



FLOWERS

FOR OUR

GRANDMOTHERS



“Aunt Effie,” Charles Winfield Tice, 1860, Courtesy New York State Museum, Albany, NY

Flowers for Our Grandmothers is dedicated to Effie Smith of Newburgh, New York. Very little is known about her life save that she worked for the Smith family in Newburgh, first as a slave and later as a free Black person. The Smiths, who owned a big farm in central Newburgh, commissioned Charles Winfield Tice, a well-known Newburgh portrait painter, to make an elegant portrait. Here we see “Aunt Effie” wearing a fancy dress and lace bonnet seated in a ladder-back chair, clay pipe in hand. The existence of such a portrait shows that Effie Smith was respected and cherished. That the details of her life are lost is a great shame. We hope to rectify this and so many other losses of collective memory in our book that honors the lives and legacies of current Black/African-American grandmothers in the City of Newburgh. Each participant was interviewed, photographed, and encouraged to include personal materials. Frames for each portrait were based on the participant’s favorite color or theme. The project was initiated and inspired by Gabrielle Burton Hill whose words of introduction follow.

This project gave me an opportunity to step back and remember from whence I’ve come and that I’m standing on the shoulders of someone who went before me. Whether she’s my biological grandma or not, she has words of wisdom to share with me and others.

We are leaving behind a record, in print, sound, and photo of the hard work of those who came before us. We are sharing their expectation of who we are to become — productive, kind, vigilant, standing up for what’s right. Their words of wisdom need to be passed on and on and on.

The reason we chose African-American grandmothers to be part of this project is due to the lack of recorded history in our community regarding Black families. We celebrate the Black women’s role, especially those around us. She wasn’t only Grandma to her grandchildren but a surrogate grandmother to children around her and sometimes even to those of the white family she worked for.

As we’ve heard time and time again in the interviews in this project sometimes what gets lost are those one-on-one stories: me and Grandma sitting on the porch, me and Grandma making a cake, Grandma

braiding my hair, stories we don’t usually hear in magazines and other media. These are the influences of grandmothers that have deeply shaped families and communities.

I often think that instead of having the sheriff sit outside in front of our high school, what if all the grandmas went to school once a week and monitored the halls? Imagine your grandchildren turning around and seeing you. The behavior is going to be different. The problem-solving will also be different.

Who is this publication for? Everybody. This is an opportunity for us to hear from folks who are often silenced or overlooked. Through their stories we can begin to form a human connection again. These are stories straight from one person’s lived experience to us; they’re giving us a gift.

I am grateful for each participant and all City of Newburgh grandmothers, including those not represented in this project. Your invaluable wisdom and presence are both needed and appreciated. And the future? Maybe a grandmother’s cookbook filled with recipes of food for the soul and for life.

Gabrielle Burton Hill

Lanetta Jean Moore

Born in 1945, in Portland, Maine, Lanetta Jean Moore was one of approximately 200 Blacks in the state who were said to live on one street in Portland. Her grandmother and grandfather had come from Jamaica and settled in Maine, where her mother was born. Her grandfather was a janitor in a department store, and her grandmother cleaned toilets as a housekeeper. Lanetta had a good education, yet experienced some racism as the only Black in all her classes. Her father was a pharmacist mate in the U.S. Coast Guard, and her mother was a beautician in the home. When she wanted to go into the service, her father was adamant that she should instead become a nurse, and so she went to nursing school, where she was the only Black student. In 1966, at the age of 21, she moved to New York City. She worked at Albert Einstein Hospital because she was interested in research and eventually zeroed in on psychiatric medicine that she practiced for 30 years. As a child she loved reading, and now she buys her grandchildren Barnes & Noble gift certificates so that they can buy books. She loves to travel and has been to many countries in Europe and Africa where she collects local art that hangs in her apartment. She has 2 boys, 6 grandchildren, and 2 great-grandchildren, with one due in December.

One time, one of the teachers had a calendar and she said who wants the calendar. Well everybody in the class raised their hand and she said the “Eenie Meenie Miny Moe....” I won’t say the whole thing but anyways the N-word was in there and I always remember that then she realized she had upset me cause I said, “I’m going home and tell my mother.” My mother and uncle went to school to complain.

Harlem, I loved it! I loved it! I loved it! I got to go to the Apollo and see all of the singers that we would just hear on the record up in Maine. There we were so far up that we used to have to take a hanger, like you did with TVs, and put it on the radio for an antenna. Then we all sit around and listen to the music. I loved it!

In Harlem, that’s where I really got to know the Black culture that we didn’t have up in Maine. My grandmother would cook big meals and she had a large family and have them all come over. Usually it was the holidays so you would have turkey and a ham and you would have potato salad, macaroni and cheese, greens, chitlins, sweet potatoes and

of course the olives in the pickles in the cranberry sauce; and all of that with biscuits, hot biscuits which I couldn’t wait for.

Once the Civil Rights movement began, then we began to talk, and my father mentioned how hard it was for him, because he went in as a mess boy right from high school, and how they would treat him; the officers would say they want coffee and to make it “your color.” You kept quiet because you wanted the money and all the benefits and it was a good way to take care of the family. And that hit me because I thought, my father sacrificed a lot so that my sister and I could have so many things, like free medical care.

The extended family is so important and it has always been important in the Black community, because they’re always there for each other. If there’s a death, if there’s a wedding, a birthday celebration, they are there. We grew up together and we had big celebrations at the 4th of July. We would go to Sebago Lake and we would have these cookouts, and there was always a big dance the night before.



There'd be adults with their families. I just think extended families are so important.

I saw how substance-abuse was destroying the community. When crack became relevant that really did it to the Black community. They went through a whole lot, so many parents addicted and that's where grandparents came in, because grandparents were taking care of the children. A lot of programs were developed in that area to give support to the grandparents, especially the grandmothers. Crack destroyed the soul of people. It was like you would see them walking around and it was like the soul had left them and their eyes were very empty.

What kept me from alcohol and drugs, it was my parents. They worked hard. We lived a good life and I would say that they are the ones that influenced me and I didn't want to do anything to disappoint them. They were very good parents, very loving. My father would be one month out at sea and one month at home. But when he'd come home, the house would just lighten up and he would spoil us. He would take us out to get sandwiches and I remember all of those things that he did.

My two boys I love them dearly, but grandchildren, they really special. And I feel honored to be their grandmother. I really do. They teach me a lot and it's so nice to see them grow up and knock on wood they have all grown up well. The last two are twins and they're getting ready to go off to college in August. And it's a pleasure to sit and laugh and talk. I have a lot of fun with them and I hope they have a lot of fun with me. I try to always talk about the ancestors to them and let them know that these are the people whose shoulders we stand on.

The only advice I give the grands is to find something that you really have a passion for and that you love and do it and don't sacrifice your happiness. Definitely do it. The grands always laugh when I say it. They say "you want us to travel, Nana" and I say, "yes, I want you to get to know people, different cultures, and all that." I love to watch the family grow up. To have the family, that's a blessing and it's a blessing to remember the people that impacted on me in my family when I was growing up. And I have pictures all over the place of the family. I can go as far back as a great grand, about five generations.



Top row, left to right: Lanetta's paternal grandfather Robert Perry, grandmother Isolene Perry, and father James Perry. Bottom row, left to right: Lanetta's uncles Paul and Henry.



