

From
**Driven To Succeed-An Inspirational Memoir Of Lessons Learned
Through Faith, Family And Favor**
By Dr. Hattie N. Washington

Introduction

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:13(KJV)

One day a 16-year-old girl decided she had had enough of the terrible conditions of her high school, a school built to house 180 students, but held 450 students. To pacify the students and the parents rather than building a new larger high school, the county built long temporary buildings that looked like chicken coops to house the overflow of black students. The 16-year-old girl and the majority of her fellow students walked out of their high school and made history. The date was April 23, 1951, when the average gas prices were 10 cents per gallon. The young student's name was Barbara Johns, niece of civil rights pioneer Reverend Vernon Johns. The high school was R.R. Moton High School. Not only did Barbara Johns

organize the two-week strike, she and her uncle called the NAACP, which included noted lawyers, Thurgood Marshall, who ultimately became the first African-American United States Supreme Court Justice, and Oliver W. Hill, to help them in their fight for better facilities. The thing that was so significant about the strike at R.R. Moton High School was that it was the catalyst that eventually led to the historic landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education*.

I was very young when the strike occurred; however, like Barbara Johns and the other prominent figures I named, I, too, experienced racism, even after the separate but equal policies were struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court. And, like Barbara Johns, I lived in Prince Edwards County Virginia during my early childhood years, right in the era of the civil rights movement, a time when African-American people weren't given the same respect and opportunities as white people. As Barbara Johns succinctly put it, "It was like reaching for the moon."

In the summer of 1959, at the age of thirteen, I learned that I would be leaving the only family I had known. I would be heading to another city for education purposes, because the county in which I lived chose to close the schools rather than desegregate them. Though I was devastated about my plight, I was driven to execute a survival action plan for my life and made every effort to follow that plan to accomplish the things that I wanted and was expected to accomplish. When I think back to the early part of my life, I realize how fortunate I was to have had a father who loved me unconditionally and who was the ultimate role model. Although we were in a time of uncertainty, the era of segregation and desegregation, I was taught by my father values and morals that I still live by to this day. My father taught me, "If you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything"; "We have got to be twice as qualified just to get one-half of an opportunity"; "When given the opportunity, work twice as hard to prove that you are qualified, and not just a token—not only for yourself personally, but also for your family and your race"; "It's nice to be important, but it's more important to be nice"; and many other pearls of wisdom. I've passed along these same principles and morals to my daughters, foster sons, and my granddaughters.

My first cousin, Lorenzo Goganious, whom I consider more a brother than a cousin, called me around 6:30 one morning, on February 2014. He told me that he had a vision of me writing a book to share my parental principles of raising two daughters, one a medical doctor and the other one a lawyer and how I helped my foster boys and other students over the years to believe and achieve.

It was a vision indeed because on the same day, that evening, I received another confirmation from my good friend, Marilyn Massey-Ball, that I should write a book. While

eating dinner, we talked about the book idea over fried flounder and two slices of Smith Island nine-layer, pineapple-coconut cake (a must-splurge), at the renowned Crisfield Restaurant in Silver Spring, Maryland.

After both affirmations and a previous spiritual revelation, I knew then that it was time to write my book, as I had been putting it off, to make a difference in the lives of deserving foster boys. I had already started jotting down thoughts and events over the years that took place in my life that propelled me and inspired me day by day.

Now some twenty years later, I sat down, in this “quiet phase” of my life, and wrote my life’s story, which has been considered motivational by many. The truth be told, over the years, as I speak, teach and encourage others to pursue their dreams, I have shared my story with many people, and they find it both intriguing and inspiring. They are amazed to learn the struggles I have endured to become the person I am today. I am humbled by God’s grace in my life. As a young girl and even as a young woman, so much had happened to me to block my path. People weren’t always friendly, and I had to kick some doors down, using the arsenal of education, optimism and the pleasant personality stored within me. Another thing that helped me was I never treated people as though they were less than me, regardless of the titles I carried.

