

Pur Autr Vie Memoir

Vantage Point: Unveiling My Southern Experience

(For the life of another)

Buffie M. Williams

Philippians 3

13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

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“If you don't feed your love it will die” - Thich Nhat Hanh

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my children Bree and Jordan, my biological and acquired extended family. To my grandchildren in heaven I have never forgotten you and my granddaughter Arpi Jane who is the fullest extension of myself. You have all grown and shaped me to be able to nurture others. It is in these times that we must be honest enough to acknowledge our past missteps, nurture who we are and growing into the best version of ourselves. I love you all.

Acknowledgements

I remember I came into Ms. Buffie's office when she was employed at Troy University. I was hysterical, and she introduced me to meditation. I've never met a person with such a tranquil spirit. She is my soul mother as she has taken me and my daughters in as a part of her family; she's also my mentor. I've seen all aspects of her life spiritual, personal, and professional. And she is exceptional in all ways. She always seemed to handle herself well but after her trip to (I think Israel, I forgot the name of the place) she's transcended. Something was different about her but on a level of perfection. Her business excelled, her spiritual life excelled as well. She is what I aspire to be like in every aspect, because she is the epitome of a phenomenal woman.

Jennifer Davis
Writer / Author, Atlanta, GA

Your personal transformation is remarkable. As a leader you must always evaluate whether or not you are doing what is best for the people that you are leading. I admire your ability to evaluate your situation and determine that you were not were God wanted you to be and acted upon it. You are a testimony of faith persistence and true inspiration. You made your inside universe become the outside for others benefit from.

Dr. Drake Dudley
Dentist / Memphis, TN

I was so excited about my very first yoga experience and even more excited that the beloved Buffie Williams would be my instructor. I had so much tension in my body and thoughts racing through my head. As I walked into the room, the smell of the aromatherapy, the dimmed lights,

and the soft music overwhelmed my racing thoughts. As she led the session, her soft voice and guidance through the poses made me unaware of the tension in my body and brought my mind to a standstill. I could really hear my heart beating like she had mentioned. I felt as if someone had guided me through a complete body and mind transformation by the end of the session. That end result was familiar to me as I had experienced numerous counseling sessions with Mrs. Williams as well. Successfully completing nursing school, life's challenges, being a single parent, and depression were the major issues that Mrs. Williams helped me through. I could not have chosen a better person to be my counselor. Her holistic techniques make her one of a kind.

-La'Keveya Jones
Registered nurse, Troy, AL

I pride myself on saying I'm living a life of purpose, on purpose. It is my personal quote on describing where I'm at today; however, when I think of my yesterday's one key player comes to mind. Buffie M. Williams! Just the mention of that person and my heart begins to glow, a smile illuminates from my heart all the way to my face, and gratefulness consumes me to know that I made a forever friend who has impacted my life forever in so many ways. Who would have thought a little girl from fast paced Miami, Florida would end up find herself in Alabama thanks to a covert angel on a mission to impact lives by resetting mental states, exploring the impossibilities, and finding our personal keys to our salvation. This is a complete understatement to relationship with Buffie and the impact that she has had on my life.

I first came in contact with B. Marie/ Buffie Williams when I was a Student in college. Buffie had such a strong presence of professionalism that I admire and respected. Wither it was the way she graced a room with her presence and all heads would turn not only for her beauty but also her wit, or the way she would handle tense situations of conflict with grace and conviction. Anybody who wanted to be somebody of importance wanted to be in relation with B. Marie. All of her many attributes made me want to be in fellowship with her since I was preparing myself for the world. Through time, work, and sisterly fellowship she became more than just my boss but also a trusted friend.

Many times, in One's journey to finding themselves there is a disconnect to reality and the end result one would desire. Buffie has had front row seats to some of the darkest times in my life. I can say with full confidence that Buffie was my tether to sanity. To say that Buffie was my tether is an understatement, but it's the truth. Buffie equipped me with tools that I still use to this day like; yoga, deep meditation/prayer, and sitting in silence. Many of the tools she instilled in me were already planted in me; however, she showed me how to implement them in my life at a time where I barely knew how to live a life that was a true reflection of me.

The overall impact of Buffie in my life is that of a spiritual guide pushing me closer to my greatness. I often refer to her as a modern Harriet Tubman with her lantern guiding lost, enslaved, and oppressed souls to the north. Instead of physical freedom she offers the ultimate light of love, happiness, acceptance, and peace. To know this beautiful soul is to truly have an encounter with God and to make a vow to pick up our own lanterns and guide others to their north as well.

Kristien Sherman
Airline Stewardess, Fairburn, GA

I have watched my mother struggle by having a child early. She had my grandmother to help when she was pregnant, but she still had a hard time. She had to put school on hold for me. Then she got married and had my brother, with that came a divorce. She is now married again but I am very proud of my mother. She has always provided for me and my brother no matter how much work she has to do or what she has to sacrifice. She is also very big on church, she has always been helpful with the church by being a mission officer, children choir director, second women Sunday school teacher. She always fills in where she is needed and does her part. she helps the most people that she can by providing what she can. She does a lot of community service and visits the elderly regularly and also the sick. She does all of this with two children, a husband, and I very needy 8-hour job at Troy University. She is trying to complete school by get her doctorate at this moment. I admire her very much because even through her many struggles and setbacks she still strives to be the best mother and is still aiming high and for her overall goals.

Amazing mother—Xavia Bree Alloway
Writer / Author, Troy, AL

Prologue

This is a fiction-memoir journey through eras of my life past and present. It also includes other stories that describe various fictional characters lives. Any similarities to real life are purely my recollection of the events.

This is an effort to be a full expression to my life and ways in which I feel life could possibly be better. I am by no means a guru, but I am an enlightened one. This is my life purpose and goal. Completing this memoir, brings me closure to my journeys beginning. I am a spiritual warrior here to learn from my experiences through logic and creativity on a higher mental plain. I have found that I enjoy spending time alone with God and my thoughts, but I do thoroughly enjoy the company of others portraying an extrovert. I have learned that striving for perfection in life and life experiences it 'self is far different. I have discovered that I have come to promote peace, happiness and harmony. I tend to be a sensitive soul even though I seem to have a tough exterior. I have a love for the arts, music and poetry which sprang up from my early influences on the arts. Spiritually I have been found to have a strong connection with my intuition and have found that the more I acknowledge the presence of the spirit within me the louder the echo. With that since of knowing I am able to offer a sense of support for others and I am hoping that by reading this memoir it will aid you on your journey to determine what is the undercurrent of their hurt and pain as well. Home is where the heart is and I want to welcome you to my home. My heart has room for you all #AWAKEN.

<https://www.kickstarter.com/profile/awakenholistic>

Buffie M. Williams

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Pur Autr Vie

Vantage Point: Unveiling My Southern Experience

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BaBa

Our viewpoint in life is often limited and colored with the life experiences we have endured. In the Southern African American culture, we share a collective purpose that is driven by the experiences of our ancestors. Growing up in south Alabama could be tricky at times. Trying to figure out what store to stop at or where to stop to eat lunch on a lazy Saturday afternoon was always an underlying internal dialogue. But I am sure that in other parts of the world people had similar quiet keep secrets. That only by living there could you begin to articulate the angst that creep up in your soul when you felt that your presence was unwanted. BaBa had an interesting perspective on life. Somewhat different indeed from my experiences as a child. There was nothing particularly striking about BaBa's and my story, except I am not afraid to share it. My life experiences although significant and indelible for me, may only be fleeting past times or thoughts for you, of an uneventful nature.

But hear BaBa's story of the south as Baba experienced it.

Sitting talking to my 89-year-old aunt she reminded me of days when even before my parents contemplated bringing me into the world God provided for them in the most beautiful ways. She reminded us that "We thought we had it bad, but those were the best days of her life". She reflected on making con pons (pronounced corn pones) over an open fire in the fireplace of an old three-room house. Or if your family was privileged enough a potbellied stove, in a cast iron fry fill of grease. Slowly

dipping her spoon in the grease pouring it over the pons with it slowing drizzling down frying the outside as it cooked and baked from the heat from the inside out. They mostly cooked them when company came over she softly recalled. “It reminded me of the times when my own mother would use a similar method to cook one of the family members their favorite dish. She would put those delicious water cornbread drops the garden-grown turnips that my father had tilled and nurtured until full maturity for the family. Church members and neighbors to savor them as well. Eating a few for Sunday dinner and then cooking the rest to be put up in the freezer for entertaining guests and family at a much later date. Saving up little by little like squirrels all year long for the winter. Harvesting and canning was just a way of life for us. Always looking to the future and preparing for hard times because we knew that the time would inevitably come. The turnips greens, it was something about them made them extra special. I could never figure out if it was the love or the meat grease or bacon grease ...lol. We could take ½ cup of water and flour or meal and make what we called hoecakes and cornbread patties with syrup or the liqueur off of any vegetable and make a meal. Back then lard could be multipurpose. Grease for your hair or your legs. Boy, we sure have come a long way from charging groceries at the corner store until payday.