Maternal grandmother, Imogene Austin



Paternal grandmother, Lanetta Perry



Paternal grandfather, Zack Austin



Father, James L. Perry



Mother, Elsie Perry



Son, Benjamin Moore, deceased, (1967-2002)



Son, Malik J. Moore with his wife, Delvia M. Moore



Grandson, Malik A. J. Moore



Granddaughter, Jordan Ross



Grandson, Khalil E. Moore



Granddaughter, Khalia S. Moore



Grandson, Kendell X. Rouse



Granddaughter, Mya N. D. Moore with Samaje J. Eligio



Great grandson, Harlem S. Braithwaite

Karen Atkins Lee

Born in 1965, Karen Atkins Lee is a lifelong Newburgh resident. Her mother, “Mama Atkins,” used to go around talking to people, informally preaching, and giving advice. Karen also likes to go around helping people and jokes about being “Mama Atkins Two.” She says that she has been in bad relationships and tells the kids to watch out. She is concerned about how the kids in school carry guns and sell drugs and how they might end up “Upstate.” She says she had four cousins who were killed right in front of her. She herself was abused by her husband so badly that she ended up in the hospital, but she did not press charges. Now she wants to help other people along the way. She talks about how collard greens can be a spiritual food. She has one boy and one girl, one grandchild and one great-grandchild.

My mom’s name is Anna D. Atkins and they called her “Mama Atkins” in Newburgh or “Grandma Atkins” and she used to walk with a cane and she used to pray for people. She was a preacher and she loved the Lord. She loved everybody. And every time you see her, the young people would run up to her and say “Hey Grandma. How you doing? Need anything Grandma? Could we help you?” She says so. She talked to them about the Lord. She talked to the drug dealers. She had an open communication.

I tell a lot of people, and I tell young girls and boys “Listen to your mama. And don’t get in a relationship. Because, you know, if you get in a relationship, you don’t know what might go behind closed doors.” So I tell everybody, “Don’t get in a relationship until God sends you the right one.”

I tell them, “I’ve been there. I’ve been in a bad relationship. I’ve been in a drug relationship.” I want to give back to the community. Now, you got different ages. I know some kids is 14. They carrying

guns in the school, they selling drugs. The parents ain’t doing nothing. You talk to the parents, they don’t want to hear. But I put God first. I always talk about God and I pray with them but they don’t take heed to what I’m saying. They’re going to be locked up. They’re going to be upstate in prison. You ain’t gonna have no friends with you. And when you go to jail, parents ain’t got that kind of money to get ‘em out. They ain’t got that kind of money to send them food packages.

I am very friendly. Somebody needs some food, I make them a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and take it to them and give them some juice or hot coffee or hot tea. I say “Jesus love you. And I love you too.” And I give them a hug.

I tell the young people, “If you need something call me. Call me 2, 3 o’clock in the morning. I be here.” I’m well known here in the city of Newburgh. Mama Atkins number one and Mama Atkins number two. I give God the glory.



Karen Atkins Lee

I want to live right. I want to go see my mother in heaven. I don't want to go downstairs. I keep telling everyone "love one another". Cause, we are living in the last evil days. Look at how COVID came in. A lot of friends they passed on.

We got the new generation. And the kids is growing up. Got some kids that talk back to their parents. You got some boys do what they want to do. It's not right. You gotta love one another. Because if you don't love one another, it's going to be a big boo-boo.

You gotta take heed to what I'm saying. I'm old. I'm learning something new everyday. Because, you go outside, you don't know what might happen to you. But, I could talk. I thank God I'm sitting here today talking on the mike trying to help somebody else. Because, if you don't talk, two wrongs don't make two rights. And I'm keeping it real. I want to get out there to the community, talk to them, because if you don't, you're going to lose your loved ones. And the youngest are leaving, where is the old?



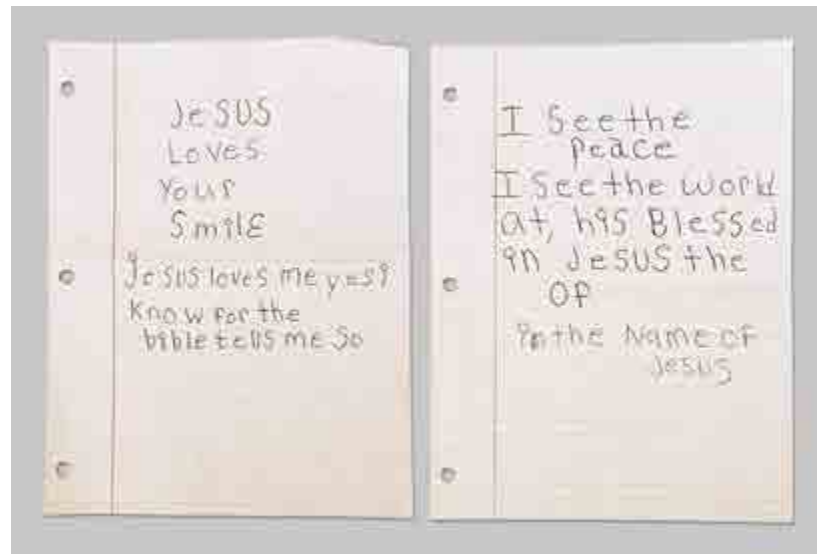
Mother, Edna D. Atkins, 1932-2014



Daughter, Destiny Jones, b. 1992



With granddaughter Simone Atkins



Some pages from a book Karen is writing

Joyce Burns

Born in 1945, in Garland, North Carolina, Joyce Burns grew up in a family of 13 children who lived on a farm with chickens, cows, hogs, tobacco, peanuts, and cotton. They grew everything except flour and grains. After High School in Garland, she worked in a shirt factory where she pressed shirts for seven dollars a day. In 1966, at the age of 21, she moved up to Newburgh with her husband whom she had met down South. In Newburgh, she worked at the Regal Bag Factory and later for IBM. She had two boys and three girls; sadly, she has lost three children. Regina, a little girl, passed away in 1968 from spinal meningitis; her son Anthony, a pastor in Fort Worth, passed away from COVID; and her daughter Benita passed away in 2023 from lupus. She has 12 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. She enjoys going to flea markets and says that her role now as a grandmother is to teach her grandchildren about God. She said "My mantra is: Grandparents don't give up on your children. Pray for them."

We enjoyed one another, my sisters and brothers, we all got along. If it was harvesting time, my dad said, "Okay get yourself together, get the hoe and come go with me." And when he finished working you out on that farm, when you came back, you were glad to eat your dinner and your supper and take yourself a good wash off and go to bed; and you didn't fight no more. So he had discipline. He didn't have nobody going to prison or jail, because they believed in discipline, and that took care of that problem.

When I grew up, you couldn't drink out of the same fountains. They had white and colored. That's the way it was until Dr. King came through; he was for all nationalities. He wanted to break that cycle, and by God's grace, he broke it and everybody got along with one another, and all that mess was thrown out.

I lost my daughter Benita last year, yes. She died in her sleep in Atlanta, Georgia. But I know where she is because I always told my children, "Before you go to bed at night, always say your prayers and ask God to forgive you for your sins, so if He takes you home, you'll go with Him."

Because there is a heaven and there is a hell. You make that destination while you live on planet Earth, whether you believe it or not.

