

BURNBURN

THOMAS

374

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR:



Greetings Thomas family members!

As always, I hope this letter finds you both happy and healthy.

First of all, I'd like to apologize for being later than planned with this issue. My only valid excuse is holiday BURN-OUT! You know how it is when you've tried to fit everything you possibly can into a very short period of time. And, worse yet, you've tried to eat every delicious holiday treat that was put in front of you. So, now you discover you have at least 15 pounds to lose! That alone is enough to put you into "deep freeze". No need to be kind, I know everyone has noticed my extra winter "padding". But, I'm on the diet wagon again, soon to advance to the "healthy eating for life" wagon. So, please accept my deepest apologies for the delay.

Before we move on into the New Year, I'd like to take this opportunity to say that I think that 1996 was a pretty good year for the Thomas family. As we look at things in perspective, we must admit that we have been blessed. Although we all have goals we have not yet met, we certainly can say that some have been accomplished by the grace of God. Therefore, as the New Year rolls in, don't throw away all the "old". Hang on to and treasure the "old" friends, the "old" and trusted prayers, the "old" and everlasting love of family.

As you read through the pages of this month's edition, I hope that your sense of self-pride will be heightened. As I write about each family member's experience and celebration of life, I take pride in their accomplishment. For, as they say, no man is an island and we don't get to where we're going all alone. So, I selfishly take pride in Judy's new home, Wayne's final exam, Shaun's wonderful performance, and all of our children who made the honor roll. It may not seem obvious at the time,

but we're all traveling this road together as a family whose small parts make up the larger whole. My New Year's prayer is that the Thomas family will continue to recognize this important fact and contribute in a positive way to one another's growth and happiness.

Lastly, I'd like to remind everyone of how important our family ancestors are. Keep their spirits happy by never forgetting them and living your life to the fullest so that their struggles were not made in vain.

Happy New Year to all!

Donna



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A SPECIAL TRIBUTE TO CHARLES WESLEY COLEMAN "Pa-Pa"



January 30, 1893 - February 18, 1980

Although I have many fond memories of my grandfather, better known as Pa-Pa, I believe the ones that will last forever are the ones which were created when I was a young child. During my grade-school years, I remember spending several weeks during the summer months with Pa-Pa at his home in Washington, D.C. Boy, how I loved it! You see, these visits I made all alone. I was allowed to spend this time with my grandfather without my constant companions, Wayne and Johnny. Although I enjoyed having my brothers to play with at home, I didn't need them on these visits. No, I loved having Pa-Pa's undivided attention.

It was during one of these special visits with Pa-Pa that I discovered he had been keeping a "secret". It was the discovery of this "secret" that truly laid the foundation for my everlasting love and respect for this sweet man. I already knew as a young girl that I loved my grandfather because of his kindness, his generosity, his playfulness, and his warm smile. But on one special summer day I discovered there was so much more to love.

It was nearing the time for me to return home and Pa-Pa had promised to take me shopping for some school things before I left. So, shopping day had arrived! We got up early, ate breakfast and took the bus to the shopping center - just Pa-Pa and

me. I had a great time! I must have tried on dresses and shoes at what seemed like a million different stores. (I couldn't wait to get back to Maryland to show off my new things to my brothers.) Well, I'm not sure what happened during our travels but somehow we got turned around and Pa-Pa wasn't sure how to get us back home. I noticed he kept looking up at signs and twisting his face in confusion. This went on for several minutes, when it finally dawned on me that Pa-Pa couldn't read the signs he was staring at. At first, I just wanted to cry because I felt so sorry for him, but then I realized the man standing in front of me was very proud and certainly would not have wanted any sympathy. I also realized that he was embarrassed. We looked at one another for a minute or two and knew that we would have to work as a team to get home. I never said a word about his inability to read that day or any other day for a very long time. Not because I was ashamed to have a grandfather who couldn't read, but because at that age I felt proud and honored to think that I shared this special "secret" with my grandfather and I didn't see why anyone else had to know.

As time went on, I thought a lot about Pa-Pa's "secret" and how smart he really was. Indeed, although this man could not read, I had certainly seen him handle money like a polished banker. He had managed to make a living well enough to raise six children and was doing a great job of helping them raise his grandchildren. I thought about how unfair it was that he wasn't able to spend enough time in school to learn to read. So, as I stated before, this "secret" only deepened my feelings for Pa-Pa and they continued to grow as the years went on.