Driving along the backroads of Alabama along county road 11 or 8 (some say Willie Nelson lives out this way) dirt roads in the distance, three room houses that people still live in, seems that the world is not that much different from how it used to be. I often wonder about the past lives of those I never got a chance to meet. I stopped along one of these old county roads one day just curious about an old cemetery that caught my eye each time I passed calling me wanting to teach or tell me something of its past. As I got out of my car a calm wind caressed my back as to say welcome it so good that you finally had the time to stop by. Before I knew it, I welcomed it. Whatever it was into my spirit and soul. I was guided to the furthest graves toward the back-right part of the old cemetery, one of the things that stood out to me most was that most of the headstones read “Jane Doe the wife of John Doe” I got the since that a woman was defined by who she was joined to and vice versa. It may not seem like much but to me it was meaningful. I had just had a long conversation with my mother about the fact that, I wasn’t sure that marriage was not all it was “Cracked-up-to-be”, not a the happily ever after. Her comment to me was you

haven't had a good one" "No" I quickly replied. At that point I was on my third marriage and even though I was the one to say I no longer want this, the previous times, reflecting back maybe they didn't want it either. I thought that maybe it was a lesson I had not yet learned or was this even the path I should take marriage. I wasn't sure, but I still had a longing desire in me to be a wife and to be loved. Loved like I had seen in my grandparents for over 40 or so years, loved like my parents for over 55 years. It saddens me. I thought that I had failed myself, my kids, my parents, my family and most of all God. It was a torment that nudged me almost every day. I never even though I lived a life I wanted. I didn't feel that I was truly loved the way I wanted to be even by myself. So, I vowed that day I would pay more attention to me. I had been in personal reflection most of my life. Which is why it surprised me that I was in this position to begin with. Baffled at the all-consuming thought of does the marriage have meaning, so I went on with my day but still feeling compelled to do something different. Make some change in my life. As I returned back to my car driving a long the backroads rolling over massive potholes and patchwork of asphalt on almost every county road one of the most obvious things and saddest is that the more minorities living on the roads the more potholes and patchwork. Almost an indicator to say minorities live here and it seems as though no one cares or even considers repair until whites start to migrate from the city to the county. Uncaring politicians it seems those roads I remember coming up as a kid were dirt roads that the school buses would often get stuck on or have to do a kind of dancing maneuver on wheels to get us to school an hour and a half away. To a school where in the early years during elementary years served hot grits, fresh eggs and your choice of sausage or bacon with whole milk and juice in cartons. Yes, a full course breakfast. The south was a different world back then.

Home remedies in the south was commonplace. I am not sure if it was one of the few cultural things we brought over from Africa or our of necessity for healthcare. Emotional and physical.

Auntie was the type of person who would "hack-up any residue of unwanted or lost past thoughts of experiences or bad spirits she felt were trying to enter her body at any given time. A tall medium brown woman with freckles from some ancestral connection long forgotten. She towered over me. She had to be at least 6' 3". She would also take a swig, as she called it, of homebrewed moonshine, whiskey, or wine

to clear the toxins in her throat from the nights sleep. My uncle who we fondly called “Unc” was the type of man who would hack-up residue of poison toxin he called them, early in the morning after a deep night’s sleep and sniff astringent alcohol in his nostrils to kill any bacteria that was lingering in the air. Which made them the perfect odd couple. They were able to keep their, somewhat, strange quirks within their close nit circle. He was the total opposite of auntie in height. He stood only about 5’3”, short for the guys in our family, but he was my uncle by marriage. It was rumored that he would often walk around naked in their yard protected by a wooden panel privacy fence he would always comment when neighbors, or family would question him about it, “Is this my yard?” “okay then” stay on your side of the fence. Which made since to me, but not to others That was just Unc and I respected him for that.

Home remedies were much better than the cattle heading of patients in mental health and watching companies no matter how good, not giving enough support to the therapist and health care workers who try their best to give to their patients. Work life balance is essential. America seems to be bursting at the seams on every level. We must find a way to find peace and solace one by one, household by household in order to find comfort. We may need to take a page from their history book.

And to get a quality healthcare provider, you would have to drive at least an hour and a half not to mention the extra expenses like the cost of getting there, taking off work and missing pay or having the co-pay or health insurance coverage. My grandfather who had lost one of his lungs to cancer after about six months after his youngest child graduated high school was living in what we now call the family house ,tied to aired property like most in the south, needed an ambulance late one evening and as my mother recalled the last words she heard as he requested to be transported to the ER in Montgomery, Alabama and being told by the ambulance driver you have to go to the one in Troy due to some policy, Grandpa quoted “And they say this is a free country.” He would not live to see another day in that home and we lost one of the greatest patriarchs of our times. Those words still haunted my mother still at the age of 76. It was sad, disheartening to think even though we have made tremendous strides in America, rural communities still suffered in ways others could never bare.

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At that time, I had a faint desire to live for a better tomorrow. Other times not.... After a major surgery I had most nights as I tossed and turned in my bed restless. Most mornings just before the red hue of the dawn began to rise I would have this thought to myself as if it was the first time each day “Oh yeah”.. After about the fourth or fifth time I had tossed as if I was trying to get my pillow ready for a good night’s sleep. Then I felt it. The pain in my lower abdomen. Yes, that’s it” I would say to myself. I need to go to the bathroom. This was the new way of my body telling me I needed to go to the bathroom. This was my body telling me, “You may want to go now, ahh I let out a huge sigh every time it happened because it annoyed me, it inconvenienced me. I could never really tell if I had to go. Especially in the daytime. Usually, then it was I just couldn’t keep still in my chair just like the pillow thing I did at night and in the mornings. If I couldn’t get comfortable I probably needed to go. My new normal was getting frustrating and the doctors didn’t seem to care. Just one of those things you have to get used to. I sighed again, and again, knowing that would take more effort and more money than I had to figure out what my bladder issue really was. So, I just keep it moving along as usual thinking some people have it much worse and with that I went to the restroom, washed up and went back to sleep, bladder empty or as far as I could tell.

My story wasn't at all unique. Access to quality healthcare in my community was the running joke of the town. Residents were afraid of going to the local hospital for fear that they may well have been at home and left to die. Rather than encounter incompetent workers at the local emergency room "The Edge of Death" we called it.

Growing up

Growing up everyone has a home garden and the lawns although not perfectly manicured, they had a beautiful array of flower beds that brought joy to your heart and practical purposes for the environment. Each lawn creating the perfect habitat for us to enjoy its beauty, the bees to feast and pollinate the vegetable gardens and water and bugs for the birds that passed through on their morning journey to more beautiful lawns scattered across the county side. Some yards were only dirt yard that they would rake each week to move any debris that cluttered it.

Back then families were farmers by necessity and by nature. It was what we knew. It was what we did for survival. Almost everything we ate was grown by our fathers and grandfathers or a neighbor down the street. It was a common occurrence for us to trade vegetables and freshly killed deer, squirrel, possum, raccoon, chicken or hog.

Hog killing days were especially eventful. All the neighborhood men would gather on a cool Saturday morning to slaughter a hog, gut him, make sausage, divide the meat and cook fresh crackling over a log fire outside in a black cast iron pot. That was my favorite. Over the years I lost my desire for fresh meat, fresh vegetables and the patience it took to gather the eggs for baking a homemade three-layer cake. But I am glad I have these experiences to fall back on. They have given me a sense of comfort since I have come to the realization that now I am one of the working poor searching for a better way of life.

I have found peace and solitude with it. Being poor. Because it is only in the material sense. It used to be a source of distress and pain. Everyday portraying the image of what others perceived I had become but my reality was yes, I had accomplished the educational goals, dreams and desires my ancestors hoped for me, but it was not a sustaining lifestyle due to school loan debt and the desire to provide more for my children. I was indeed in a worse place than I had grown up in. My aunt was right “we thought we had it bad, but it turns out that was when we had everything we needed”, including the right perspective and priorities in life, faith, family, and community then everything else. Those were the times I miss most.

Sharing cups of sugar, flour, milk, or even an egg or two was a common occurrence in those times. We did what we had to do to make it from one day to the next. So maybe God allowed some of this suffering, and sacrifice to teach us that we all survive, live and thrive through each other even if it was symbolized by a bunch of collard greens.

This life was far from the life I had been living. My soul had become detached and I could feel the tug each time I did anything contrary to where my soul and heart desired to be.

As kids we would play for hours in tree houses. Now for us this was simply finding a tree that we could climb into on our own and claim it as our own. No, lumber or assembly required, just God's creations. Playing house in the trees calling each other on imaginary phones and we would talk for what seemed like hours or until we could see the clouds swooning and swaying across the sky with the sun neatly tucked away and nestled in setting for the day. Or someone's mom calling their name and as it roared on the wind it echoed lingering on the wind and finally settling in our ears. We would all sprint down from our tree homes and make a mad dash for our houses to enjoy a homecooked meal around the dinner table. We always knew what it was because most weeks everyone's home had the same menu—Monday's meatloaf, green beans and mashed potatoes. Tuesday's Liver which I hated with a passion, white rice and gravy. Wednesday's Spaghetti, English peas and corn. Thursday's Pork chops or Saulsberry steak which I hated as much as I did liver. Friday's were special if your parents got paid we would have fast food. Saturday's, we had turkey or ham sandwiches and chips or a tomato sandwich with mayo, salt and pepper or syrup sandwiches. But my favorite was a butter sandwich. Artery clogging but so delicious. Sunday's were special and we all looked forward to fried chicken, potato salad, field peas, homemade cake or cobbler with freshly picked berries and tea that had been left outside while we were at church to brew the sun. Nothing better than sun kissed sweet tea.

Playing church on the steps leading to my parents' outdoor access basement was one of the highlights of my childhood. My paternal grandmother who lived with us and I shared a room with, would often let me borrow her crystal triple string necklace BaBa my aunt bought for her. As the sun would hit the crystals beads a rainbow reflection would light up the steps walls just as we were breaking into song

singing old hymns. It reminded me of the promise of a better tomorrow and my old church. Or sometimes I would play driving to the church in the old car in the front yard, that had long since stop running. Then it was just the second of the churches our ancestors had after slavery. One small white wooden framed building that if you were ushering standing at the entry door you could feel the breeze blow through the cracks. In the summer it was sweltering hot. Big meetings sermons, church fans waving and box fans in the windows to keep us all cool. The floors as I remember were pretty level and we used gas heaters after they removed the potbellied stove. Eventually they added a kitchen and restrooms and tore down the outhouses. After church services was another highlight, communal dinner. Children would be running around, and all the ladies of the church would be bringing out the old chicken boxes stuffed with any and all the soul food you could imagine. Back then we ate outside on long picnic tables with matching benches after church on special Sunday's. Long picnic table/bench, snow cones, whiskey on the back of old trucks, down the dirt road some ways of course and handmade dresses. My mom was a great seamstress. She would make my Easter dresses by hand each year, along with a matching purse with a ribbon for a draw string to keep it closed. Whether it was out of necessity or choices they were all beautiful and appreciated.