And one thing about my family, we were brought up in prayers. My mother and father always kept prayer going in their home. Before you ate breakfast on Sundays, there was a line, a circle, and there was a prayer going on. You better not take a biscuit, or anything, before you prayed, and then it was blessed, and then we had breakfast.

My mom was a cook. And on Sundays, sometimes we had the preacher come over. He would come to have dinner at the house. She would serve her favorite meal, which was chicken and mashed potatoes and collard greens and gravy and biscuits. Yes, and Kool-Aid. She always baked the cake. It was chocolate or vanilla. She always, at Christmas time, made all kinds of cakes. And I just enjoy helping her bake cakes.

I have 12 grandchildren and 5 great-grandchildren. I play a role with them. All of my grandchildren don't know the Lord. My role as a grandmother is to



Joyce Burns

introduce them to God and let them know that God loves them and He cares for them.

Get an education and make sure you vote. That's your legal right to vote. That's something my parents instilled in us. And live a clean life. Always live an honest life. That's something my dad taught us, instilled in us.

Kindness doesn't hurt anybody. And I would say, accept Christ as your personal Saviour. Accept Him. If you don't know the Man, get to know Him because He died on the cross for us. Just look at all the stripes that He took. The beatings that He took. They spat on Him. They did everything to Him, called Him names, He did all this. He loved all of us. He's a forgiving God. When He forgives you, He doesn't throw it up in your face.

*I always got this little song:
Feel my way every day with love,
As I walk with the Heavenly Dove;
Let me go all the while
With a song and a smile,
Fill my way every day with love.*

That's all I have to say. I try to live a decent life and move on. It's all you can do.



Parents, James Oscar and Annie Lois Simpson



Joyce left with her daughter Benita Burns-Phinney, deceased



Son, William Martin Anthony Burns, deceased, with his wife Betty Burns



Children at a Simpson Family reunion



Son, William Martin Anthony Burns, an Apostle at the King's Heaven Worship Center in Fort Worth, Texas

Sheila A. Williams

Born in 1946, in Barnwell, South Carolina, Sheila A. Williams was largely raised by her grandmother whom she called “Mama.” The five girls and five boys in her family all lived in town and kept a garden where they grew almost all their food except flour, rice, grits, and meal. She had to work in the fields earning two dollars a day for picking 100 pounds of cotton. Her mother, Jessie Lee Williams, would work all day, Monday till Friday, and even some Saturdays, at other peoples’ houses; cooking, cleaning, and ironing their clothes for only \$15 a week. After Sheila graduated high school in 1964, she moved to New Jersey and worked in a lighting factory in Dunellen. Later she moved to Brooklyn where she worked in a Hasidic owned shop making men’s cardigan sweaters. She worked in the New York State Drug Abuse program in the World Trade Center for 10 years and then worked at IBM. She has lived in Newburgh for 46 years since 1978. She raised her three children and five additional children, with a man whose wife was deceased; she considers these five the same as her own children. She has 11 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

We lived next to my grandmother so she took me and raised me in her house. All of us called her “Mama.” Even my siblings that was raised by my mother, we all called my grandmother “Mama.” That’s my mother. My grandmother is my mama, that’s who raised me. It was wonderful. She was from the old school and everything had to be a certain way. They had certain rules, you couldn’t do this, you couldn’t do that. You respected your elders.

We grew a lot of food. We tilled the soil, made furrows, spread compost, planted vegetables and food in the garden. Yes, I did all that. We worked in the peach fields, picked cotton, harvested watermelon. We did some of that every day. We used to pick blackberries and she would make blackberry wine, make blackberry cobbler. That’s what we did. That’s the life that we had.

We ate whatever was put in front of us. The kids now they have it good. Some mothers make 3 or 4 different things. From where I came from, there was one meal prepared, and if you didn’t like what was at that meal, they would say “Well, maybe the next meal we may have something you like.” That’s how it was.

I remember the times when you wanted a hamburger that was cooked in a restaurant, we had go to the back door, off the street, to order a sandwich from the restaurant cause you weren’t allowed to go into the restaurant. That’s how it was. It didn’t feel bad. I just thought, that’s the way. I was a kid.

I remember days when people used to come by selling stuff and I could never get over how the gentlemen, as old as Mama was, he never called her by her name “Miss Corley” or “Miss Algerine.” He would always say “Annie.” That wasn’t her name. In those days that’s just how it was.

But here, in the North, the Caucasians, as far as I am concerned, sometimes they’re worse than they was in the South by the things that they do and say. They don’t say it to you cause it’s a little different. You can’t just say what you feel towards us now with no repercussions. But if you believe in God and you’re a Christian, you not going to think like that.

But it’s hard. I see the kids, so many of them are just lost. I think it’s because babies having babies. Let’s be realistic now, they got grandkids and maybe they’re 30. Some of them are not even 30. And they’re



keeping their grandkids cause their children are having kids at young ages.

And the world, there's so much in the world, and how do you stop your child from seeing that. They see the world when they go to school and they see all this stuff, it's on television. It's everywhere. They have access to anything and everything.

I want my grandchildren to say about me that I was a caring grandmother and I loved all of them. We argue all the time, especially the young ones, the youngest boy, oh my god. But anything I've asked them, they will come.

For the boys, I give them something. Because I believe if you have teenage sons, they should not walk around with no cash. Not boys. So if I have money, I give them some. You just don't let your son walk around, a teenager with no money. There's too many things out there in the world. Someone else can entice you.

I've had a good life, so I won't complain. He wakes me every day. I'm good. I don't have no children that's in no trouble. No grandkids that's in no trouble. So I thank Him every day. That's all that matters.

Listen to your elders because they've been there, done that. But some of them don't have elders and they are into the world, worldly things. They got it coming at them from all directions. These cell phones, the TV, everything. And they want that fast life and they don't understand that comes with a price. The fast life comes with a price.

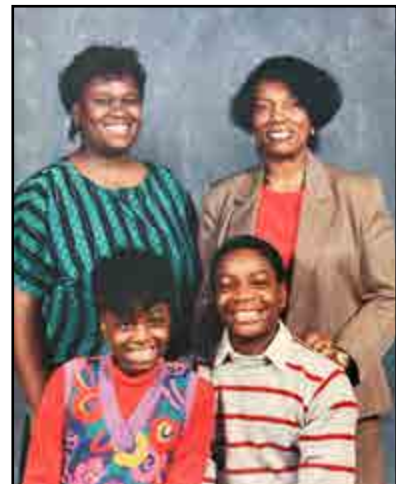
If they would just listen. Go to school. Get your education, listen to your parents. Put the Almighty in your life. Don't believe everything you hear from somebody. Everybody is not your friend. Listen to your parents or your grandparents. It's not all about partying and having a good time. You can go out there and get mixed up with the wrong people and things can happen to you. That's how I look at it. So that's me. That's my life.



