my vision a family elder is pouring libation invoking me among other family ancestors and the RBG flag is blowing in the wind. And then we start to come down...
10. I wish I knew more about my Mother. I love her very deeply as sons love mothers. I sense that there are some crucial things that I don't know about her. And her parents for that matter...
11. One of my primary criteria for real friendship is whether or not I believe a

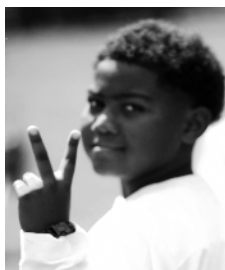
person will fight with me, i.e. have my back. I have to know that if it goes down we gon' be together whether its 2 on 2 or 2 on 10.

12. I think memory is at the core of our existence as Afrikan people. The extent to which we repair our collective memory is the extent to which we will win this war and rebuild our world.
13. If I could have been present at any time and place in our history it would have to be 1791, Ayiti/ Haiti, Bwa Kayiman. Hands down. Let's get it!

*-Ayinde Madzimoyo*

### Reflection

I think it is important that he wrote this because I never knew a lot of the things that he wrote, and I feel like it connects us more and it makes me learn more about his personality. This writing will also allow future generations of our family to know what he was like and learn about him in ways that they wouldn't have, without him writing about himself. This is important for my father because it shows that he is in synch with himself and who he is, it will set a good example for me and future generations of the Madzimoyo line.



# Muhammad Family

dialogue with the past & the future



Asalaah Muhammad  
Time-Traveler  
Student-Author (12)



Khadirah Muhammad  
Time-Traveler  
Student-Author (15)

This Family Lore project is one of the most important assignments that my children have ever had. While they were not excited with the process, they were amused with what they learned. Khadirah seems to have a deeper sense and love for family, while Asaalah is learning that her parents once had a life before her.

This project touched me as I watched my mother and my husband's mother share stories with the girls. Those were surreal moments where I saw the energy of the past being transferred far into the future, because I know the girls will one day share these stories with their children and grandchildren and so on. My heart smiles. My eyes fill with tears of joy as I read their words and know that they get it! I would love to see this project carry on so that we can discover and record more family jewels. Thank you AYA!

Asaalah Muhammad



My first family-lore selection comes from something that my maternal Grandmother, Vera Woods, says that inspires me. No matter what we face, she always says:

***"Let's make it."***

Reflection:

This quote means: Whenever you have something to do, just do it. No excuses; just jump on it. I take this personally because, sometimes, whenever I say I'm going to do something, I don't do it. So in the future, I should take this to heart and just do it.

My second selection is from a song called "Real."

I'll focus on these two lines:

***"Let me hold you; let me show you.  
All the things lovers should do."***

Reflection:

It is pretty simple. The singer - a woman - wants to show her would-be-lover all the things that lovers do. The real surprise for me is that these are the words my mother sang to hundreds of people! She was a part of a female singing group - the "Paypa Doll\$." My mother, a star! I never thought of that. And it's really funny, because I never heard this song from my Mom my whole entire life, so I was glad to hear it. Singing it is one thing; I also discovered that she wrote the song. I was even more surprised.

My third selection from my family lore is from my older Sister - Hannefa. This selection is from her writing when she was an AYA student years before me.

Dear Araminta (Harriet Tubman), you have inspired me so much to do something for my people. Your most inspiring words were the prayer you said to Allah to kill your captor! That taught me you cannot change a person, so you have to leave them, and on some occasions, like you said, you have to kill them. You suffered for our people's freedom.



What I think of freedom is that Allah is going to

wipe out America and the blood suckers of the poor. That is freedom to me. But my thoughts of freedom is different from yours. You worked for Black people to be free from captivity. But I want America and the unrighteous people to be destroyed.

In the Civil War you showed everyone what you could do by serving as a general on the Combahee River Campaign. I want to thank you for your bravery, sacrifice, blood, and strength to free Black people. You were a nurse, doctor, freedom-fighter, humanitarian and much more. So the least I can do is to fulfill my vision to tell my people the truth and educate them... I pray you will guide me through my life.