Thinking of those days reminds me of my maternal grandfather who was a sharecropping and memories of watermelons and grandma baking tea cakes. Sunday dinners with the pastor after church some Sundays. Grandma smelling like Avon Odyssey. She was a fair skinned lady with reddish gold hair and she stood about 5' 5" and for most of her life she was plus-size as we would call her these days. Seems as though now people would rather see you die trying to lose ten pounds than accept you for who you are at ten pounds overweight. Don't get me wrong I know health is important, but I can remember a time when we respected and accepted, big mammas' as they call them, for growing old gracefully with gray hair, 20 pounds overweight, limping with a cane and we adored her for it all. We know she had sacrificed and supported her husband, raised her kids, worked hard and never complained. She worshipped and treated everyone with kindness and respect for who they were as a person on the inside and we showed that same respect to others.

Sharecropping was just in my opinion another form of oppression, but somehow my maternal grandfather turned it into an asset. Later becoming a school bus driver and purchasing enough land to build a four-bedroom two bath house. Which was phenomenal to me and provided each of his eight surviving kids with an acre of land. How did he acquire land? I may never know. Back then parents would sacrifice all of themselves just to give future generations a leg up. The historical backdrop of sharecropping has always been a mix of appreciation for what it taught us about caring for each other and the land of God. And also a disdain for the oppression and bondage of mind it created.

Now I have gotten to an age where it pains me to get out of the bed, I can no longer feel the sensation of whether or not I need to urinate. Not staying away from home long because I didn't know if I would find the need to go to the bathroom or lay down to rest my aching knees or legs. I weep myself to sleep most nights thinking of what I have become and how much worse it must have been for Baba and my grandparents. It makes my heart ache. Now we are at a time of asking our smart speakers to play whatever our minds can phantom or conjure.

Most days now when people approach me about church or religion I direct them to a seeker friendly station Faith Radio 89.1 with I think a Montgomery commentator and the inspiring message of Adolph Coors IV on CD at "Focus on the Family.com".

Coming up

We should all have the freedom to learn and experience life in our own unique way. Due in part to an innate feeling inside me and due to the way, I feel I was not even given an opportunity to express myself and excel educationally, I agree with the philosophy of unschooling and self-directed education. Where a student is able to explore the curious nature and playfulness through sociability and information access digital or otherwise. Instead of a system of imposed schooling through reward and punishment.

I can remember days as a child when my dad would come home from his day job as a civilian worker at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama and then leaving out to go “pulp wooding” that is hauling lumber for the city folks, after work. After having gotten up at 4:00 a.m. in the morning so that he would drop off one of my brothers, Kenneth at his plant job, “ at I think it was a mayonnaise company” in Montgomery, my other brother Curtis at his job where he would repaired air conditioners, old stoves and washer dryers for a then black owned second-hand store and then drop me off at Trenholm State Community College.

I never imagined I would find myself in a similar situation as my dad many years later. I had started working a second job, not my first time doing so but at this stage in my life, around the age when my dad was pulp wooding it hit me, I was repeating a cycle, to ensure we, my husband and I would hold on to our home. Which we had built about six years before on land my parents had worked so hard to keep to pass down to me someday. Each evening as I dragged myself to bed with tears in my eyes from the knee and shoulder joint pain, from a long day's work before, and the sorrow of being black in America, even though we have more opportunities than most countries, was a too heavy and hard burden to bare. I would often pray the sincerest prayer for God to allow me to rest with him for all eternity and never let me go at night. But to my dismay each morning I woke up to the same knowing that the sparing of my life was not for me but the glory to our Father who said in the kindness way as only he can within my heart, "Buffie you still have more work to do. And with that I lived to see and work another day. I realized that I had been living in a constant tense state. Until one day someone showed me a Tyler Perry play they had purchased bootleg off the streets and I laughed, and I cried, and I laughed and thought "laughter to heal the soul." No thinking required. Thank you, Tyler, for giving us the comic relief we all need

People fishing beside the roadways for Saturday evening dinner. Keeping their cane poles in the back seat of their cars with the back window down just enough to let the pole to wobble, bounce and wave in the wind as they search for the perfect fishing hole beside the roadways underneath a county rickety wooden bridge. With cups of bait dug up from the muddy yard after a hard rain and a five-gallon-bucket to keep any catch of the day in the floorboard of the back seat. Those were the days.

Each neighborhood had its own little village as I like to call them. There were a sea of different homes some trailers, homes with a room where a bathroom should be like my grandma's. They usually consisted of an area that one relative had purchased and then included all of their sisters and brothers in on the deal and each child would then get their plot of land. So, each immediate group lived near their immediate clan or family. And usually there was a community store that had everything from oil for your car, to honey buns, to penny candy. Penny bags of candy were my favorite. I would bum a dollar or two off my parents and would get on the bus the next morning still beaming because I has at least 75 pieces

left to enjoy. Back then the bus drivers knew your parents because school would employ local people. Most of them had permission to get a switch to threaten to spank your butt if you dared to talkback or start trouble on the bus and then they would politely put the bus in park upon your arrival home telling your parents, so you could get a second tongue thrashing or spanking when you got home.

On the weekend's kids, young adults, cousins and neighbors would gather together and play various games like dominos, spades or even the dozens, joking on each other -- It was also most a custom greeting and sparring of intellectual wit. The dozens was fun to watch and even more exciting to participate in. It seemed because they were always ready and fully loaded the insults that were meant to level the playing field or display who was the alpha dog of the day. "Who was tha man? It was fun. All of this would be followed by a friendly game of basketball, softball or baseball depending on what season we were in.

Living in my parents' house back then was fun and interesting. I had been rooming with my paternal grandmother since the age of about two, so my parents say, my brothers shared a room, and my mom and dad's room was in the room where the dining room was supposed to be. My parents would host house party's where I would have the privilege of playing DJ and switching out the Brooke Benton, Sam Cooke, Marvin Gay and Al Green 8-tracks. I loved when their friends came to the house. They had one friend that looked so much like Smokey Robinson I would go into a deep gaze every time he came around. Later I would find myself as a preteen or teenager in the middle of the floor listening to my Boom box, making mixed tapes from the radio. Waiting on the top 10 or 20 on the charts or Mid-night grooves on HOT 105.7. You had to time it just right, so you could press record just after the announcer finished setting the song up and press the pause button just before the commercials. It was a tricky game of cat and mouse, but I had perfected my mixing skills during the house parties at home and from my brother Curtis who ended up being one of the best DJ's in town. Especially when it came to Blues music, until he became a deacon at the church and then it was back to the radio.

Most of my parents' friends were truth-tellers. I don't know if it was who they truly were or if it was the fact they had just left the bootleggers house. Either way we all need truth-tellers in your life—I have a

mastermind group to help keep me grounded but back-in-the-day truth-tellers were everywhere. My personal choice of natural connections with a truth-teller was my husband. Because living up to expectations of what others wanted for me almost costed me my life. I preferred to live up to truth not expectations. That is why I love Tyler Perry. He taught us, and by us, I mean blacks, how to laugh again. Laugh at ourselves, laugh at our difference and our similarities as a native tribe with the same root values at a time when we needed it most. The country feels so divide from my small perspective of the world. I find myself feeling knots in my stomach when I would see a confederate flag or a police officer. The preoccupation with what if they just decide today is my day to be harassed. Don't get me wrong I know I have not done anything wrong, but my anxiety level goes up each time I see an officer in uniform, and that saddens me for the state of the world and the future.

When I was younger my dad took me to democratic party meetings which I am sure contributed to my black power attitude as a kid and I was involved in the NAACP as a youth. All of which gave me a deep appreciation for my family, my community and my nation. In small towns we often hear rumors whether true or not of mysterious death and hangings of African American males in Alabama, Mississippi and all around the south, but it is kept hush, hush because of the perpetuation of hate that causes a lower middle-class woman like me to fear being caught on the streets alone in my own neighborhood. A neighborhood I grew up in, fought for, worked to make positive changes in but still I fear when my children or I go out at night what may happen. I believe in the humanity and kindness of people. Yes, there are those who have done unspeakable evil things in this life, but I still insist that love flows throughout the universe and I try to remind myself of it every day. Love is a powerful equalizer that brings with it peace and light and with that I live with the hope of a better day.

Because of my exposure to all of these efforts, although I consider myself a shy introvert I am very vocal and very visible in my community and action. Or so I tell myself.

Vibrations of water

We must grieve the pain that once was our nourishment like fresh milk from a mother's breast. Birth is sometimes difficult but worth the pains and difficulty of the beautiful and sometimes still born ideas of the soul. But yet they are still loved just the same and valuable for the journey ahead. Sometimes the protracted experience of it all makes you wonder if all the pleasure you experienced in the past was truly worth the sacrifice of the pain of letting it go. Freeing the energy, you have that has swelled up inside you. Sometimes it takes a lifetime for a woman to understand that the energy that she has succumb to has been birthed in misery or regret. But still the hopes, and the possibilities of birthing light and love wins each time. In the hopes that the misery and pain that was birthed in her could somehow be healed in the process and the pain would end forever and the light and love would last for an eternity.

Then almost as easily as the pain leaves her and hope rushes in. She wonders to herself how will she be able to sustain, nourish and feed this love for she has only but for a brief time now of its existence but all the while clinging to it because she knows it is the cure for all things.

All pain, all suffering, all injustice, all heartbreak whether it be physical, mental or emotional is especially nourishing for the soul. For it is there where awareness abides. The cure for what ails us.

For the pains of the others who have not been able to pass on the fullness of their pain have been driven to hysteria for generations. Driven mad by the hate, lies, pain and suffering trapped in her womb the womb of her soul unable to find a tangible place to release it and being surrounded by people who can easily identify it but no resolution for her visible and manifesting hysteria. Pain of watching the glimmer leave my sons eyes was one of the hardest moments for me as a mother. Vibration, Vibration. Not everyone operates on the same vibration. Some call it chemistry, but when you encounter it is powerful. The most powerful thing of it all is not to succumb to it but resist it Which is the most powerful thing failing to resist the vibration long enough to realize what the universe is telling you can be detrimental. All vibrations are not meant to be sexual although the feel and the allure of the attraction is similar in nature. The vibration is so powerful it stimulates all the cells of your natural body and the infinite nature of you should be. You must search within yourself to understand what the meaning behind what you

have naturally become drawn to. It may be for reflection, or healing. Unavoidably Certainly, you will learn the lesson.