"Mama," Algerine Corley



Mother, Jesse Lee Williams



Clockwise from top left, daughter Sybil, Sheila, son Leon, and daughter Hasina



Sheila's refrigerator

Agnes Jones

Born in 1963, in Roseboro, North Carolina, Agnes Jones moved to Newburgh at the age of three with her mother. Agnes was born the same day that her father died in an automobile crash in North Carolina when the shock of that accident sent her mother into labor. She had five brothers and a sister, and they were all very close to their grandmother, Grace McPhail, whom they called “Ma.” Agnes left home to be on her own at the age of 16, and she worked as a home helper, something she learned to do from watching her grandmother help others. She has two boys, Jamal and Dateriel, and one granddaughter. Her mother, Mary Walker (80), lives in Newburgh Heights. The love of her life, Paul, who lived around the corner when she was growing up, was the father of her first pregnancy that was aborted at the urging of her mother. She has had no cigarettes or alcohol for 16 years and attends Kingdom Building Ministries (KBM) on Chambers Street where she loves to clean. She has lived at Safe Harbors since 2017. Her nickname is “Peanut,” and her friend Wendy calls her “Peanut Butter.”

Newburgh is my home. People call me the mayor because I'm the friendly type. I get along with everybody. I like to help people. Where there's a need, I help. I got that from my grandmother. She always open her door for people, feed them. Like in the middle of the week, my grandmother will cook a big meal, like she cooking a Sunday meal. She would do collard greens, the chickens and dumpling. My grandmother bake cakes.

Grandma Grace, I never seen her go to church but I know she a woman who believe in God. She would sit down and put you in your place when you're wrong. That she would do. We never call her grandma, we called her “Ma.” We looked up to our mother, but we looked up to her more. All my cousins, my brothers, sisters we all hung at her house. We never were home.

When I used to get into trouble, I used to run over to her house. We all did. My grandmother used to say, “They ain't gonna hit you not around me.” I said,

yeah, that's what I'm talking about. On the weekend we always spent the night at grandma's house. We would go home on Sunday cause we had school through the week. And then Friday we go back again. And one time it got so good, we used to go to school from grandma's house. We get out of school, we go to grandma's house.

My grandmother, she used to keep us laughing. Especially when she'd get mad and she'd fuss out one of her kids, even her grandkids. It was just the way she say. She tell you how she feel now.

My aunt Yvette and I, we always used to hang out, got in trouble together. We lie together. Back each other up. When you're young, you scheme. You scheme before you get home. You figure what you're gonna say and I got your back. And when somebody else come along, we gotta put them on it too. So they don't say nothing different from what we say. We all got to say the same thing. Yeah, getting it together. When you see the belt, get it together.



It's the times we living in and these kids need structure. They really not getting that from home. I see that they're lost. And some of these parents, I like to keep it real, they don't have time. That's why their kids are lost. They are here in the world and some of them are disrespectful. But you can't be hard on it, because it's not them. They only going by what they see. Like hanging out with wrong people. They're steering the kids the wrong way. How they live is what they see. A lot of kids really want somebody to talk to and when you sit down and talk to them, you will be surprised how they'll open up.

As matter fact in June, it be sixteen years for no cigarettes and alcohol. For the rest of my days, I don't really have nothing in mind. I like to help people, I like to clean. I attend KBM church on Chambers Street.



From left to right: Agnes' brother Larry, her sister Mary (deceased), her mother, Mary Walker, Agnes, her brother Roy (deceased)

Mary Anderson

Born in 1947, Mary Anderson grew up on a farm in Clinton, North Carolina, with 10 siblings. She was raised by her grandmother who would be away for two or three weeks at a time as a traveling caretaker. Mary recalls how her grandmother would comb her hair and how much fun it was when she was home. She called her grandfather and grandmother "Mom" and "Dad." She had her first daughter in 1963 when she was 16 and moved to Brooklyn for 10 years. Her grandfather, who drove a truck for Singer Sewing Machine, was assaulted and stabbed six times, eventually dying from the wounds. She has two boys and four girls. She worked at West Point 18 1/2 years, where she waited tables and eventually worked in the kitchen. She learned to crack three eggs at a time because they had to feed 2000 cadets each morning. Later, she went to Newburgh Bible school and received a bachelors degree of theology. Working at West Point allowed her children to have good medical care. In addition to her 6 children, she has 12 grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild.

In Clinton, North Carolina, we never wanted for anything. We were poor but we really never knew we were poor because we had everything we needed. We grew everything. My grandfather had a pretty large farm so we had hogs, pigs, cows, everything; we had a big garden with tobacco, corn, wheat, we had all of that stuff. I had a good childhood. There were 10 boys and six girls. The oldest boy is now 80. I am 77, the oldest girl. I guess you would call me the matriarch of the family

We just regular people. As John Legend says, we just ordinary people, we just love taking care of each other. You gotta be good to each other whether you're family or not, no matter where the person come from, no matter how they look, or anything, you gotta be kind.

I loved fried chicken, rice and gravy, and the speckled butter beans. I still love fried chicken. I can't eat much of it, being fried you know. I do it once in a while. I feel like you can have anything you want long as

you do it in moderation. As long as you don't overdo it, you can have anything you want. You just can't be a glutton.

Been busy all my life, busy, busy, busy. All the time I was raising children, sometimes two jobs, nothing to brag about, but that's how we weren't on welfare. I worked every day. I used to be so tired.

None of my kids ever been to jail, thank God, cause things could have gone the other way, me being a single mom raising the children, you know raising Black boys. So, a lot of things is a lot of influence in the street you know. But I'm so glad I have more influence than the street had.

Tough love is missing in this town, in this area, this place here, a lot of tough love is missing. Not saying that I know all the situations, but there are too many babies raising babies, it's hard, babies raising babies. And mom don't have time for the children, you know, and that's society today.



Mary Anderson

Always put Christ first and then education. Education is a must. Cause it's free. We don't need to stand in on the corner with a boombox and a bottle of beer. That's why you always gotta go to school, you gotta go to school. You graduate, you either go to college or you go to the army. That's it. My grandfather said, "When you graduate, you gotta get a job. If you can't get no job, go to the army; teach you discipline."

I'm just grateful for what the Lord has done and what He is still doing and how He has allowed me to still be here. Somebody could be viewing me, but instead they're looking at me.

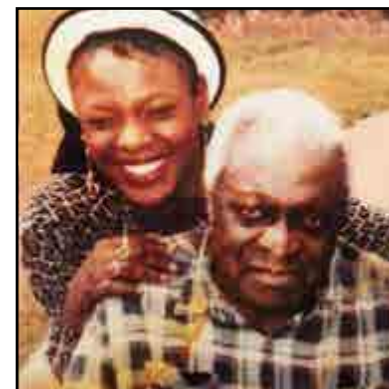
Heaven is real. Hell is real. So you believe that. You have to pick where you're gonna go. Nobody choose the place you're going but you.



Mother, Mary Frances Vann



Daughter, Natalie Aman, with husband Ragi Aman and son Ragi Jr.



Grandfather, Arthur Vann, with Mary's sister Enola Conley



Daughter, Tiffany Anderson, with husband Roshawn Braddock and family

Wendy Riley

Born in 1967, in Monticello, New York, Wendy Riley was raised in a blended family with two sisters and three brothers. Her father's mother, Cora, from Alabama, raised many foster kids in Monticello. Wendy wanted to be a teacher but decided to go into nursing. She graduated but did not pass the boards and decided to go into the medical transport field. She had her first child at 17 and later raised three more children while in an abusive relationship. Her youngest daughter, Deanna, is in Georgia. Her daughter La Toya, in Monticello, has 6 kids, one of which has a kid, thereby making Wendy a great-grandmother. Her youngest son, Philip, serving 2 1/2 years, will be out this spring and has 3 children. Her oldest son, "AJ" (Arsenio), serving 5 years, will be out in a year and has 5 children. She goes to One Accord Christian Church on Lake Street, where she teaches Sunday school for adults every third Sunday and Bible study on the third and fourth Wednesday; they are currently studying the Apostle Philip. She has been a resident of Safe Harbors since 2017, but will move out soon.