Thank you, Haneefa (@ age 11)

My reflection:

This letter to Araminta was about Haneefa thanking Araminta for all of her hard work. She talked about how grateful she was and how Araminta inspired her. However, she also talked about how the way Araminta wanted freedom was different from hers. It makes me think, "Hey, just because we follow a person does not mean we agree with everything that person says." I think she wrote this for the AYA class called *Following Araminta*. I'm really glad she learned about Araminta like I am doing right now.

### **Family Saying:**

*"Don't say can't because that's a cuss word. So you better not say can't around me"*

~ Omie (Grandmother on Dad's side)



Khadirah



Omie

We always say we can't do something. "I can't read; I can't write; I can't si-blah blah". It's a bunch of stuff people say they can't do. If you always say "I can't," you will believe that you can't. Can't is a strong word. What's the meaning of "can't?" The meaning of "can't?" Once you break it down, it means can not. As I said before you restrict yourselves when you say can't. But when you say "I CAN DO THIS," you build up confidence to do whatever it is you wish to.

This quote creates the feeling of being powerful. The mind is the most powerful tool of the body. The brain is divided into 4 different lobes. The 4 lobes are the frontal, parietal, temporal, and occipital. The different parts of the brain control different parts of the body. I took it upon myself to look up what part of the brain controls emotions. From my research, I found that the amygdala, a small almond-shaped structure deep inside the brain, and the hippocampus, a tiny seahorse-shaped structure seems to be the main areas involved with emotions.

When you say or think certain things, those words and thoughts can affect your body and mood. You maybe have

heard the saying ‘sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.’ I have to disagree with this saying. I think words can hurt you. They can also lift you. Do you remember the last time someone told you that you couldn’t do something? Once I was getting ready to race an old friend. I was determined to out-run that person. I knew that I could win; I boasted that I would win! “That’s impossible, you CAN’T beat me,” the friend said. Somehow, that affected me and no matter how hard I tried, I could not win.

This is what my Grandmother Omie knew. She didn’t want me to ‘beat myself’ by saying “I can’t.” Her warning, and that loss, has made me careful of what I say and what I let in.

Cited works: Omie Personal interview.

### *Millions of Blue Birds*



From my paternal Grandmother Vickie Wane to her mother Patricia Miles

*“Millions and millions of blue birds  
Millions and millions of red birds  
All different colors, just dressed up for  
my mother  
For I love my mother and she loves me  
too  
So let the pretty little blue birds sang  
the whole day through”*

This poem expresses the love she has for her mother. All the little birds are all the things she loves about her mother, and the little bird sings because singing out love is better than speaking it.

***To the 4<sup>th</sup> Power!***



This is my Great-Great-great-Great-Grandmother Maudie. She is from my grandmother’s father’s side of the family. She’s Great to the 4th power! Grandmother Maudie was fully Native American.

### *... Until the 12<sup>th</sup> of Never*

There is nothing like family. Family is always there to help and support. A family is like any army. We protect and fight for each other. On the outside, we may seem big and mean, but we also love, have fun and chill out. My family loves to come together and talk life. We play games, eat and sing. Come with me on a journey inside my family.

Every year at the family reunion we play games and sing songs. We have many people in our family who had singing groups “back in the day.” My sister, Asaalah, already told you about the “Paypa Doll\$” - the group formed by my mother and her two older sisters. My uncle Edgar was in a group called “The Omega Showman.” While we have lots of singing talent in our family, I wasn’t so blessed. But that doesn’t mean I can’t hit a note in the shower.

Every time we get together we HAVE to listen to ***Fantasy*** by Earth Wind and Fire. If we don’t listen to it, our time together will feel incomplete.



When we sing the song I feel warm and joyful. There is nothing like family singing together. It feels so good to connect to each other through music. While my everyday music may not be my mother’s and her’s not mine, when we all find a song we all can vibe to, it’s fun!