How could this country girl not feel blessed and thankful when remembering from whence and how far I have come? It’s unbelievable to me how people who have achieved a great deal in life soon forget how they got there and who helped them along the way. I believe in that famous line from Meditation XVII by the English poet John Donne, “No Man Is an Island entire of itself,” that is, without a mentor or a person who offers words of encouragement or inspires self-confidence. Having this type of mind frame, took me much further in life, where I’ve been favored to be in the presence of some phenomenal people, such as our 42nd President, William Jefferson “Bill” Clinton, women’s rights and civil rights activist and educator, the late Dr. Dorothy Height, and the award-winning actress and veteran of many acclaimed feature films and television series, Victoria Rowell, to name just a few. I will elaborate more on the influences that these renowned people have had on my life later in the book.

My story reflects the impact that desegregation and my school closing had on me during my formative years in Prince Edward County, Virginia, as well as on my later years. As a southern country girl, I went through life without a roadmap, but trail blazed through it with optimism, high self-expectations and a belief in God to become an honor student and a proud

parent of two successful daughters, as well as a foster parent to over 100 foster boys over a 20-year time period.

I have never been the type of person who merely talks a good talk, or complains about what someone else should do about a problem or a situation; I put action behind my words. I hope this book is motivational and informative to the reader and gives insight into what times were like in the past; but, more importantly, shows the reader how anyone can turn their struggles and their setbacks into an inspiring plan of action for their life. Also, that their action plan can result in an exciting and rewarding career if they ditch the excuses and perform the hard work necessary to make their dreams a reality.

Love and blessings,

Aunt Hattie

Low Aim Is Sin

*“It must be borne in mind that
the tragedy of life doesn’t lie in not reaching your goal.*

The tragedy lies in having no goal to reach.

It isn’t a calamity to die with dreams unfulfilled, but it is a calamity not to dream.

It is not a disaster to be unable to capture your ideal, but it is a disaster to have no ideal to capture.

It is not a disgrace not to reach the stars, but it is a disgrace to have no stars to reach for.

Not failure, but low aim is sin.”

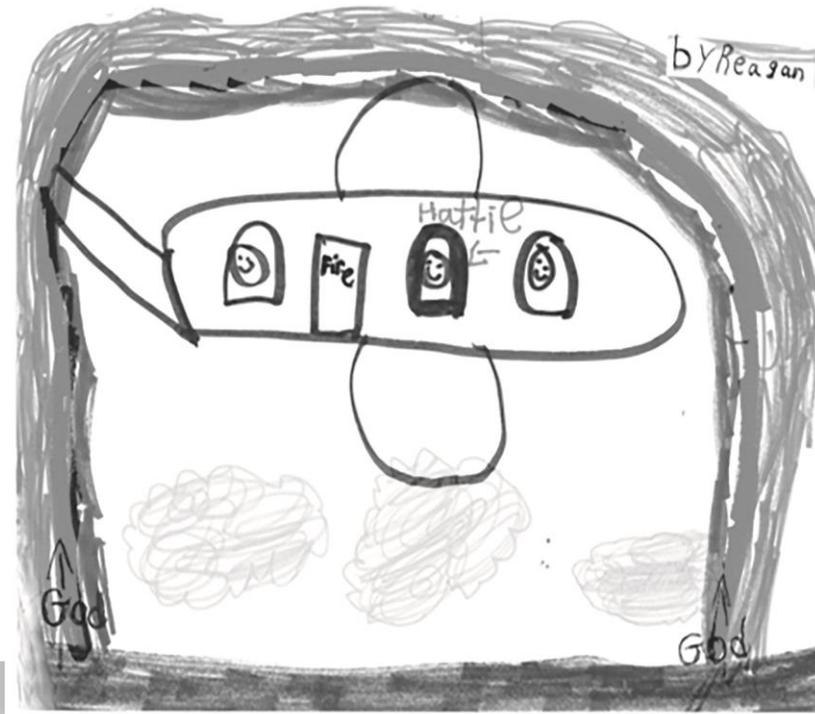
—Benjamin Elijah Mays

~PART ONE~

Faith And Family

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Matthew 19:26 (NIV)



The beautiful picture my granddaughter, Reagan, drew of me and the optimism of my plight—being in God’s hands at the end of His rainbow.