I am the oldest and I was the more wild one. I like to go places, hang out, climb trees, there was so many things that I like to do.

Monticello back then was a very good town. You could leave your door unlocked, go to bed. You didn't have to worry about it. Everybody knew everybody. Neighbors come together. Everybody around was family basically. It was a mixed neighborhood. It was more Black and Spanish than White. But whoever we hung around, that's who we hung around. We didn't make no difference. My mother didn't raise us to be prejudice. We played with everybody. We didn't care.

I went through quite a few failed relationships and marriages. But I still going to church. That's the one thing my mother always instilled in us was church. You lived in her house, you went to church. Even when I didn't live in her house, I still went to church. I always loved it.

Being a parent was very hard, especially starting at a young age. I made a lot of mistakes. Until when I got older, I had to apologize to my kids for not being a better mother. I smoked weed. I drink wine

every now and again. I wasn't a drug addict, but I got caught up with wanting to make sure that I had a man. As I got older, I got more mature and started seeing that wasn't the life that I had to be living.

Raising my kids, we didn't live rich, but I always made sure that we'd sit around the table to eat dinner. I'd make sure that they had a meat, a starch, and a veggie. On Friday would be our family night so we would go to the park. At times we would do board games. These are things I still try to instill in them and I still hear them talking about. It makes me feel good to know that when they got older they instill that in their children.

I have my one great grandson; that's just my world. I didn't think I could love another child like I love my grandkids. But he just took over my heart and it's good to know that before I leave this earth, I was able to have a great grandchild. Seeing me and my daughter and my granddaughter, I'm like, wow! We are generations! That excites me.

My mother is one of 16 children by one man and one woman. When my mother passed away, we went to her



Wendy Riley

house and we actually found the marriage certificate of her parents. When I saw that, I was like, let me take a picture of that. That's something that you don't see very often, that is part of my legacy.

I love being a grandmother. I'm asking my youngest when am I gonna get my grandchild from her. But she said not yet and she's 33. I guess I'm gonna have to wait a while for her. She graduated from college. Got her masters. She's a therapist.

I just started flying on planes. I still don't like planes, but I like to fly on them because now I started doing it and I realize this is easier than driving. I learn these things and I love every time I learned something new about myself that I didn't know before.

I want to say to my grandchildren: Get your education. Don't think you have to have a baby at a young age. Get your career. Put God first in everything you do. If you're going across the street, ask God "should I go at this time?" Marriages will come. Learn yourself before you put anybody else in your life and start raising children. Do it now, while you have none of those responsibilities. If you don't do it now, you're gonna be another 40, 50-year-old grandmother trying to figure out "Do I like blue or do I like pink? Do I like when it's raining? Do I like when it's sunny?"



Sons, AJ (Arsenio) and Philip



Daughters, LaToya and Deanna



Maternal grandparents, Willie and Allie Riley



Mother, Shirley Riley



Wendy, left, with her granddaughter Zora at her baby shower

Wendy Riley



Great-grandson, Orion



Grandson, Jeremiah



Grandson, TJ



Granddaughters, Taylor and Olivia



Granddaughters, Dakota and Wynter



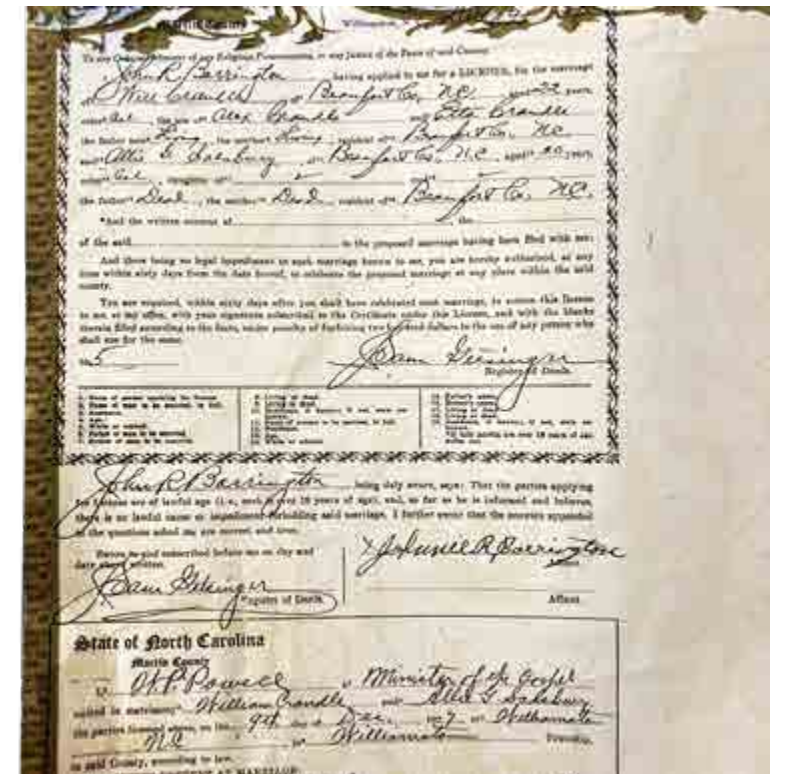
Grandson, Ajeon



Grandchildren, Gigi, Taylor, Alexis, Olivia, LaToya



Grandson, Josiah



Grandparent's marriage certificate dated December 9, 1927

Joanne Stevens

Born in 1962, in St. Luke's hospital, Joanne Stevens has been a Newburgh resident all her life. Joanne's grandmother was a preacher, as was her mother. Her grandmother died right in church after testifying. She is proud of her dad who drove an 18-wheeler on the graveyard shift for Tarkett. After raising her family, Joanne's mother worked in daycare on Liberty Street; this influenced Joanne to also work in daycare. She has two boys and three girls, and nine grandchildren, including two 10-year-old twin girls. She loves being a grandmother but worries about her daughter Viola, who has a child with lissencephaly; he cannot walk and requires a lot of extra care. She likes to draw and made a drawing for this book. Joanne, who has been in an abusive relationship, sees herself as a survivor and wants to help other women with that issue.

When I was growing up, there wasn't a lot of violence like it is now. And everybody was friendly and when you went to the clubs it wasn't as violent. And you could come outside without people trying to snatch your purse. But now it is like you have to have someone with you.

Because I am left-handed, the teacher took the paddle and she hit me on my right hand, the one that she wanted me to use, and she put a big knot, it was the size of a golf ball. My mom and dad were really furious about it so they confronted her about it and she said, "Yes, I did." Reverend Elliot at church prayed for me and it went away.

I have two boys and three girls. It feels good being a mom. But one of my sons, when he turned two years old, his father took him away from me. His father brainwashed him, telling him that I don't love him. He's 35 now and he won't say anything to me because he has that thought in his mind that I don't love him; but I do love Christopher.

People often say I look young. One time I went to

my daughter's job at Verizon and she said, "That's my mom," and they said: "No, that's not your mom. That's gotta be your sister." They kept on saying that and she said, "No, that's my mom."