Prayer for understanding

The last time I was in despair this is what I told a friend who came to me for help and healing. “I appreciate you entrusting me enough and caring enough about me that you listened to God and reached out to me. My last prayer to him was a cry that I am always the strong one and I have only God to turn to. In life it is difficult sometimes to find a space for healing. This is why I became a therapist myself. Growing up it was always looked at as a weakness reach-out when you were hurting.”

I have prayed the prayer and I already feel a spiritual lifting in my spirit. I know that the vibration of my hurting was heard today. Just to have a safe space to be able to communicate freely (in trust) is beneficial to me.

The feeling of angst came over me like the trickling of a waterfall before you feel the rush of the cascading water. That could either wash our sins away or engulf you like a mighty wave...And this felt like the latter. Like I only had milliseconds to grasp for air as if I were a fish laying on the banks hoping that the next gush of water would wash me into the river of forgiveness for all I had done or even contemplated in me in to do wrong.

As I mentally inventoried one of my many go-bags excitements of what was to come welled up inside me. “Lip balm check. Perfume check. Hair pins check. Mini scented lotion check. Lip gloss check. Facial concealer for the next morning in case I had too much to drink check. Mini tooth paste check. Mini body wash check. Tweezers in case there any stray hairs peeked out check.” “I had a go-bag for just about every occasion you could think of.” This was the problem. I was looking for an escape instead of dealing with the pain of my reality.

My parents and grandparents never told me I have to go to college it just felt like an expectation that lingered in me. I was fortunate enough to be one of the many children in our neighborhood to participate in a Head Start program growing up. Over fifty years ago, President Lyndon B. Johnson created the program to help meet the socioeconomic need of preschool-aged children from low-income backgrounds. This was designed to meet their emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs. The program began in 1965 as a part of the War on Poverty. Nearly half of the nation's children were under the age of 12 and the government felt a need to, as the history book quoted through a life line to the impoverished community.

I am sure my parents never fathomed that I would one day work and ultimately be the program director over another program that also had its inception under the implementation of the 1965 Higher Education Act. President Johnson was quoted as saying "I believe that this is one of the most constructive, and one of the most sensible, and also one of the most exciting programs that this nation has ever undertaken." I am not a historian and I am sometimes a skeptic of programs that promote one thing in public but had an underlining message privately, but this is one that probably because of my direct participation and therefore benefit of the Head Start program am a believer in it and the trajectory path it can send children in. But in my community the feeling of being marginalized almost seemed perpetual even though these programs were offered.

I was a college graduate, but I still had to choose between paying my car insurance or having to give up car insurance and the equivalent of a mortgage payment to provide healthcare coverage for my husband and I. So needless to say, we are two of the uninsured self-payers. It is almost, no, it is demoralizing to think that by doing what I thought would insure me a hopeful future, entrapped me with student loan debt, a mortgage, and I was still not able to make the ends quite meet. I had gone through my savings several times although I should consider myself and my family fortunate that I even was able to save during the

times I did. My husband is considerably older than I and he had two major surgeries on his quad tendons and that left him out of work for almost two years and by the time we knew he would not be able to return to his labor-intensive job he had before. Even though his job of supervisor was less strenuous than a laborer he had to make sure the job was done and if he didn't have enough men to cover the shift he had to do the work. No excuses. It had to be done. A year prior to his last surgery I left my job at the university where I worked for a first generation, low-income federal TRIO program and had become vested in the retirement pension. So, I took a personal sabbatical.

I began my time with TRIO as a counseling intern after I had one of my counseling rotations with a mental health facility I wanted to broaden my scope of practice and expertise to a population that was dear to me so I was able to secure a spot as an intern for the Upward Bound program at Troy University. The history of TRIO began with the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, again as a direct action on the War on Poverty. In its inception in 1965 birthed was Talent Search the second program to be created as a part of the Higher Education Act and then in 1968 Student Support Services, which I would later work for also, the original TRIO so they were coined. These programs were all designed to assist disadvantaged students from middle school on through college. Later other programs were added Amendments adding Educational Opportunity Centers, Training Program for Federal TRIO Programs, Ronald E. McNair Post baccalaureate Achievement Program and Upward Bound Math/Science program. All of them designed to give students like me a better chance of completing high school, going to college to obtain a master's and a doctorate degree. At that time the Director Mary J. Griffin only knew of me, but I assume it was all pleasant, she hired me. I worked within the university setting for over fifteen years. It was always within the fabric of who I was. The residue of the first spark in me from Head Start was still there after all these years. When I looked at those students I saw myself. I wanted to give them the guidance and care I was not able to obtain. Even though TRIO was in my home town I was never able to participate in any of the programs besides Head Start.

The decision to take a sabbatical was riddled with reasons why? Why after all this time was I thinking of leaving a program that had done so much for students just like me? It boiled down to this, I wasn't

making enough money to make my monthly bills. I was over worked and undervalued. My staff had lost their fight to make a difference in the lives of the students and I was completely burned out. I had tried unsuccessfully to have my student loans forgiven. Even though I did all that was required I was still denied loan forgiveness. I still took my yearly trips or call or letter writing campaigns to fight for TRIO year after year, on my own time and with my own funds as to not confuse the flow of federal funds. I made sure we only purchase or had staff training all on approved by the Office of Management and Budgets (OMB) guidelines and governed the program by Federal Regulations So why was I doing it? Why, could I not control the urge to just walk away after all this time. I just needed to take a step back and reevaluate what I wanted out of this life. I was working with students everyday teaching them how to succeed and overcome barriers that I too had faced not so many years before them, but I still had the baggage of “I still haven’t made it. What makes me think their road is going to be any different.” It wasn’t always that way. I wasn’t always cynical about it. I truly believed in the dream. But trying to convince a low-income student to not take out student loans when their family is being faced with evictions and mountains of debt some of them could not create a strong foundation for themselves without looking back and falling into many of the same traps they came to college to avoid. I had numerous success stories and through the years that is what I clung to most, but I was drained mentally and emotionally trying to make my own finances make sense. It was one thing to understand economic literacy and apply it to fluctuational dollar amounts but if you don’t have the finances to work with it is, all useless knowledge and small town, small talk.

My mother had been valedictorian of her class, my dad was on schedule to become salutatorian of his class, I had two aunts on my maternal side to get valedictorian and a first cousin to follow. I had persons on my parental and maternal side to serve in the U.S. Military. I had a brother Mario that had just recently to retire from the U. S. Navy and we lost my brother Sgt. Carl Ray Fuller in Iraq in 2005 at the age of 44. My family was not perfect by any means, but they were perfect for me, but I still longed for something more. Something I still had not yet mastered. So many in my community are happy just to be working and I know I was one of the blessed ones. But here I was contemplating leaving because I just couldn’t survive with the pay I knew I had survived enough financial plans to see our boat was sinking. Not fast and not at

a dripping pace, but it was a steady stream and I needed to jump ship or drown. Because after all the point of the TRIO program from my perspective is to hopefully one day work yourself out of a job and I felt we were extremely close to reaching that goal. Now the government needed to redefine the goal and I needed to redefine my life.

For whatever reason I had been given the privilege early in life of diversity. Exposure to the Head Start Program. Exposure to different nationalities at Maxwell Air Force Base, with my dad working there in civil service in the laundry for 34 years. Exposure to different socioeconomic communities visiting my aunts and uncles growing up in New Jersey, Ohio, Indiana, and Texas. Family trips to Panama City Beach, Florida only two hours away from my home. My parents didn't have a lot, but they were resourceful. My parents would sacrifice and save so that we could take road trips almost every summer to somewhere different. My mom would prepare fried chicken and sandwiched in a bag and we would stop at different rest areas or concrete benches beside the highways back then and we would enjoy our family meals together. With my dad always blessing us in prayer before. It was magical, and I still can feel the love and sacrifice of it all. And I lived in a university town that brought it's own diversified flavor.

My mother tells stories of all the offers my dad passed up because she was wasn't crazy about the ideas. For her been content and working hard was the way to security in life. He had offers to work oversees in Germany for the military as a civil service employee but because she didn't want to move away. He had taken off to New York once for work and found himself trapped in a worker's camp where everything he made in the days wages he had to pay the owner back for his lodging and meals. In these ways I was a lot like my dad in my younger years. It sent cringes down my mother's spine each time I would tell her of what I was up to next. I am sure because I was her baby girl it kept her on pins and needles, even though she didn't say it I could feel the energy just the same. I had not tried hard enough to control all of my missteps and my later downward spiral. This is what I hoped my children would avoid. Ultimately, he sent word back to my paternal grandmother and she sole a cow to send him the fund to come home. Once he and his cousins the gospel quartet group "The Heavenly Stars" were offered a record deal but because all the members did not agree so they passed it up. They would sing songs like.

“God’s Goodness” by the Willie banks & The Messengers. “This Evening Our Heavenly Father” by the Dixie Hummingbirds and Ol’ Death by author unknown or it’s been so many years I don’t recall.

Growing up going listening to quartet singing was an amazing thing to witness. Almost everyone I knew in my family had at least three people who could sing, play the piano or the guitar. The musical impact of my upbringing also had its effects on me. As Old Deacon Jones used to say, “and that is the thing about that.”

Not to mention in those days’ blacks were restricted or challenged to do things that brought in a decent income. So, everyone made some type of adjustment. Whether it was heading off to a historically black college because white colleges would not allow is in, or running moonshining as a necessity, or crating a bookie or bootlegging business. Whatever needed to be done for their advancement within reason seemed to be fair game.