I titled it *Above The Clouds*

Chapter 1

The First Wave of the Baby Boomers (Aiming To Make A Difference)

The more you praise and celebrate your life, the more there is in life to celebrate.

-Oprah Winfrey

Yes! I am in the first wave of the Baby Boomers. The United States Census considers a baby boomer to be someone born during the demographic birth boom between 1946 and 1964. President Barack Obama, President Bill Clinton and his wife, Hillary Clinton, Oprah Winfrey, Bill Gates, Denzel Washington, Jimmy Buffett, Ellen DeGeneres, Branford Marsalis, and Mary Barra are just a few of the 76 million who are also all part of this special generation. We are the largest cohort of Americans born in U.S. history. My personal interpretation: We are that extraordinary generation that though we encountered trials and setbacks along the way, persisted, triumphed and brought about a change not only for our baby-boomer generation but also for future generations to come.

While I'm up above the clouds in an airplane en route to Florida from Baltimore, visiting my seven-year-old and ten-year-old granddaughters to attend Grandparents' Day at their elementary school, my heart is filled with unspeakable joy. God has truly blessed me and allowed me to be a blessing to others. Although it is a cloudy day below, the sun above the clouds streams in through the airplane's window with its multicolored beams of light. I have this calming and serene feeling of magically floating above the clouds. My eyes are closed, experiencing a spiritual feeling of being carried by God to my next destination in life—whatever that may be and whatever He has in store for me.

My earthly problems are being controlled by my Heavenly Father, and He is telling me everything is going to be okay if I just keep the faith. I feel a sense of power knowing that God made this universe and is in control of the weather, the seasons, the leaves, the grass, the cherry blossoms, and every living creature. God is in control of each and every day, and He

decides the timeline of these uncontrollable events and circumstances. Since I believe and have faith in God, I thought, why then would I have more confidence in the pilot of this plane getting me to my destination than my God, who created the entire universe? I settle back and feel that this is another sign that I had asked God to show me about my life's journey and the meaning of things that have happened in my life.

A couple hours later, I arrive at my daughter's house. She already knows my sad story, after many days on the phone with her. I needed a listening ear to get through this sad period in my life. After being open for just three years, Aunt Hattie's Place (AHP), a new third "eco-friendly" group home in Sandy Spring, Maryland, along with numerous other group homes in the state, is being reduced, sparked by a statewide initiative called *Place Matters*. The initiative was designed to keep children in families first and decrease the numbers of children in congregate care (www.dhr.state.md.us). Subsequently, this lack of state funding necessitated having to sell the boys group home and my personal home to pay off the construction loan.

My daughter puts her hand on my shoulder as she consoles and encourages me. I tell her like I've told others, I'm disappointed, but I'm also honored and feel blessed to have been able to help so many troubled teens from becoming another saddened statistic, especially black males. The reason I care so much for black males is that even long after the civil rights marches of the sixties and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *I Have A Dream* speech, people of color continue to be disproportionately incarcerated, policed, and sentenced to death at significantly higher rates than their white counterparts. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, one in three black men can expect to go to prison in their lifetime. Very troubling and dismal statistics, indeed, and they don't appear to be getting any better.

Anxious to make a difference in the community and the world, I founded my first group home for foster boys, Aunt Hattie's Place (AHP), in 1997. The boys, who were abused, neglected and/or abandoned, were overjoyed to stay at Aunt Hattie's Place. While at AHP, they were able to attend public or private schools, eat three home cooked meals a day and stay in a clean, clutter-free environment. AHP's staff implemented rules and offered guidance and structure that were very different from the surroundings the boys had left.

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