My middle daughter, Viola, has one child and he has lissencephaly and he can't walk and he has the mind of a six-month old baby. It really bothers me because I want to see Mesiah walking normally like other babies. My daughter she has to carry him all the time. He's very heavy and then he can't hold his head up, it dangles like a newborn baby.

My grandmother was like a preaching lady. She was a traveling preacher, an evangelist. My mom was too. I remember when my grandmother was testifying, she died right in church. I was five years old. Right after she testified, she sat in church and she just died. We thought she was just taking a nap.

My father sometimes brought the 18-wheeler truck home and he brought flowers and candy for my mom. His ability to provide brought a strong sense of security to the family.



I was in an abusive relationship with my kid's father, so I am a survivor from that for the sake of my three children. So I want to help other women to tell them what I have I been through. I wanna work with women to help them to be strong.

Being a grandmother is just like being a mother, but it's very wonderful, it's very integrity. It's just like being a mother, but you have to be strong. You can never break down as being a grandmother. Being a grandmother is so true and it's forever and you could never turn back cause a grandmother is forever.



Grandson, Mesiah



Sarina Souser

Born in Poughkeepsie, New York, in 1961, Sarina Souser was in foster care from the age of 7 until 19. She said that her childhood was not good. She married at the urging of friends and knew right away she had made a mistake. "I was too young," she said. She had her first child in 1982, at the age of 21, and stuck by an abusive relationship, eventually having one boy and three girls. She has five grandsons and two granddaughters who range in age from 13 to 19. She has had two hip replacements, two knee replacements, and is suffering now in her back. The last will require an operation for which she is losing 40 pounds. She was a homemaker and a sitter at St. Luke's. For the photograph she wanted a frame that was "compassionate, pretty, loving, Christian," and we decided to use her scarf with a favorite bible quote: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." She loves going to church at the Kingdom Building Ministries on Chambers Street, where she sings in the choir. Her sister Charlene, who was in many ways her very best friend, passed away at the end of April, ten days before our interview. Sarina was deeply shaken by the loss. In a very moving moment of our conversation, she sang a hymn in memory of her sister, which brought tears to our eyes.

My sister Charlene Jacobs just passed a week and a half ago and I'm still in the process of getting the funeral arrangements right now. We had our ups and downs but I love my sister very much. She was a woman of God, a prophet of the nation, a powerful prayer warrior, my best friend. We would spend two, three hours on the phone just talking.

I didn't meet my mother till I was nineteen. Actually, I was in foster care since I was seven. So our relationship was back-and-forth, back-and-forth as well with a lot of missed times between us. My sister Nina, I haven't seen her in years. So I don't know exactly where she is. My brother Darrell, which is my first cousin, I don't know where he is either. So my childhood was not a good childhood at all. Some parts were good. Some parts of it were abusive. There was a lot of trauma in my life.

My aunt Pearl, I look just like her. So I was real close to her when I was younger. I got to spend a little time with her before she passed. And then I got a chance

to spend time with my mom before she passed. In the beginning, it was nice. I stayed with my mother a little while. I love my mom. And then next thing I know my mom passed from cancer. So I had to end up burying my mom as well.

As a little girl before foster care, my Daddy spoiled me. I remember the first time he gave me a spanking. I was very mad at him for a while. Yes, I was daddy's little girl whenever I got sick he would buy me candy and get me presents.

My grandson says "I don't wanna go to grandma's house, she mean." It's not that I mean, I have rules and boundaries and I want to teach you some things in life. You not gonna make the same mistakes, as I was taught, when I was growing up. You gonna be a better version of me.

I enjoy spending time with my grandchildren. It's nice going to the beach with them and to the cookout. I was scared to get in the water because there was



Sarina Souser

little fish. I eat them, but I don't swim with them. Eventually I got into the water. The cookout, nothing like food on the grill!

I didn't discover that I could sing until I started going to church. My favorite song, I just sing this Sunday, "I will not be silent. I will always worship you." My sister's on a praise team. I'm on a praise team too. She always wanted to hear me sing and she never got a chance to hear me. So the last time she was here to say goodbye, I put the song on, and I sang it to her.

What I would say to my grandchildren. I am glad that they get to see the new me. The different me. Not the woman that was once out in the world doing a lot of things. But they get to see me for who I am now, today. To teach them that they could come to me no matter what is going on in their life. They could come share with me because I was once young too. There was times when I was not always obedient to my parents either and I understand. And I loved them very much.

All the stuff that I did in my life is a testimony. And it's for me to share for other children as I see on the news that are going through similar things to that I've been through as a kid. To give them hope and to encourage them. And to let them know that if they want to talk, I'm here and I love them in spite of what they are going through. I've been there, done that. I am an Overcomer and victorious.

You Lord, You are worthy
And no one can worship You for me
For all the things You've done for me
And no one can worship You for me
Here's my worship
All of my worship
Receive my worship
All of my worship

Come on, let's sing high in this place
Here's my worship
All of my worship
Receive my worship

And I will not be silent
I will always worship You
As long as I am breathing
I will always worship You
All of my worship
Receive my worship
All of my worship
You Lord, You are worthy



Sarina's family on her Facebook page

Etta Warren

Born in San Antonio, Texas, in 1959, Etta Warren was raised in a family with three boys and six girls. She fondly remembers sitting on the porch with her grandmother Beulah (born in 1890) who cooked, sewed, and made an Easter dress Etta remembers to this day. Her grandfather was mistaken for a bank robber and shot by the police when he was running to catch a bus. She met her husband, Ronald, who was part Native American by his mother, Dorothy, at the age of 17 and they moved to Rockland County, New York, in 1981, when she was 22. She recalls his proposal: "It's time to get married, make it legal." Ronald worked for Yellow Freight until he got sick with congestive heart failure and was forced to quit. He took up woodwork and jewelry-making after retirement and loved contributing to community activities. He passed away in 2018 after they had been together 45 years. Etta was briefly homeless and lost many of her favorite photographs that were in storage. Etta had two children and has 11 grandchildren, six boys and five girls. Her first great-grandchild, Xy'aire, arrived on June 1, 2024, and she said, "He's going to be spoiled."

My grandmother Beulah used to sit on the porch and talk. She made the iced tea. We sit there and snap some green beans and eat some watermelon. Spit the seeds. She would show me how to cook. "You have to know how to cook if you wanna catch a man." And she made clothes. That was her job. She made me an Easter dress one time. It made me feel good.

I'm a good collard green cooker. I can make good turkey, cornbread, potato salad, macaroni and cheese; whatever I cook, I generally know how to cook it. My husband, Ronald, said "You have to be a good cook." I said, "Why?" He said, "Cause my mother's a cook."

Ronald was more of a fixer upper of things. He like to make things. He made that cane I have there. It's the only thing keeping me near him.

I have bad legs, but it don't keep me from dancing. I might regret it later. I gotta put ice and put it up, but I love to dance. We had the old TV with the antenna.

Me and my sister and my father we had built a stage and we thought we were the Supremes. Dance, it make you feel better. You have stress, just dance.

I go to church only on really special occasions but I have Him in my life. Now every time I have a chance, I try to mention Him. Because without Him, I would not be here today. He gave His life for us. You don't really have to go to church to worship Him. You just have to be in a room with closed doors and just talk to Him.