For my children I as many parents do hope that they would have access to more opportunities than I would even imagine. So, we as a family saved and sacrificed to send my oldest Bree on a trip overseas even though I did not yet possess a passport. She was selected among some of her classmates while we were living in Tifton, Georgia to take a trip to Dublin, Wales, Ireland and London. So, we ate turkey sandwiches for I can’t even remember how long to scrape the money together for her to experience something I always wanted for myself. Each family member sacrifices something. Later we would sacrifice again to send her to the Alabama School of Math and Science her sophomore through senior year, where she graduated with a distinction in History and Biology. Ultimately, she studied at Nichols State in Thibodaux, Louisiana and Troy University majoring first in chemistry and biology for me and then philosophy and political science after some soul searching for herself. My youngest Jordan was given all of the options as well, but he declined them all probably as an act of kindness seeing the drain it did on the family budget each month. Struggling to find the resources, and time to take her back and forth to Mobile just at the off-chance it would keep her interested in Math and Biology which were her passions at the time. I would meticulously enroll her and Jordan into math, science, reading, art and sports camps each summer hoping they would find their passion at one of them and latch on for dear life. These were

opportunities I was not afford because we didn't have the funds. I desperately wanted to take jazz dance I can still feel the faint movement of the motions in my body continuously even though I never had the opportunity to take one class. I recall a time when in grade school all the kids were checked for scoliosis and they told my parents I needed a back brace. When I can home and gave the info to my mom she simply said we can't afford it. That was our reality. I was somewhat elated at the time not to have to wear a brace or be bullied more than I already was at school but now as an adult I think to myself, "Buffie you should have pushed harder." But I know my parents made the sacrifices they could and everything else falls into its proper order, getting picked only if the funds were truly available. We were still able to eat and have a roof over our heads and I think I would much rather have that. Then my heart smiled, and I knew she had made the right decision. Later in life my kids would too have their own struggles, but I am so proud of them, and my beautiful full of life and energy granddaughter Arpi Jane, as I know my parents are of me, just for finding my voice and being who I was destined to be. I don't regret one sacrifice or extra job I took to provide what I felt best for them both. We only get one shot at this life and I aim to give them my best.

Surreptitious way

It is my understanding that there are 37 vibrations between happiness and sadness in music notes. I have found mine and my life's purpose is to assist others on their journey towards theirs's. Almost everyone in the south is a part of some type of secret society. Whether they are Masons, a part of the Eastern Stars, in a fraternity, sorority, the Klan or apart of some other surreptitious group, as some call them. It feels as though there is a growing fear of secret organizations that are not necessarily approved of by some. One pliable feeling in the south is that you need to belong to something, but the ones who feel like excluded for one reason or another start to formulate varying opinions.

My great aunt Kitty as we lovingly called her, was adamant about preserving tradition and since my father was no longer an active Mason my early inquiries about joining the Eastern Stars was quickly and swiftly quenched. It perplexed me for some time but eventually I let it go. I knew, or I didn't think it was personal since she constantly asked me to get my dad back active. But he was his own man and I would never attempt to try and convince him of anything of that personal a nature. With that I still to this day am not interested, maybe she since that as well. My grandfather and grandmother equally were extremely active in the Masons and Eastern Star society, but it still didn't faze me that much not to be considered due to my father's inactive status. Years later I found myself being accepted by the best civic group, a sorority of which I love and deeply respect from its inception to its core. After that I had the spiritual urging to start a different type of group called "Find LOVE in the Darkness" and the other was a mentorship type program call World Knowledge "Think Tank" group. "Find LOVE in the Darkness" includes a MAP- Master Assignment Plan. Which in some form is included in the group meetings? Some who joined have struggled with abuse, depression, lack of acceptance, low-self-esteem and many other issues that exacerbate the emotional and mental state of so many. Finding your life purpose can be

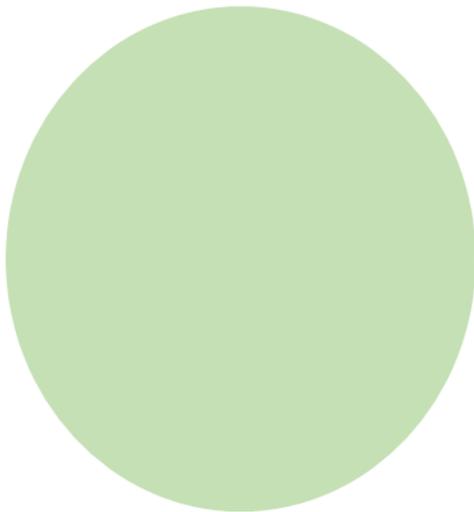
difficult. We as a community have a responsibility to recognize when our fellow brothers and sisters are struggling. Hopefully this will be a segway to a deeper conversation in our community and in the world.

So now I encourage you to develop your own Master Assignment Plan (MAP) for your life. After delving into my story, you may see things more clearly. You may have had pitfalls that have hindered you. Others you may want to avoid. You have various areas that must be included in this plan: Spirituality (Faith), Health, Personal Growth, Relationships, Service, Finance, Career, and Education (we are lifelong learners).

Also consider implementing a “Find LOVE in the Darkness” group for women or for males a R.A.M.P. (Real AWAKEN Men Pray) group in your community, church community or organization using the following template. Results will vary and remember to consult a professional if issues are beyond the groups capabilities. It is designed to be a supportive confidential healing environment. “Find LOVE in the Darkness” group begins with Arrival/ Greeting. (Payments/Donations for group at this time will happen; the circle will be made before seating). Next, sitting in Silence (Prep time for discussion that will later happen, mini meditation, allowing self to open from the inside out. 5 mins w/ light music). Followed by introductions (No more than 10 mins). Then give the topic for the session (Topics will be taken from meaningful group topics or guest speaker). This includes intimate dialogue. (This is similar to a Question and Answer time; however, it is less based on a right and wrong answer and more about tailoring each experience to each individual person). Mind, Body, Spiritual Fitness Time with God is the final five minutes of the session.

Weekly Pie Reflection

Before closing out (This time will be taken out to review each person's individual being emotional state at that moment. There are 6 categories and each one creates harmony and balance in one's life.)



The Balancers of My Life

Directions: The sage color circle is the frame for your weekly pie. In this pie, you will divide it into the 6 categories given. Divide your pie as it is applicable to your life now. Remember no one person's pie is perfect. The overall concept is to become aware of the balancers of our life and apply correction if needed.

- **Faith**
- **Finances**
- **Career**
- **Personal**
- **Academic**
- **Health**

The World Knowledge "Think Tank" group came from my desire to provide student with an education template that I feel if expanded into the public-school system or charter school experience could have lasting and sustainable results using Federal TRIO programs or public-school systems as a

comparative group baseline to measure results more closely. It was set-up with the following structure, a structure flexible enough to be tweaked along the way with intellectual agility for the most beneficial students outcomes, of course. The mission of the AWAKEN Holistic Summer Enrichment program which incorporates “The World Knowledge “Think Tank” group is to develop individuals who will possess the knowledge, skills, and values essential to becoming whole and productive citizens (i.e. career, college, or life transition from high school).

The programs *guiding principles* are: 1) Develop high expectations and performance for all students 2) Impart personal accountability, economic responsibility, and strong communication skills, 3) pledge and develop effective collaboration with cohorts, community agencies, and business-industry associates, 4) engage in research to provide innovative training, skillful technology use, and extended student prospects, and 5) Provide respectful and considerate service in safe, clean, well-maintained environments.

Key Offerings

- Find LOVE in the Darkness or for males a R.A.M.P.

(Real AWAKEN Men Pray) – Spiritual Grounding

- Emotional and Physical Health – Understanding of baseline health and emotions is vital for sustained success
- Financial Efficacy - Understanding Earning, Saving, Investing and Creating Wealth for the future
- Technology – Knowledge to leverage reach not to dependency is key
- Creative Arts – Creative expression in every form is healing
- Global Focus – The United States is a melting pot of cultures and we need to equip our children to work in a way that is inclusive and innovative.
- Service – Giving back to others is one of the best ways to experience gratitude.

Key Elements

These programs allow students to enter the world from high school and network with Masterminds in the world. There is no cost too high to better equip your child for success.

The Global Focus of the program allows students to explore their impact on the world at a minimal expense and earn 18 credit hours of continuing education credits to build their resume.

Network partners include community professionals that will serve as mentors and allow the students to express their thoughts and ideas as a collective unit to empower their goals individually and collectively.

The instructors maintain advanced certification training. Student performance in assessments is comparable with students around the world. We encourage you to utilize data collected by the program after the program is complete to support your efforts to make this a worldwide enrichment program.

What We Do Best!

The AWAKEN Holistic Initiative is launching a program focused on spiritual grounding, emotional and physical health, financial efficacy, technological advances, and creative arts areas we feel are vital for success in the world. The program also prides itself in a growing global focus which includes next era innovation. Students ages 13-15 and 16-19 cohort groups, are young adults transition courses, which feature several "Scholastic/Preliminary Career and College Transition Options."

To create enlightenment through education where awareness of life, body, health, and spiritual knowledge are in complete balance!

This curriculum is designed to assist youth and young adults ages 13 – 19 in their growth to become spiritually fit, emotionally balanced and financially stable as they make the transition to adulthood.

Education,

Growth,

and Training

your child needs.

Holistic approach in

every area

of Life.

With all that I have accomplished I still find myself wishing I had an opportunity to attend and graduate from an historically black college and an ivy league school. As a high school student, I was not challenged nor was I adequately exposed to all of my options. I wonder what my life would be like if I had not been a teen mother, not that I would trade my children for anything in the world. Through my experiences I have had the opportunity to intern during undergraduate school with a public relations program called A.I.M. Abstinence In Motion, designed to provide a comprehensive sex education program for the prevention of teen pregnancy. Later working with another abstinence program called W.A.I.T.S. funded by the government. Hired as the executive director six months before graduating undergraduate school in journalism and advertising and one class away from having a concentration in public relations, which I loved most of all impacted me greatly. I later went to graduate school for a masters in community counseling and psychology and started my doctorate in higher education and organizational leadership. But still remembering my days at Head Start and my certificate as a nursing assistance and home health aide I received from Trenholm State community college just out of high school. Leaving me to wonder how things may have been different if given the opportunity.