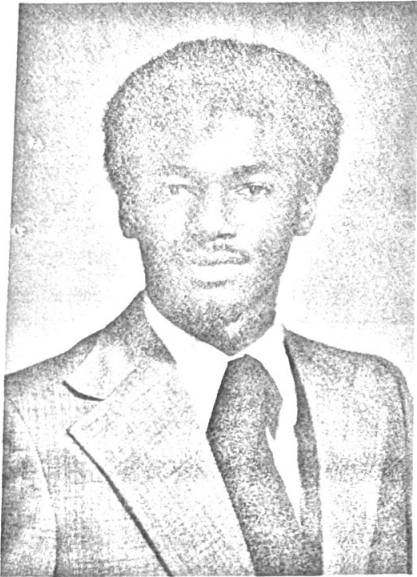
I will always cherish the time we had together, and I hope that my family will keep his memory alive by living the legacy that he bestowed upon us. He lived for his family and was always there for them. We can keep his "family reunions" alive by always caring for and loving one another.

On behalf of all the Thomas family, we wish you Happy Birthday, Pa-Pa!!!

THE THOMAS TRIBUNE

IN LOVING MEMORY OF JOHNNY ELLIOTT THOMAS

"John-Boy"



February 21, 1960 - September 3, 1980



A Bird of the Evening

As I reach my wings toward the sky,
I often stop and wonder why.
Why the world seems full of woe,
Why the people hate each other so.

If only they could live as me.
Maybe then they would see
That the world should live as one
So people can live their lives in fun.

Written by
Johnny Elliott Thomas



One can only imagine what the author was thinking when he wrote this poem. One thing is for certain, it defines his outlook on life. He left, knowingly or unknowingly, through this poem, a "footprint" of his personality to his family. Loving, gentle, and kind. At the tender age of 20, he simply couldn't imagine why life had to be so complicated, and sometimes down right ugly. Even though during his short time with us, he, too, had to suffer; he never let it get him down. His faith and the family's faith pulled him through to see much better days. We continue to thank God for the extra time we had.

But the five short months Johnny shared with his son, Jason, will be forever etched in our minds. What a proud father he was as he carried his son off to church or bundled him up to go visit a family member. We can still hear his infectious laughter as he tickled and bounced him on his long, thin legs, or sheepishly tried to hand him over when the pamper was "full". Although they were separated much too soon, it is our prayer that Jason will somehow know and feel his father's love and, when in doubt, he will do as we have done and look to the *bird in the evening* for a sign.

But Johnny was, and always will be, the "baby of the bunch". His crooked smile, hearty laughter, insatiable appetite, and constant begging are only a few of his trademarks that will never be forgotten. As the anniversary of his birth date approaches, let all our hearts be glad for the special times we shared with him. We must believe that he has been blessed. It is our prayer that he has found his world of fun.

Someday we'll meet again
Our loved ones gone before.
Someday we'll reach that happy land
Where parting is no more.



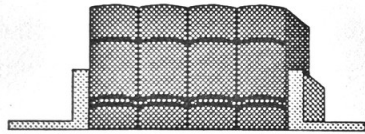
Happy Birthday, Johnny! We love you!
Your Family

VOLUME
THREE

THE READING CORNER



The featured book of the month came about as a total surprise. I had already selected and typed up another selection, but after reading Kareem's book, I decided the other could wait. As Black History Month approaches, *Black Profiles in Courage* is a most appropriate book to read. Although I have a great deal of respect for the author as a great basketball player, I wasn't quite sure how he would fare as a writer. Well, I was pleasantly surprised and what he lacks in writing style he more than makes up for in his sincerity to educate and empower African Americans. I highly recommend it to people of all ethnic groups and ages.



Title: Black Profiles in Courage
 Authors: Kareem Abdul-Jabbar
 with Alan Steinberg
 Price: \$14.98 (sale price at Crown)

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar knows the importance of heroes. As a child and young man, he admired Martin Luther King, Jackie Robinson, Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, and others whose lives influenced their fellow African Americans, as well as the country as a whole.

But today, according to Abdul-Jabbar, there is a scarcity of heroes for the African-American community. Black youth do not feel connected to this country or its institutions. Their ancestors were instrumental in building the nation and changing the course of American history in many significant ways - yet these black heroes remain obscure to those who need them most.