Keep living straight. Keep Jesus in your life. With young kids, they get the wrong crowd, friends, drugs whatever. I am grateful my kids didn't. My grandkids either. It's difficult with what's going on in the world now, very tough with children now.

My grandkids they all pretty much have my husband's personality. Every time they say something, it pretty much reminds me of what he would do cause he taught them a lot of things, like how to put things together.



Etta Warren

My grandson, he's 25 now, he like to play music. First instrument he ever played was the saxophone. And the first song he ever played was theme song from the Cosby Show. He teach himself every instrument he play from the guitar to the saxophone to the drums. He did the saxophone cause my husband always wanted to do the saxophone, but he couldn't cause his heart. So he did it for his grandpa.

What do I want to say to my unborn offspring? I can't wait till he get here. When he's grown, I'm gonna tell him things, like about the family, like I did with the other kids.



Etta's cane, made by her husband Ronald



Mother-in-law, Dorothy Warren



Husband Ronald's appreciation award



Etta, in white, with her five sisters



Husband Ronald Warren's grandmother and great-grandmother



Etta and husband, Ronald Warren



First great grandchild, Xy'aire Zalyne Roenajay Otero, born June 1, 2024

Etta Warren



Etta's refrigerator covered with photographs of family and grandchildren

Catherine James

Born in 1949, in Louisville, Alabama, Catherine James moved with her mother to Macon, Georgia, at the age of nine months. She had three sisters, two of whom are now deceased, with the older one still living in Macon. She knew only one grandparent, her grandmother Mary, who died when Catherine was 8 years old. Mary inspired her life-long interest in fabric and sewing, and she makes all of her own clothes. She has vivid memories of a hard life, walking everywhere and enduring racism in Georgia in the 1960s. She studied in segregated schools, since integration happened only in her last year, and she opted not to change schools. At the age of 20, she moved to Newburgh where she worked at Star Expansion from 1969 to 1998, and then in the fabric department at Walmart, starting in 1998 until now. Her daughter, Felicia, born in 1973, is now 51 years old, and Catherine's first grandchild is now 32. Catherine played a big role in raising her grandchildren with her daughter.

I grew up in the typical South dealing with racial issues that my mother protected us from a lot. We did see a lot of stuff that went on, with the cross burning in the yard, KKK, and stuff like that. We went to segregated schools. We were not integrated until the last year I come out of high school. We walked to school. Never rode a school bus in my life.

We walked everywhere. Once in a while, we would get on the bus, but we had to ride in the back of the bus or stand. We accepted it. Mostly my mother was nonviolent. Most of the time we just walked everywhere. We walked to town. We came back home. As a matter fact, there was no money to ride the bus. My mother worked, but she didn't have no money that we could ride the bus.

My mother shielded me. She was the father. She was the mother. We were family where we stuck together and if she needed somebody to come in take care of us, we would go to my aunt's house or to my uncle's house. When it comes to dealing with people from the outside, not so much.

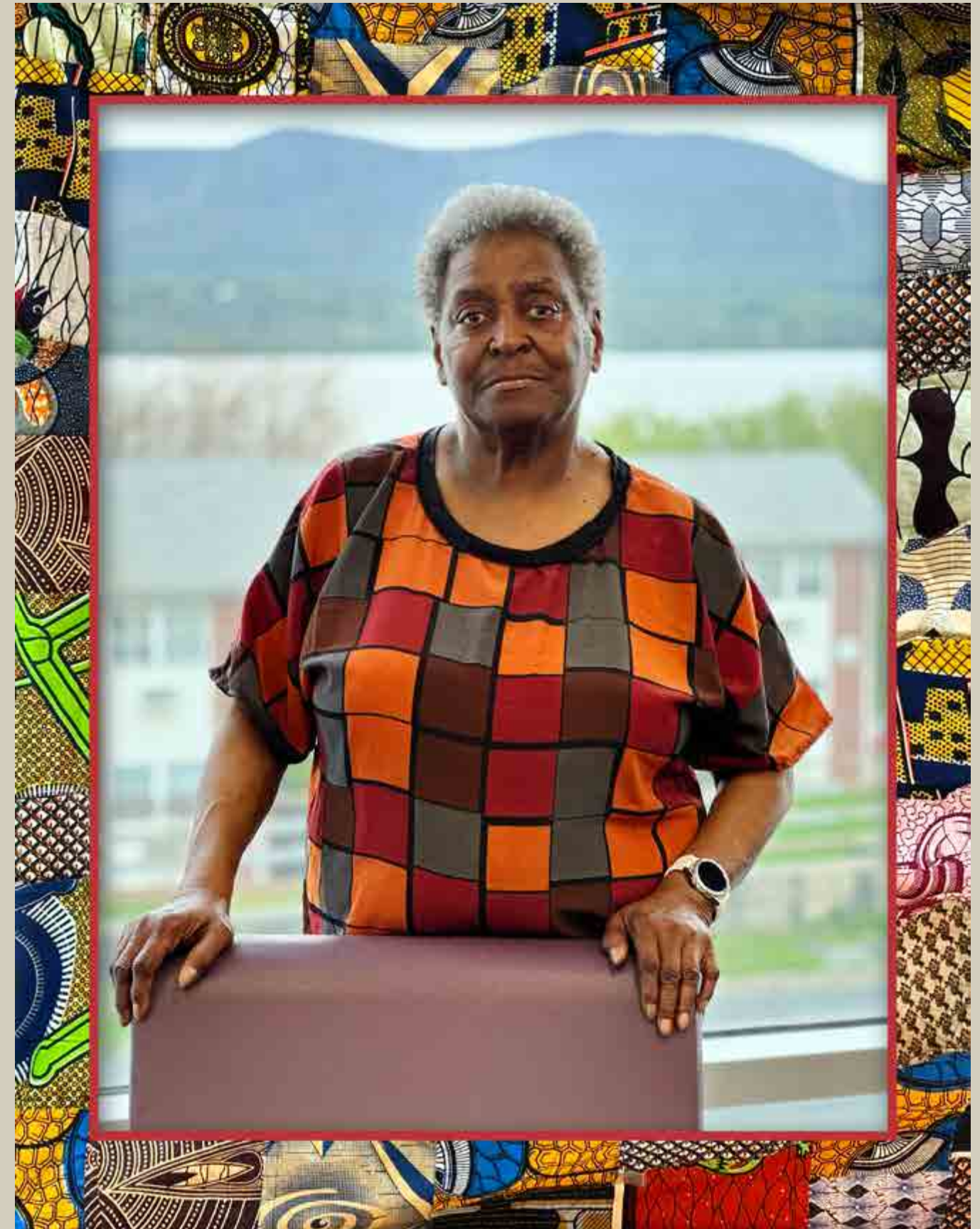
I used to watch my grandmother Mary, we called her "Madea," pull clothes out of the trunk and tear them up and sew them up by hand. And I would say "Madea, can I have a little piece of fabric?" And she

would give me a little piece of fabric and I will play around with it a little and that was it when it come down to learning how to sew, because I didn't have nobody else really to teach me how to do things like that. We would just clean up, cook, and that's it. I loved sewing. And my mother couldn't afford to buy us a lot of clothes. Don't get me wrong, we was clean. We would wash and iron those clothes. We was perfectly clean. I basically started sewing in high school and making my clothes that I needed for graduation. I would make whatever I needed. And I've been doing that ever since.