I have had many missteps along the way, but they have all taught me more about myself. I married a soldier young in my early twenties or maybe I was nineteen, it's been so many lifetimes ago I forget. Young and in love for sure. Then after that marriage fell apart at no one's fault I went back to school with two school aged children in tow and no money. Later, I would marry my second husband and if I am being honest because he was a good man I felt, and my son needed a father figure in the household, or so I told myself. Later we would divorce as well only to remarry later out of familiarity this time, but it did not last either. By this point I was sure marriage was not for me. Then I met Henry. He blind sighted me. We were friends. He was handsome enough. He was stable enough. So out of my theory we only ride this rodeo once in life, we married. You would have to ask him if it is worth it this time because I am all out of answers. I just wait to see what way the wind is going to blow me next. Hoping that it is a slow and steady breeze one that only holds you and invites you to stay just a little while longer until the time the sun sets on our life. The thing have learned about love is that no matter how quirky or different you

think you are there is someone out there who appreciates and loves those qualities. So, don't stop until you find them.

Because in the south roots run deep and our experiences are quilted in fabric that shields us and unveils us just as it should be when it should be.

Because of my story and the school bullies I dealt with in school, I agree with the philosophy of unschooling and self-directed education. It is through this method I feel I would have benefited most. If it wasn't for my family support and my school friendships, who were like brothers and sisters to me I probably wouldn't have made it out. So, I am forever grateful for the bonds we had, and we share. No matter how many miles divided us our heart strings remain tied together.

My Way

I was just sitting at my desk and God came to me and he said, "it's time", so I just really didn't know what to think at that point so what I did was I looked around and I noticed that everything that I wanted to achieve at this job had already been accomplished. I originally started with a new grant program in its infancy and with the help of my co-workers and my director we had written a grant that was the largest awarded for a four-year institution at that time. I looked at my computer and I had just transferred all of my old documents into an external drive and on my new computer, my new beautiful Apple computer in front of me only had the first year of the new grant on it. I was looking around and all my workers had an attitude of which I was not sure, as if they were no longer happy working there. I had reviewed all my old files and all my new files for the new year. I had just employed the last person to make my staff complete and there was nothing left for me to do that would exceed what I had already done. Then I heard God's voice again say it's time and I thought to myself time for what? I can't leave here I have a good job and I love it here. He said why not, and I heard it's time again, so I dug through my notebook in my purse because I always keep it with me just to jot down ideas or things I needed to do. I write down all of these things that I'm going to do. New goals or things that I need to research, and I was in my car one day I guess or maybe I heard it on the radio not quite sure and I wrote this thing down it's called the Camino Frances. Every year

I always look through these notebooks to see what things I haven't done. Then I transfer the things I didn't accomplish. Each year I say what do I want? So, I transferred the Camino Frances to the next book and so I did that two years in a row and it was in the third year and I transferred the Camino Frances again. So, I got on my computer and I looked it up and I thought to myself this is what I have been waiting for. God said you're going to do this, and I thought I'm going to do this. He said yes, you're going to do this. So, he said its time to turn in your resignation, so I thought I can't do this, and he was like yes you can, so I turned to my computer I wrote my resignation letter. I stated that I was going to do a sabbatical and go do the Camino Frances afterwards I heard God say to me before you turn in your resignation letter to your director take one to the human resources (HR) department. So, I said oh my gosh I really can't do that. Yes, you can God repeated. So, I got up I went to the HR office and the co-worker who received the letter said are you really leaving. I simply stated I just made the decision, so she read the letter again as if she was not sure if I really wanted to do this. She stated it was a phenomenal idea and that I should come and tell them about it when I returned. God said, now you have only one thing left for you to do. I went to my supervisor's office and she wasn't there, so I placed the letter on her desk upside down and asked one of my co-workers to notify me when she returned. I went back to my desk and oh my goodness I was just too overwhelmed by everything that happened. It seems like all of a sudden, I was in a job that I loved but now in the next minute I was leaving. So, I sat there and watched the clock and after some time when it was almost time for us to leave work I thought what could be happening. Why hasn't my supervisor called me in. I go, and I check with my co-worker/friend and my boss had left for the day. I said that I wanted to talk with her before she read it, but she had left for the day. Now how am I going to explain after 15 or 16 years that I'm just leaving my job for not even another job but because God told me. Most people don't take that type of thing very well, so I had nothing else to do but wait until the next day this is on a Thursday around three in the afternoon, so I went back to my office and I began to prepare myself mentally for the next day at work. I went to talk with my boss again the following morning, but she didn't come into work. My friend said she told her she just couldn't take it and that she had to take some time. So, I guess in some ways I disappointed her and surprised her as well. I was surprised at myself. It was something I couldn't quite explain what God

was using me to do at that moment so when she did return on Monday I decided to just go into her office to talk with her about it. "So, what happened" she said, please explain this to me why all of a sudden did you decide to leave. I explained to her the story of having the Camino Frances written in my notebook and how I had transferred it from year to year but never really knew what it was or what it meant or what it represented. God just spoke to me and said its time and I looked it up and I saw this pilgrimage of people of different faiths and different walks of life and I knew he was telling me this is something that I had to do no matter what. My health was declining, and I had to take the journey now. I asked her had she discussed with our superior that I leaving? She said she hadn't had the time, so I waited on her to tell my superior. When she notified him, he decided that he needed some time off. He went on vacation for a month, so I didn't even get a chance to do my exit interview. What was I doing? In some ways I seemed relieved that I was leaving because the environment even though it was productive it seemed like people that I work for, not that they had to value what I did but sometimes you just want to feel like you're doing a good job. Even when you're working hard for the people who are your subordinates. They don't realize all the sacrifices you make to make their jobs better and all they do is complain. They never see the benefits of things that you sacrificed in order for them to have more benefits or take more time off, so I guess in a way God knew that my spirit was tired of having to fight every day for people who had no faith in me and what I could do for them. Or for the people we were serving so it's time for me to go. I left my job with no job lined up and no real savings to speak of that will take me through this journey and I went home. At that time, I had my private practice on the side where I had a few clients not enough to make a living. So, God helped me on this journey. Was I leaving my job out of fear or due to necessity.

Every day from 8 to 5 I was at the public library working on growing my business. The focus was trying to line up a government contract so for the next several months that's what I did every day. I thought I would use that time to get in shape or figure out what I was going to do about my health, but I didn't do everything out of my savings. I paid my debt down by using the other money to just place it into an account so that I could pay my bills so that I could keep the beautiful home God has already blessed me with that I had struggled and scraped to acquire.

I couldn't explain to my church members or my parents why I was making this decision other than God led me to do it. So, at this time I was also planning my family reunion which was challenging because for the first time in a long time where I didn't have a lot of support, but it was something that my mother really wanted and I wanted to be able to give it to her. She's the oldest of her siblings and she's always a strong presence in my life and so was my father. At that point, they had been married for 56 years or more; I can't really remember. After I had planned the reunion and I had my office setup.

I was driving down this street in Montgomery, Alabama and saw Executive Suites. I was like this would be a perfect location for me. So, I thought why not and drove into the parking lot. I called the number asked if they had an available unit and he said yes, and I can show it to you today. So, when I went to look at the unit I thought this is perfect free WiFi perfect. The office space was not too much just enough. So, at that point I knew I had to continue to move forward on whatever path God has placed in my life as soon as I got my office set up I had my son and my cousin help me move all of my office items in and every day I thought to myself that God must have a major plan for my life.

I'll never forget, I remember it just like it was yesterday the last piece of furniture to be delivered was my desk. I had ordered it and I was waiting on that to come in office. It was just the way I envisioned. Perfect in my mind and the day after my desk was delivered I got a call. I got the call I had been wanting. The company wanted to contract my business to do professional counseling services for their agency. I knew I still had to do my journey, my pilgrimage walk but I accepted the offer graciously, and I started to scramble around thinking what are all the things that I need to do to pack for this Camino sabbatical.

One of the things I did was extensive research on other people, other people's pilgrimages from Paris to Sierra Spain. I paid attention to all the little details that made their journey easier for them because I knew that my journey was on the way. This will be my own special journey, but I can learn from others who had already walked the path before me.

At the last minute, my son and I were up ironically at about 12 a.m. in the morning and I said I have to get a plane ticket. I've been doing all of this preparing for this journey and I still haven't purchased my plane ticket. The Camino pilgrimage is 500 miles from Paris France to Sierra Spain. I knew that with this

new opportunity for the contract that I would not have enough time between then and the time that I started my new job to finish the journey in a way that I wanted. I didn't want to go in rushing the pilgrimage. I wanted to make sure that I took in everything that God wanted me to take in. So, as we were looking for plane tickets my son was on the website and he discovered that if you did the last 100 miles of the walk you could still receive your certificate of completion for the journey. I thought this is perfect. It'll give my body time to recover from the long journey because at that point I was experiencing extreme pain in my knees and in my legs and all over my body and I didn't quite understand why. I still don't understand why but I knew in my soul that if I didn't take this journey at this time in my life my body probably would not allow me to do it any other time. So, I booked the flight.

I was so excited. My husband was still kind of ambivalent about me taking the journey, but he never expressed that he didn't want me to go. So, I did.

I met many angels along the way on this journey and my first angel was when I boarded the plane there was this young girl she was probably 12 or 13. I was terrified. It was my first time going overseas, even though I had sent my daughter to London Wales and Dublin in Ireland for a school trip. So that she could explore overseas but I had never had the opportunity. As a first-generation college graduate, it was a dream of mine for as long as I could remember to travel overseas and to experience a life that I'd only read about.

So, on the plane I sat next to my angel but ironically, we didn't speak much to each other. We smile politely and silently acknowledged each other during the long hours of the trip. Close to us arriving in Sierra we started a conversation and she expressed to me she comes to Sierra to spend time with her father because her father and mother had divorced a few years ago. Her courage gave me comfort, comfort to know that if she could do this journey alone I at the ripe old age of 41 definitely could do this journey. God gave me that reassurance and I knew that she was there to guide me and to bring awareness and a sense of comfort and peace about the journey. At that point I said to myself, it was all going to be okay.