“And we will live together, until the twelfth of never; Our voices will ring forever, as one.” These are my favorite lines. They remind us that even when our bodies are gone, our souls / spirits are still here.



Khadirah

PROOF

# Sherrod Family

dialogue with the past & the future



**L-R top row:** Laura A Cuffee and William D. Denvy, John A. Graves and Margie Lee-Graves, Shahida (V.E. Smith) Sherrod & Hannibal A. Sherrod, Donna Morrison and Nija Jeter

**L-R second row:** Andrew Sherrod Jr. and Virdell Sherrod, Marjorie Crumbley, Jaleel Reese-Sherrod, Anana Reynolds, Jayanah Reynolds, and Jennah Reynolds, Gary Jeter

**Group Back Row:** Autumn Reid, DawnRae Prescott, Dale Prescott, Adero Prescott, Nadir Sherrod, Adam Prescott, **Front row:** Gabriel Reid, Zion Prescott, Niara Prescott



Nadir Sherrod  
Time-Traveler & Student Author (18)



# Sherrod Family

In the beginning I felt challenged to help Nadir with the Family Lore Project (FLP) research. I had mixed feelings. I was happy that it was mandatory for him; it forced us to start or continue a very important task to reach back and fetch our past and learn about ourselves through the elders and ancestors. I was scared; I wasn't certain we'd get answers from our elders. Those that are still with us are hesitant to share personal stories that carry painful memories or times of struggle and confusion. What we discovered not only lit a fire within me to continue to build on what has been started, it has also made me more curious about our unique imprint on this planet. No value can be placed on our story, the woven fabric reaching up the trunk from my children, through me, to the branches of my parents, grandparents, great grandparents and beyond.

Nadir's enthusiasm for this FLProject has been thrilling to observe. I've noticed him standing a little taller and more confident in his uniqueness. He sees himself in the images of great-great-great-great-grands. He admires their clothing and meticulous hairstyles. He wonders what stories they would have shared with him and what advice they have for his future. I see him rooted deeper.

– Adero D. Sherrod-Prescott



Nadir Sherrod  
Time-Traveler & Student Author

## *A Package Full*

There was a cautious tone in my Baba's voice when he shouted to my mother upstairs: "Dero! Do you know what your son is doing?" He was talking about me. I had received a letter package from the Scottish Rite Cathedral. The Scottish Rite Cathedral is a sector of the Free Masons organization that my Great Aunt Renee works for. As soon as my Baba said it was from the Scottish Rite Cathedral, my mama said it was my Great Aunt. I perked up, and all I could think about were the goodies that were inside that package. On my birthday that year, my Great Aunt had sent me a similar package full of money. It wasn't my birthday, and it was close to the holidays so I expected nothing less. I rushed downstairs only to rush right back up to my room with the envelope. I slid on the carpet to my ceiling to floor window and began to open the package. A one-thousand-person chorus began to sing as I took the contents of the package out; needless to say, it was not what I was expecting.

Brown cardboard paper slid out in my hand. Loopy, dramatic handwriting on a neon green notepaper greeted me with this message:

*"Hello Nephew, I hope this helps with your project."  
- Aunt Renee.*

I stared at the note blankly, trying to think of what project she was talking about. Undeterred, I continued to look. Beneath the cardboard paper were two faces I had never seen before. It was a man and a woman - a couple, it seemed. I

immediately saw me and my little brother, Zion, in his face. I also saw that the woman looked to be Native American, or perhaps Aboriginal. Then it hit me! My Great Aunt had sent me information for my Family Lore Project. I smiled broadly in the sunlight streaming through my window as I stared at these two beautiful people. Finally, some tangible images of my ancestors.