In the fabric department at Walmart, I try to treat people like I want to be treated. I can't stand people with nasty attitudes. I tend to walk away from them before I say anything that I shouldn't say. It don't pay to be angry all the time and take out revenge on other people.

My first grandchild. It was beautiful. My daughter was young. I was young. And we did it together. And even with her other kids, she had four kids, we did it together. It was like me being the second mother and to this day we have a good relationship.

The greatest joy in being a grandmother is seeing them grow up to be some people. And know that



there is a difference being made in their lives. That they can stop and listen and that they won't talk back. My daughter, she will not talk back. As old as she is. I talk to her and I tell her just what's on my mind. And we leave it like that.

You gotta talk to them. Get down to their level and bring them back up. And I pray with them and I pray for them. And they do the same thing for me. They're not perfect. Kids are not perfect. But they learn from us. They learn from us when they're little. They pattern their life after us. I still sit there and listen, what they have to say. Because, this day and age, if we don't listen to the kids, you might listen to them when they bury them or when they go to jail.

I tell them, you can come and talk to me, but you can still talk to God. Sometimes when you can't talk to me, you can talk to God. I might not have all the answers. I don't have all the answers. But God does.



Clockwise from top left, sister Sharon James, Catherine James, sister Ruby James, sister Dean James, mother Terestra James



Mother, Telestra James with her grandchildren



Mother, Telestra James



Daughter, Felicia James-Brunson with her husband

Gabrielle Burton Hill

Born in Newburgh, New York, in 1965, Gabrielle Burton Hill was raised with two younger brothers. In the 1980's her family purchased a five-bedroom house that became a multi-generational household hosting many foster children. She married in 1995 and separated in 2010. When she was 26 years old, she had been told that she couldn't have children; so she was thrilled when she had her first daughter in 1997, without incident in 2 hours and 13 minutes. The second baby in 2007 took a full day of labor, but Gabrielle muses "What's one day to bring another human into the world?" Her activism ignited in 1999 after her firstborn was diagnosed with near-fatal lead poisoning. This personal crisis propelled her into action, focusing on lead-poisoning awareness. Gabrielle has worked for the Restorative Center of Newburgh since 2016 and has facilitated many of its circles throughout the Hudson Valley. Gabrielle believes that inter-generational conversations are an important part of community and family dynamic. In this space there is the possibility of the collective wisdom of elders and youth to intertwine in an organic way. Gabrielle has worked in public and private industry and is currently a member of the Newburgh Transportation Advisory Committee and is a Newburgh Human Rights Commissioner. She actively takes care of her two grandchildren.

My childhood was one of safety, pleasure, all of my needs being met, care, compassion, protection, everything that a child needs to succeed. I grew up in a very tight-knit family.

My paternal grandmother, Jeanette "Chicken" Burton, was a teenage mom at 15 and my father never knew his dad. Even if I don't remember her voice, I can see her face in pictures. And what I see in her face is a woman who was very proud to be a grandmother. I was my father's first child and I could see in her eyes that she was happy that she lived long enough to see me born.

When my parents and I visited my grandmother Jeanette in Corinth, Mississippi, she was afraid that something may happen with my father and his friends going out. She felt that if they had me along, maybe the officer would have some compassion and not harm them because there was a baby in the car. My grandmother died of a massive heart attack at the tender age of 47. I can't help but think that racial pressure, not knowing if a police car is going to roll up to your house and drag your teenage son out, affected her health.

My maternal grandmother, Willie Lee Hargrove-Howard, lived with us the last 6 months before she passed away; she and I slept in the same bed together during that time. I was 16 and I remember my grandmother thought it was light all the time, so even at night she would wake up and say, "Gabrielle turn that light off." And be I'd be like, "Grandma, the light is off. I'm trying to get some sleep. I got to go to school in the morning." She wasn't a big talker, very quiet woman but she was a gentle force and she gave us such love that you didn't want to disappoint her.

My grandma Willie Lee was very welcoming, fixing meals. She was a stay-at-home mom and caretaker, babysitter of her grandchildren and children in the neighborhood. There was always a sense of helping those who were maybe down on their luck for a minute.

Three months after my father died, my daughter Ragi informed me that she was pregnant. My father had just passed away and there was such a hole there in our entire family that I immediately said, "Thank you" to him because I felt like he was sending a gift.



Gabrielle Burton Hill

Holding my granddaughter Alesia after 32 hours of anticipation gave me another sense of purpose. Now I have to live a little bit longer, now I have to take care of myself, now I have to be present because this is another person that's depending on me and she's also born in a world of turmoil.

I'm teaching my grandson Stephan to be courteous, compassionate, thoughtful. For example, write his mom a thank you letter for those new sneakers. I broke it down for him. I said, this is what your sneakers cost and this is how much your mom makes an hour; this is how many hours she has to work to buy these sneakers. I want them to be very thoughtful of the things that they do have, and not to be envious of what they don't have, but to be really grateful.

I've been with my grandchildren since birth. When the school calls, they call me and I love it. I want my grandchildren to grow up having that sure foundation of belonging and being loved. No one can ever take that from you. If you lose your job, if you lose your spouse, if you lose friends, you will have that solid foundation.

With my grandchildren, we talk face to face, eye to eyeball, "Tell me what's on your mind. Did Grandma do something to offend you?" It is important to give them space to be heard. If she's confident enough to talk to me about something I might not want to hear (like curfew, trust, riding with people in the car, all the no's), then she'll be able to sit in front of her employer and say "this is why I believe I deserve a raise." The hardest person to talk to are your loved ones. If she could stand up for herself to me, she will be able to stand up to others.

When given the opportunity to be kind or right, choose being kind. It's always the right time to be kind. Be thoughtful of others who may be suffering, especially if you're in a position of power and means, to remember that but for the grace of God, there go I. I want my grandchildren to view their presence on the planet Earth as their responsibility or privilege, to do something good for others. But it is equally important to be good to oneself. If it's just one person that you touch, you've earned your rent to stay here.



Grandchildren, Stephan (5) and Alesia (6)



Gabrielle with her mother, Mavis Howard Burton



Daughters, Jo-May and Ragi



Grandchildren, Stephan and Alesia with Gabrielle at Downing Park, Newburgh



Grandchildren, Stephan and Alesia with their great grandmother Mavis Howard Burton



Mother, Mavis Howard Burton with the portrait of her sister Roseanne and brother-in-law



Gabrielle's mother, Mavis Howard Burton framed by pictures of some of the children she raised



Gabrielle Burton Hill is a teacher, social justice warrior, and community activist who is the co-founder of the Frederick Douglass In Newburgh Project (2028) as well as Newburgh Barbershop Appreciation Day (2022).

Francois Deschamps is a photographer and professor emeritus of SUNY New Paltz. His website is: francoisdeschamps.net

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Flowers for Our Grandmothers was conceived and inspired by Gabrielle Burton Hill, who structured and conducted the interviews recorded by Jesse Flaitz. These interviews were transcribed and edited by Deschamps to reflect the content and style of the original oral communication. Deschamps interviewed Burton Hill and wrote the short biographies that accompany each participant's section. The participants reviewed the biographies and interviews, editing for accuracy. The original audio files of the interviews are available to the participants and their families through Jesse Flaitz.

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