When I landed in Spain I immediately took the bus to Sierra because you have to actually fly into De Compostela and walk back to De Compostela. So, once you arrive in Sierra by bus you have to walk back to De Compostela. I didn't anticipate how long I would be awake trying to just get to the starting point of

my trip where I could process all of my emotions. This part was a journey in itself. The plane from Montgomery, Alabama to Atlanta, Georgia to Santiago. Santiago was, oh my goodness, breathtaking to say the least. My body held up better than I anticipated but I was tired so once we got to the bus station and took the bus to Sierra I was exhausted.

I had been awake for more than 24 hours. I quickly identified all the pilgrims who would be walking along the way with me. At one point or another they were clearly identified by their backpacks and most of them had already received the seashell which is a clear indication of people along the way. The seashell was designed as a commemorative ornament of the people who were walking along the way. As you go along the way you see this symbol of the seashell guiding you from one point to another.

Once I arrived in Sierra Spain we first had to find the chapel where we received our Camino passport. The passport is designed so that you get stamps at each hostel you sleep in or each place that you eat along the way. When your journey ends you can receive your completion certificate. I was so exhausted and needed a bath. The other pilgrims immediately started to search for the chapel. When we arrived, it was almost Sunset. Before the wave of pilgrims started walking we got our maps and we started to search for the first chapel. We were all thinking hopefully we can find a hostel where we could sleep for the night.

Before we got there and my second angel, in retrospect, thinking about him and thinking about what he represented came to me. He seemed almost mystical to me. I thought to myself that if I was to tell someone about him they wouldn't understand. Or they would think you were crazy or telling a tall tale. I found myself in the midst of a crowd of people and next to me was a gentleman. Writing about him sparked a curiosity in me which didn't occur to me initially. If I had to describe how he looked, what it felt like. It would be hard because it was more of the feeling that accompanied his presence. He appeared to me to be an albino. His eyes were like ice piercing, ice eyes. He asked had I taken this journey before and I told him no it was my first time. He said I have taken this journey many times back and forth each time in a different way. When I come to a town I observed how my spirit feels as to whether or not that is a town that I can stay in. I thought to myself that's interesting and what great food for thought. Something that naively I didn't think about before the journey began. As he talked to me I noticed that the crowd was leaving me. As I continued

to walk I thought to myself I must catch up with the crowd. Then I looked up and, in a flash, he was suddenly gone. I could see him just before then he told me I don't think I'm going to stay in this town. I think I'm going to go to the next town. I wish I had taken his advice. But I didn't as I looked over my shoulder I saw him in the distance and I thought to myself there's no way he could have gotten that far that quickly. How did he get there, and I saw him on his bike looking at me as if to say are you staying or are you coming with me?

I continued to walk I was walking further and further towards the hill where my fellow pilgrims were climbing. I can see them in the distance hurting and in pain trying to make it to the top. I started to walk trying to catch up with them walking up the hill towards the chapel and it seems as if I just might get to the chapel before sundown. I could see the steeple. On the other side of the hill there was an elderly man who didn't speak English who as I started past him immediately started to talk to me. It was like I understood him. He started to weep, and he said to me God bless you. It was as if God had already told him what was wrong with me and he touched my knees and cried and prayed. I was so full of the spirit at that point I almost couldn't breathe. I couldn't talk, I couldn't move. I didn't know what to make of it and I thought to myself God if this is what the journey is going to be like I don't think I'm going to make it. I continue to walk lightly tried to tell myself you must go. I wiped the tears away from my eyes and I tried to catch up with my group.

As I reach the top of the hill I saw the Chapel to my right and there were two men standing in the doorway. I walked over to them and asked them is this where I pick up my Camino passport? They said yes, and you will be the last one for the day. I was so relieved that I was able to get my journey started that day, having received my passport. By passport I mean my Camino passport from the priest and the man who was with him. I asked if I could enter the chapel because at that point I thought I must talk to God. I need to talk to God. I need to be inside of this chapel. I need to be able to sit with him and feel his presence more closely to make sure this is what he wanted me to do. They informed me that the chapel was closing. It would be opening early the next morning. As I walked away to look for a hostel to stay in for the night something told me to look back at the chapel. I wanted to take a picture because I thought I needed to

capture this moment. The priest and the man with him immediately turned away as if they didn't want their picture taken. I took the photo anyway. There was this upstairs to the church that almost look like someone was peeking out the window, but I thought nothing of it at the moment. While I was there I asked the priest if they had a hostel nearby. He stated, "yes the church has one next door." I walked next door and all of my fellow pilgrims who were with me had already checked in for the night.

I asked if they had room in the inn. Initially the innkeeper said no we don't have any vacancies. Then I said but I have my Camino passport and she said yes come in. I paid the customary fee. For the Camino travelers, the church did not have a set fee but what I read was that you customarily give them what you would pay anyone for staying at a hostile. I was so grateful just have a bed, a place to lay my head. I went in and claimed my place. I went and washed my clothes by hand in the sink, took a shower and hung my clothes on the line in the laundry room downstairs. I was exhausted too exhausted to even eat I paid attention to my fellow pilgrims and watched to see what everyone else was doing. I could hear everyone in different groups talking about at what point they were going to leave the next morning. I wanted to get started on the journey with them.

As I was purchasing all of my items for the trip I recalled I had a headlamp after I picked up the headlamp I look back and there was another one and it was only a dollar. It was on clearance. I thought to myself, maybe I should get this just in case the other one doesn't work. So, I purchased both of them.

That evening I watch the elders in groups talk about how early they were going to get up. I watch the middle-aged group kind of enjoy drinks and each other's company. I watch the young ones just say hey why don't we go and find a place to kind of hang out tonight. I decided very quickly I was getting ready for bed and I was going to leave bright and early the next morning with the older group. I went to bed and in the middle of the night I needed to go to the restroom. When I got up God said, listen everyone was quiet everyone was asleep resting for the night. Overhead I could hear chairs screeching across the floor and children running and giggling. As I listen closer to see what was going on it seemed as if someone was doing some type of religious ceremony. I was frightened to death I didn't know what to think. It seemed like they were having some type of exorcism or séance. I thought to myself I must be dreaming. There's a

church next to here. I didn't know what to think this can't be. God told me, in that moment get up bright and early the next morning and leave as quickly as possible. I got back in the bed and before I could even rest my eyes the elders we're starting to rise and get things ready to go on the walk. The first day of the way, I hurried to gather all of my things. My clothes are still in the laundry, so I rushed over and gathered my laundry. When I returned everyone is grabbing breakfast in the communal kitchen. I was so frightened I didn't know if I should eat but I had all my things packed and as the first group started out the door I headed out with them. When we got outside the sun was not yet up and I realized it was Pitch Black. I was thinking to myself how are we are going to start this journey when we can't even see. The women were talking about how this was their second and third Camino and how it was something that they look forward to. So, as we prepared to leave on the journey I put my headlamp on.

The veteran in the group said oh my gosh the one thing that I needed I forgot to pack. I don't have a headlamp and I thought to myself thank you God. You can borrow mine I quickly stated. I gave her my extra headlamp we started on the way. She knew the journey, but she didn't have the headlamp.

This led me to think about how sometimes in life we think we have it all together, but we need others to get started on a journey. Someone else may be able to allow us to have something to launch us into a new path in life. I feel full and delighted that I could assist us in starting this journey in connection with another pilgrim. So, as we left, and we walked, we talked, quickly the sun came up and each of us started to separate slowly. Some walk faster, some walk slowly. Some were on the same page as me and I thought to myself how quickly people leave you.

People who you feel like, were dependent on you, just a short time ago and there was no way we could have gone on without them. How quickly they can leave you because you're different. You must part ways. So, as we get to what we considered the make-or-break stage, your part of the journey either takes you to the mountain or the valley. As I approached my literal mountain I thought to myself what you have gotten yourself into? With your physical limitations, you will not be able to climb this mountain. Then something in me said just put one foot in front of the other. All you have to do is put one foot in front of the other. Just continue to walk that's all you have to do is continue to put one foot in front of the other.

I continued along the way and then I realized I had no way of getting in contact with my family. The one thing on my list that I was supposed to do was to check with my cell phone carrier to see if I had international service. So, silly of me to get this far and not be able to let my family know that I'm safe but I still have peace. I was at peace in knowing that I was on this pilgrimage with God and I had time to listen to him very intently. Listen to what he wanted me to do with my life.

I met many people along the way. I tried to plan out walking 10 miles a day or 12 miles a day. The reality of it is you can walk as long as you want but once you get to your end there may not be a resting place. Then you must continue on your journey until you find a place to eat, to sleep, to fellowship, and to rest your body.

It's a simpler time on the Camino. You will see people planning for the next day and you think in my life do I take the time to plan for the next day? Do I take the time to plan for the next year? When I will eat with my family? What I will wear working? Walking along the way you see farmers working and tending their flocks, milking cows, etc... We stopped at any hostel just to gain a little respite. All the food they have is what they prepare for that day. So, if there was apple pie and peach pie on the menu for the day and now there's only apple pie left no one goes to the freezer to get more apple pie. No one goes to the freezer to get more peach pie. The inn keeper may say what we have is what we have for dessert today, but it may be different tomorrow and you make peace with it. This is all we have so you enjoy it. You enjoy every morsel because you know it was made with care and love. It was made for you that day and you eat what is available to you. There is no wondering no deciding what must I eat on the menu. You have one or two items to choose from. The potato chips are baked fresh for that day. Some of the houses have a restaurant linked to them. There are no televisions.

As I walked I learned to have a television is a rare thing along the Camino. I remember thinking in America everywhere you go there's a television. Everywhere you go there's a car. Everywhere you go there's another store or an item, something else for you to choose from. Things that we don't really need. Things that you feel like you have to have to go on, meaningless things. I thought about so many things I had at

my home that I didn't even really need. Things that were sitting there that would collect dust from week to week.