I touched my nose as I stared at the man's nose. His nostrils were wide and nose tip was pointed towards the horizon. The nose bridge struck out and from his nostrils, his cheekbones defined his face with deep lines. He had a mustache that stretched as far and a little beyond his long upper lip. His bottom lip sat symmetrically right underneath. He had a long face and a giraffe's neck to compliment it. His hair was combed to the sides and I know for sure, a sailor would've gotten lost in those waves. He wore a black suit jacket with a button down, white shirt underneath. As shirts during his time were, the collar sat a little ways up his neck with a large button at the very top. It seemed to be an eye without the pupil as it glowed pale white in the picture. Surely, they planned for the date for this occasion because, the man was not the only one dressed sharply.

Though finely clad, her face was the most striking thing to me. I couldn't find anyone that looked like her in my family lineage. Her face was round like Chinese dumplings. Her cheekbones still reached high for the sky though. Her ears hid underneath her loose locs flushed to the sides of her head. The point of her nose jutted out and down with large nostrils creating a shadow on her upper lip. Her upper lip was very thin and the bottom lip sat wide, denoting the wisdom she held inside. Her eyes looked like the sun during an eclipse; light shone bright from behind those dark brown eyes. Her brow was relaxed and her face showed no sign of blemishes. She wore a white shirt with some kind of

crystal button on the top of her chest area. Her neck barely stuck out underneath her shirt. She seemed a kind woman - at least that's the story the picture suggests. Examining their faces made me curious. "Who are these people?" "I know they are family, but exactly how are they connected to me?"

Hurriedly, I flipped the paper over to reveal the names of these two enigmatic people. It was on the white piece of printer paper that I saw the title

*"Photo of your Great-Great-Great-Great-Grandparents."*

I leaned in closer at the paper, tracing every line on the paper with my finger as I read more and more about these two people. My breath grew longer and deeper as I read the names of my ancestors:

*Laura A. Cuffee and William D. Denby*

They were married in 1876 for 24 years. It was as if a bulb had its light given back to it. I felt restored, I knew the names AND faces of my Great-Great-Great-Great-Grandparents. They stared back at me through the years, and I saw myself in them. I sat with that for a while before I moved to the treasure on the next page.

Green was all around. There were leaves outstretched over the stone to the left. The branches of the young tree in the middle grew up and curvy, trying to find the best sunlight. Directly underneath the small canopy was the brown dirt that served as a striking contrast between the gray slabs of stone that demarcated where my Great-Great-Great-Great-Grand-



parents were buried. Norfolk County, VA. That's where they grew up.

It occurred to me: I don't even know where Norfolk, VA is. The graves are inside the Cassell Cuffee Denby Family cemetery. We have a family graveyard from the 18<sup>th</sup> century! My last name is Sherrod. Now I was discovering that I descended from the family of Cassel, Cuffee, or Denby. So naturally, I will visit soon. And hopefully meet some folks who'll ask me "Who is you?"

The ancestral sun was shining bright. I now know two more names to call on when I need strength and love from my ancestors - Mama Laura A. Cuffee and Baba William D. Denby.

Photo of Laura A. Cuffee and William D. Denby

### ***"Words of Wisdom from Religious Women"***

(Grandma's and my Great Grandma's)

Christine Morrison's soothing voice caressed the ears of her children as she said to them, as she did every day, her favorite verse from the Bible:

*"Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." -*  
Proverbs 3:4 - 6

She had eight children - seven sons and one daughter. Her single daughter, the middle child, would live to be my grandmother, Donna Morrison. Donna Morrison would then live to give birth to my father, Gary Jeter. Grandma

Donna told me that she was raised Christian and that she raised my father to be Christian. He is not Christian now and neither am I; however, my family is a goulash of many different religious and spiritual practices that we all respect. Like her mother before her, Grandma Donna has favorite verses from the Bible that she says help her to do the work she needs to do. Her favorite verses are Isaiah 40:29 - 31.

*"He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."*

Reflection:

These Bible verses are used like proverbs in my Grandma Donna's side of my family. My Grandma Donna told me that she reads and reflects on her mother's and her own favorite verses to empower her. I imagine the Bible is like a source of solace for her. I think she is reminded of going to church with her mother and father when reading the Bible. Grandma Donna has to take care of many things including her mother who is currently in a hospice - she often sounds weary when we are talking on the phone. Her favorite Bible verse speaks of believing in God and allowing her strength to be replenished by that spiritual force. I believe with the courage and steadfastness that my Grandma approaches her responsibilities, she will always be replenished with strength from God to continue her journey. Her experience is something I pull on to empower me as well.

I do not have nearly as much responsibility as Grandma Donna; I am just now growing into an adult reality. I plan

to use both of my grandmothers' relationships with their favorite Bible verses for empowerment. In times when I feel that my responsibilities are overwhelming me, I want to remember Great Grandma Morrison's voice saying Proverbs 3:4 - 6 and Grandma Donna's saying Isaiah 40:29 - 31. Their examples help me to realize that life throws challenges and blessings at us, and it is up to us how we will handle them. They believed that if we face our challenges head on and do our best, then simultaneously we will be blessed by the Creative Force that is present all around us. One of my blessings is my grandmothers' guidance and examples. With that, I will walk a straight path and not be faint.

Now from my Grandmother, Shahida Sherrod's, side of the family:

### ***"Memories Hold Secrets to the Future"***

"This has been very difficult for me because my family never talks about the past, and by the time I was old enough to realize I could ask about the past, it was too late." That is what my Grandmother, Shahida (Virginia E. Smith) Sherrod, (I call her Shashi) said to me on the day she responded to my FLP request.

Her family has four main last names: Lee, Graves, Smith, and Crumbley. Shashi's mother's name was Marjorie Crumbley. According to legend, Great Grandma Marjorie was a wiz in the kitchen. Family members have told me of the pies and cakes she used to bake from scratch and the delicious meals she would prepare for Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas, the Fourth of July, and New Years. My only regret is that I will never get to taste her cooking for myself, however I like to think that her cooking gene has passed down to me and she is guiding me in the kitchen when I cook.

Great-Grandma Marjorie's mother's name is Margie Lee-Graves. Margie Lee-Graves was my Great-Great-Grandmother and her maiden name is Lee (also spelled Lea).

Great-Great-Grandma Margie Lee-Graves married my Great-Great-Grandfather, John A. Graves. Great-Great-Grandma Margie Lee-Graves was very proud of her crocheting. Shashi told me that the last thing Great-Great-Grandma Margie crocheted was a tablecloth for her dining room table. I have yet to know if that tablecloth is still in our family.

Great-Great-Grandfather John A. Graves was very proud of his shiny shoes. Shashi said she remembers his shoes always having a shine. She said he took great pride in shining, buffing, and polishing his shoes. I feel that same pride when I clean my sneakers, but I don't keep my shoes clean all the time like he would.



My Great-Great grandparents Margie Lee-Graves and John A. Graves both sit on my ancestor shrine in these two pictures:

Re: Photo on this page: From Bottom Left to Top Right: Unknown cousin, Great-Great Grandfather John A. Graves, Great- Great Grandmother Margie Lee-Graves, Great-Great-Great-Great Grandmother Kitty Wyatt, Unknown Cousin

Photo of my Great-Great Grandparents, Margie Lee-Graves and John A. Graves, and Great-Grandma Margie's brother.



# Simmons Family

dialogue with the past & the future



*My Family*

The Family Lore Project has been a source of joy and inspiration for our family. Farasha's research, collections of stories, anecdotes and wits from our family elders has given us much to reflect on, laugh about, retell, analyze, inquire more deeply and cherish the memories, wisdom and lore of our own ancestry. Thanks Baba Wekesa and AYA Educational Institute for making this a priority. It is priceless! —Mama Nikita.