I could be serving a different purpose. One of the other beautiful things about being on the pilgrimage is that you realize there're so many different purposes for different things. Things you really don't need. How much could I have saved? How much more productive can I be? How much more can I embrace the earth? What if we just utilize the things that God gives us and make the most of that.

As I continued to walk along my journey each day I tried to stay present and still somehow managing the next day to get up and start again. When I finally got a text from my cell phone carrier that read would you like to have international phone service text messaging I could not press yes quick enough. Then I started to get a flood of messages from my family and friends. They didn't know if I had made it safely or not. The last text I received was from my daughter. I was so happy. I knew that if I text her she was so savvy she would let everyone else know that I was okay. So, I started to text her and let her know what was going on but her last text stated Grandpa really wants you to come home.

I thought how strange they could be missing me that much already. I had planned to be there 30 days along the way I didn't know how my body would hold up, so I planned to be there that long so that I could complete my journey of 100 miles. Even if I had to do it 5 miles at a time I was determined to make it along the way. I text my daughter back and I said I will come home as soon as I possibly can. I had to try to see how much farther I had to walk to get to the next town to be able to get to the church of Saint James in de Compostela along the way. Ultimately, at the end of my journey I would have to get a taxi back to the airport. That night I promised her I was going to do everything I could to try to get home as quickly as possible.

I laid in the hostel that night after I had searched for bed bugs and thanked God that there weren't any. I wash my clothes for the night because on the Camino most people have three sets of clothes. The set you're wearing, the set you're going to wear to bed and the set that you're going to wear for the next day. Everything you need is in your backpack. You carry it and there's nothing else that you would need. You have your eating utensils, toiletries, your clothing, your first aid kit, your walking sandals. Of course, we

save space in our backpack for extra food in case you need it. One of the beautiful things about the Camino is the Camino always provides.

“Bien Camino” I can still hear it so vividly in my mind “Bien Camino” I thought to myself how I can get this journey over quicker I have no idea why my father is so frantic about having me home. I started to plot and plan and think so when I got to the next city after walking I thought I can take the taxi for the next 10 miles who will know. It's my way not anyone else's way it's how I can make this journey not how others make the journey. So, when I arrived at the final town I ran into another young lady who appeared to be about 18 years old she had to take a taxi from town to town because she had gotten blisters so bad she couldn't finish the walk. I consider myself blessed and grateful that at my age I was able to make it that far. She was so disheartening that she had to stay at the hostel and wait on her friends to come.

Journeying along the way I also met a young lady who was with her mother. This was her daughters first time she traveled the Camino Frances. She did it alone the first time. She vowed that this time she would bring someone with her to share the journey with.

I started to think about my parents and I was thinking I must get out. I must get out. I went to a hostel to try to sleep. However, at this point I'm frustrated, tired and I just want to go home to figure out what's going on.

The Innkeeper at this hostel was very persistent and encouraged me to go to the chapel in the town to see if I could find some relief through prayer. I did. The church service there was for all the pilgrims and at the front of the church were prayers. The sister explains to me one of the baskets they had prayers and God's messages to us and we were instructed to write whatever prayer request we had on a piece of paper and placed them in the basket. At the service they would pray that God would answer all the prayers and I got up to leave the chapel and became so overwhelmed I couldn't even speak. I wept and wept because I knew my heart was heavy. One of the things that troubled me most involved my marriage. It was in trouble. I didn't feel as if my husband loved me. I didn't feel as if my husband liked me. I didn't even know why I was married anymore. I wanted to ask God so badly what I should do but I was afraid of what his answer would be, so I simply wrote on the paper my marriage. The message that God has for me is so simple. It

was that along your journey you will always be prepared, and you already know what those lessons are trying to teach you.

A lesson along the way home started at the hostel. When I got back to the house there was a group of young children they were extremely rambunctious, and they were irritating me. I thought to myself I'm going to leave. Leave the hostel. The owner saw me and insisted please don't leave we are here to learn from each other. We can learn from each other. We can learn from our own frustration. This is here to teach us that we are all family and he was right. That's family we learn how to deal with things together, but I had never thought of it that way before. So, the next day I took a taxi the next 10 miles to De Compostela and I saw the church of Saint James. Standing there in its majesty I envisioned the destination much different. As I stood there in the courtyard I thought to myself, people are selling things acting as if this was a circus and not a spiritual destination.

I had to continue. I had to get my completion certificate. I had to have it. It was after all the only proof I would have that I actually completed the way. I went to the next Chapel and the innkeeper a lady greeted me at the door. She knew I was exhausted. She said, it is extremely hard I know but don't worry it's over now. She told me how to get to the certificate office and when I got there, there were so many other people together in line to get their certificate. It was a beautiful sight. We had all made it there together.

As soon as I got my certificate I didn't have time to really enjoy de Compostela. I looked for a taxi and took a ride to the airport. Immediately when I got there upon arriving I text my daughter and I said it's going to take \$2,600 to get home. I thought to myself how in the world am I going to do this. I need to change my flight. \$2,600 is a lot of damn money but it was what I had to sacrifice in order to get home. So not just changing my flight but I needed to send my daughter on a mission to move money around to another account. In Spain, it was crazy. I was scrambling trying to get the last flight out to no avail. I couldn't get anything changed until the last minute. It was crazy and there is not a place to sleep in the airport, only a few hard chairs and marble floors. I wanted to cry but I couldn't I had to make it home first.

My daughter said Mama you can't go to sleep. You can't miss your flight under any circumstances. You cannot miss it. I waited, I had to wait until the next morning for my next flight. There was something wrong

with my ticket. After I bought it they did not have my number on it; the ticket number for the flight was omitted. I thought this is ridiculous. I just purchased this ticket I was livid but being mad was not going to change anything. The next morning, I worked frantically to get my ticket worked out. But when I got to Madrid someone would have to change it or else I wouldn't be able to continue.

When I arrived at Madrid's Airport arm guards were everywhere. It was extreme security. I didn't understand. There were armed guards with machine guns and I didn't understand why. I finally got to the line boarding the flight going to Dallas. It was the same scene I thought to myself. Surely things haven't changed this much since I left. I have only been gone a little while. In the airport in Dallas everyone is being funneled outside only to come back in again and recheck all their bags. Everyone had to claim everything. I thought to myself, this is exhausting but what can I do I had to continue. I was lucky everything I had was in my pack, so I continued until I finally reached the airport in Montgomery, Alabama. I was so happy both my children were there to greet me, my son and my daughter. I have never been so happy to be an American. I developed a deeper appreciation for being an American. I love this country, I thought to myself and I thought of all that this meant to me.

Soon after returning I learned that my father had to have a stent put into his heart.

So, the next couple of days I prepared for my new job and my father's surgery. He went in for the surgery. When the surgeon came out and said, "I didn't have to put in one stent I had to put in five" and that my father was doing well. I was grateful that I was there to be able to be there for him. My mother, my siblings and I had a wakeup call. I had an opportunity to take a journey, but I also had an eye-opening experience. Not that I didn't always have an appreciation for my family, an appreciation for all the sacrifices they've made for me to do things I have done.

Traveling the Camino Frances changed me and allowed me to see that God is so much more amazing than I could have ever imagined. God is amazing in how he deals with people and how he deals with me. He still guides me on my way. Sometimes I liken it to the Flow Experience or The Peck Experience which also correlates to my Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Namaste.

Once we are reborn

I feel disjointed most of the time. In religious practice we learn how we should conduct ourselves. Whether it is love, anger, jealousy, guilt. No matter the emotion we are trained to respond in a manner that is totally different from our innate emotional reaction.

Now you have experienced the rebirth of the soul. The former soul still exists it acts as an archangel guiding and directing you away from seen and unseen danger for its very existence is entangled with the whole. You will also feel the tug of the whole. The more you pay attention to it, the stronger it will pull to allow your soul to abide and join with them in a harmonious fellowship of peace, joy and love and it will abide with you always even until the end of time and beyond eternity. For we are a part of a greater

purpose than the “I”. After her rebirth Baba felt that very few people understand her anymore. It was as if she was speaking a foreign language no one knew. But she had gained a deeper insight and well of understanding to each word spoken or felt by the soul of each person she encountered from that day forth. Baba left me with these words.

“Once we are reborn we have control over where the tug takes us we are here to enjoy the journey and spread the light as we go because it is the residue that is left behind by each step, touch and word that is spoken of the reborn that makes the difference. Enjoy the journey.”

Remember to establish boundaries for your life. Physical- if you feel uncomfortable being touched or gawked at say it. Intellectual -don't tolerate people talking down to you. Emotional- don't let people belittle you. Social- chose who you want to spend your time with and under what circumstances. Sexual- chose who you want to touch, and you want to touch you. If someone violates your boundaries report it no matter how bad it hurts and by the same token don't violate others. Be respectful of others bodies. Time create time boundaries for the things you do and allow time for God, self, family friends and work. Respect the time boundaries of others and know what their boundaries are. Money- how you use it, save it, what you do with it and analyze how much you need to feel secure and safe. Boundaries in life for saying yes when you want to and no when you don't. The energy we put into things in life matter so be mindful of the energy you are creating around yourself. We are sometimes our own barrier to healing our situations. These boundaries should be established for: Family, Friends, Acquaintances and Strangers. Each with its on limits and expectations. Taking care that they remain healthy and your version of balanced.

So, I urge you to pay attention to life and what it teaches and tells you about others and yourself. Create boundaries. When you violate another person's boundaries you know it. Make a note. When others violate your boundaries, you know it. Make note. Then after you have a list of ten or twenty things reflect on the boundary list and reevaluate if you are where you want to be and remember “Enjoy the journey” my love.

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Buffie authored “Our Family Tree and Album” an African American genealogy book, “My Baby Book, for grandparents to journal the life of their grandchildren”, “Things Every Sista Should Know” a pocket guide for women, “blackriver” book and healing companion journal that allows the reader to process current/past traumas or mental health issues, and the Guidebook for communities “Find LOVE in the Darkness” and “Real AWAKEN Men Pray (R.A.M.P.) group template to provide a safe space in community groups as a place of healing. She currently lives in Troy, Alabama with her husband Henry.