Farasha Simmons (16)  
Time-Traveler & Student Author



*When Man Meets Dog, Meets Ice*  
(As told to me by my mother - Nikita Simmons)

My Intro/Reflection

**M**y grandfather has never been one to publicly lose his cool. "PawPaw" is what we call him. That's him in the picture with his arms around me and my sisters. What some might deem an "awkward" stature, my grandfather handles it well. He's very stubborn, but with good reason. He does not speak on something unless he knows the ends and the outs. And he usually knows the ends and the outs. It is complicated to catch Perry Simmons the Second in a compromising position. Until very recently, I thought of my grandfather as perfectly brilliant. Even though I disagreed with his choice of diet and religion, my grandfather's word was his bond. This story, recreated him as human for me. It also was hilarious, and I will never tell him that I know this story unless forced too. I feel like he would deny the severity of it anyways.



My Mama Nikita:

My father is 6 feet and 6 inches tall. He isn't a slim tall either, he ain't fat, but he sure isn't slim. A man, a big man with a commanding presence and big booming voice, with dark velvet skin. A precha precha man. So this is the story about that man, ice, and my dog.

So we had a dog, a crazy dog named Charlie. A good dog, but a crazy dog. Charlie did not like to be bound any type of way; Charlie did not like to be inside the gate; he didn't like to be on a leash or chain. Charlie liked to be free. Now when I say Charlie was crazy I mean he, I mean he was crazy with some people; with other people, he was cool. He was protective; he was sweet; and

all that other good stuff. But with strangers, he was scary. One of his favorite things to do was chase the mailman and chase people who would walk down our street, if he happened to get loose. He always got loose. Charlie would dig his way under the gate and yank and pull at the chain till it broke. He would get loose and terrorize people in the neighborhood. So everybody in the neighborhood knew Charlie, and whenever he would chase people, they would run top speed screaming "GET YOUR DOG". He really wasn't trying to hurt them; to him it was a game. He would nip at their heel, especially loving to chase the mailman.

So anyway, one winter morning, I think it was a Sunday morning and I was about 12 or 13, we were getting ready for church, and Charlie had gotten out. So Sunday morning in our house was hectic; we were getting ready for church and everything. So Charlie got loose and was out terrorizing the neighborhood. So my daddy, who doesn't deal with the dog, decides he's gonna get Charlie. And it's a winter morning and there is snow and ice on the ground, which is common in New Jersey. And he gets out there tryna chase the dog. And if you can imagine my daddy: this big, black man trying to chase the dog in the snow and ice – chasing Charlie, which is impossible because you can't catch him that way. So he gets out there in church shoes and white long johns. Imagine that: this big preacher man in long johns chasing a little mixed (German Shepherd and Doberman) dog on ice trying not to slip and fall. Eventually his church shoes give way, he slips and falls, and the ground

is the beneficiary of his bleached white long johns. He was so mad and probably embarrassed, he came in the house. That was the first time I ever heard my daddy say a curse word. Of course, he said these words to me, because I was the one that could really handle Charlie.

*“Kita, would you get this d\*\*\* dog!”*

So I put on my sneakers, logically, and went outside and got Charlie.

### ***What She Tells Me....***



Farasha siblings, cousins, and Grandma “Muh”

Within my family I have a large support group. My aunts, uncles, grand-and great grandparents, older and younger cousins. Everybody has some wise advice, and I say that in all love and sincerity. However, I can admit that i don't always listen, but if anyone was to tell me anything at all and I listen, it would have to be my Grandmother - “Muh.” She doesn't tell me much these days. She comes to all my programs and shows, listens in to all my school presentations if she can't attend, and takes a lot of pictures. In these years

of my higher education she tells me so little, because she understands that I am going to go the way I want, and that I have already pretty much decided what I want to do and when I want to do it, and how it's going to be done. Recently, however she told me her story, that I didn't really know. It is a story that I will always remember.

In 1970, Elaine Griffin was enrolled in Morris Brown College with a major in Accounting. Four hours away, her family of 7 cheered her on from a small country town in south Georgia. (It has just dawned on me that she was the first in her home to go to college). As one of the top students in her math classes she decided that accounting was the job for her. During her time at one of the most famed Historically Black College and Universities (HBCU's) in the south she met a tall, dark, and handsome, Morris Brown Alumni. - a Mr. Perry Simmons Jr. who was the basketball coach, a marketing analyst, as well as a former police officer in town. His father was a prominent preacher and freedom fighter from Cairo, GA, a town about an hour or less from Elaine's hometown, Bainbridge. Their families had been distant friends for years.

Meeting this Mr. Simmons changed her course of life. After briefly changing her major to Early Childhood Education, she decided to get married. And so they did, and they moved to Waycross, Georgia to start their family. While she raised and cared for two toddlers (soon to be 3), she also worked briefly doing secretarial work, as well as work as a librarian. Soon they moved to Newark, New Jersey with three small children (names: Latoya, Nikita, and Jermaine) because Perry found a job as a Senior Minister at Abyssinian Baptist Church.

Moving up north was a huge step for this family, especially

Elaine. She held strong, stronger than strong, and continued raising and caring for her family while also working in the Board of Education, the Library, a pre-school, and as the First Lady within her church. Soon she decided to finish her degree in Early Childhood Education at Caine University in New Jersey. Throughout her two years of college, she never ceased cooking, cleaning, disciplining, or First Lady-ing, and she got her degree (with honors I believe). My grandmother began working as an elementary school teacher soon thereafter. She also worked within the Board of Education.

To conclude this story I'll leave you with the advice she gave to me: "Be prepared for things to get topsy-turvy, because life happens." She said that goals, plans, and ideas are all subject to change, so she wanted me to remember to "be practical" Most of all she advised - *"Get your education baby, no matter what. And do what you love."*

### ***Bath Time Blues***

(as told to me by my Aunt Latoya)

Aunt Latoya (the one in Black):

"Once when I was about 5 or 6, when we lived in Waycross, GA in a small house in the semi-country. Me, brother, and sister loved to put wash cloths in our mouths to suck the water out of it. Well, once my sister and I were in the tub playing, and I kept the wash cloth in my mouth, to make myself throw up red Kool-Aid. Well I did, and my mama kept telling me to stop, or



I was gonna get a whooping. I told my sister if she came to give me a whooping, I was gonna run away on my bike - naked.

Well she eventually caught me because my baby of a sister told. So I jumped out of the tub and raced out of the bathroom with soap sliding down my legs. I ran into the dining room where there was a large table and stood by the corner of the table waiting for her to catch up. I stood there shiny like I dipped myself in frying grease, smiling the whole time.

My mother came to the table already out of breath. She came around one way and went further around the table. She went the other way and I skirted around her to the other side. I was just grinning all over the place.

*"You're getting my floors wet"* my mother said - half serious and half smiling. Then I heard it - "click". It was my father at the front door. Her raised eyebrows now asked only how far I wanted to take this naked adventure? I glanced at the front door and then bolted to my bedroom - soap, water, and all.

"Adults!"

They will wonder if my Kool-Aid adventure was worth it. It was."

Now that's my Aunt Latoya - living life to its fullest!





# Williams / Frempong Family

dialogue with the  
past & the future



The Family Lore Project is truly powerful. People of African descent need to understand the primacy of family and that the family is the smallest unit of the nation. When we have strong families - we will have a strong and healthy Black Nation. Family allows us to connect with our past, makes sense of our present and prepares us for our future.

*—The Williams/Frempong Family*



Abena Williams (13)  
Time-Traveler & Student Author

## The Sting

This is a story that my Dad told me about one of his experiences when he disobeyed one of his elders and the valuable lesson he learned from doing so.



Baba Kwabena

I have one story I think that stands out y'know.

I tell this one over and over again. It has everything to do with listening to your elders and paying attention and following what they say do. I was probably about in kindergarten and next door to us was Uncle Buck on the Davis property.

He didn't have any running water in the house; he had a draw up well and an outhouse. I don't think that Uncle Buck had passed a third or fourth grade education. He was my great-grandfather's brother. Uncle Buck used to sit out there on the front porch every summer eating a piece of watermelon, just sitting back relaxing. I used to go over there and visit him everyday during the summertime and the wintertime. I know this one day, a big wasp nest was right by Uncle Buck's head on the side porch. He sat on that same seat everyday, and the wasp would never sting him.



I was being a little mischievous so I had a little stick, and I kept throwing it at the wasp nest. Uncle Buck told me to stop, and I should have.

In that time, y'know, back in the early seventies we listened to what those older people said to do. But this day I was being what the elders would call "hard-headed."

So the third time the stick hit right next to the nest, and the wasps started flying around. Then one of them came after me and stung me on the back of my neck, and I went back to the house. Gaga (Grandmother) ran across the yard back to our house. "What happened? What happened?" Gaga kept asking. My neck was swollen. I was hurtin,' and cryin, but I refused to tell her what happened. If I told her I didn't mind Uncle Buck I was going to get a beating which would only add to the pain of the wasp sting.

I was crying so bad that I cried myself to sleep on the bed. It was early afternoon. When I woke up about two hours later the pain had faded enough for me to go back outside to play. To this day, Uncle Buck hasn't mentioned it, and – until now – it's been my secret.

I learned a very important life lesson from that sting: Listen to and mind your elders' instructions. If you just do your own thing you'll go straight off the course. I learned that life has many "wasps" - some only inches from our heads. Heeding the wise instruction of our elders helps us avoid the stings of these "wasps."



(Photo L-R: Uncle Punk, Great-Great Grandma Maggie Davis and Uncle Buck!!!!)



Reflection:

This story felt like a proverb: "You can learn from your elders' feet or at the end of a stick." Either stick or sting -they both show that you can suffer if you don't listen to your elders. I always listen to my elders because they have a lot more experience in this world than I do, and they have been through many situations that I could never imagine. I trust that their advice will steer me in the right direction.

### *Dreaming To Another World*

Last week on Monday, my mom and I drove to my Great-Grand Aunt Irene's house to drop off girl scout cookies to her. Her daughter, Joan, let us in and joined us as we sat for our visit. Aunt Irene had recently been sick, but today she looked a lot healthier and was talkative. She sat down next to me and started talking to mom.



Yaa Williams/Frempong

At first, they were just asking each other how they were doing until Aunt Irene told us about how she recently went to visit one of her relatives in New York. She described the visit so vividly and clear that I could hear the raindrops. This mind trip to New York was abruptly interrupted by her daughter's insistence that she never made that

trip - that it all never happened. Did she imagine it? Did she dream it? Was it an old memory? I didn't know how to make sense of it at first. Later, I became more clear why these "dreams" were happening.

We shifted. It was family-talk time. They started to talk about some of our family members. I watched as they reminisced and laughed happily. Aunt Irene's daughter brought up the time when me, my sister, Afryea, and our mom brought strawberries picked with our own hands for all the mothers of our friends and family on Mother's Day. "You know, I've been craving strawberries," says Aunt Irene." That was enough to launch another dream. It was about strawberries. After she wakes up, she forgets the dream. The next night she had the same dream, but she was never able to remember what it was about. She told us that she has been having more and more dreams, and they are all so realistic. The topic of her dreams changed after that. Before we knew it, it was time for us to leave.

When we got in the car I started to wonder why Aunt Irene was starting to get these dreams. The fact that these dreams were becoming a regular occurrence I found strange because she never had these dreams this regularly before. "Were these dreams going to keep coming to her? Would they start to torment her? Would they make her lose her mind?" I worried.

I started to think that maybe that her recent illness caused the dreams. I pondered on that thought for a while, but then I remembered, "She is 93-years-old!" Could it be that her age was contributing to these dreams? On the ride home, my mom also brought up her dreams and asked me why I thought they were happening. I told her what I thought about them, and we both agreed that her dreams were a sign that she would be soon transitioning to the Ancestor World.

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