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar believes that this is partly because standard historical texts have ignored, diminished, or deliberately covered up black achievement in America. In *Black Profiles in Courage*, he focuses on extraordinarily courageous black men and women who typified the virtues of integrity, discipline, and self-respect. Taken together, their lives form a legacy from which African Americans of all ages can draw inspiration, wisdom, and pride.

Some of these courageous heroes include:

****Peter Salem** - the slave, blacksmith, and volunteer soldier who turned the tide at Bunker Hill.

****Joseph Cinque** - the leader of a daring revolt on the slave ship Amistad.

****Frederick Douglass** - a self-taught writer and orator who escaped slavery and became one of the most famous black leaders of the nineteenth century.

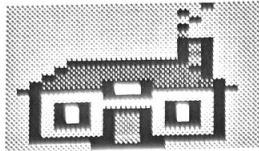
****Harriet Tubman** - the most famous conductor of the Underground Railroad, who was also a spy and scout for the Union Army.

****Lewis Latimer** - a son of slaves, whose scientific work was integral to the achievements of Alexander Graham Bell, Hiram S. Maxim, and Thomas Edison.

In relating the stories of these and other heroic African Americans throughout history, *Black Profiles in Courage* shines a bright light on the touchstones of moral character - honor, dignity, conviction, and, above all, courage. These exemplary stories are beacons in the fog of racism, and they reemphasize the fact that we are all connected. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar has been called "history's greatest basketball player." Since retiring from the National Basketball Association in 1989, he has appeared on television and in films, worked with numerous charitable organizations, and authored two best-selling books, *Giant Steps* and *Kareem*.

THE THOMAS TRIBUNE

HOME SWEET HOME



On behalf of all the Thomas family, we take great pleasure in congratulating *Judy Maxine Thomas-Younis* on the purchase of her new home in Ashburn, Virginia. Yes, on the morning of Friday, December 20, 1996, Judy signed over her left leg and right arm to the bank in exchange for a lovely townhome she can now call "Home, Sweet Home". Well, Sista, it seems you have achieved what they define as the ultimate American Dream. You can now be called a proud homeowner! Do you know what that means. No, what it really means? It means that this year's family Christmas Dinner is at your house (big smile). We took a vote and you won by a landslide. Actually, it was unanimous.



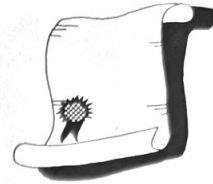
Seriously, all jokes aside, this is truly a personal milestone that not everyone achieves. We are sincerely proud of you and happy for you! We warn you that being a homeowner has it's challenges, but those challenges are easily outweighed by the rewards when you consistently strive to make your house a home. We know that you will make it into a warm, welcoming atmosphere where any guest will be comfortable. As a matter of fact, we are so sure of this, the only question we have is: *What time is dinner?*

So that family members can stop by, say hello and take a tour (at Judy's convenience, of course), we are providing the following information:

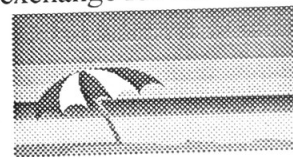
Judy M. Thomas-Younis
21104 Winding Brook Square
Ashburn, Virginia 22011-5449
Phone: (703) 589-1144

Again, congratulations Judy, from all of us!!!

PASSING THE GRADE



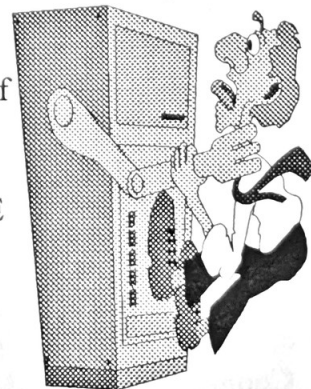
When a person is so determined to achieve a goal that he gives up an invitation to Christmas dinner to study, you know he's either seriously committed or needs to seriously be committed. Well, say what you like, his commitment, as has the commitment of many others, was rewarded with success. On the morning of Tuesday, December 31, 1996, *Wayne Wesley Thomas* aced his final exam for the coveted "Contemporary 2000" Certification!!! Congratulations Wayne, we always knew you could do it! But, boy oh boy, talk about cutting it close. Wayne had stated in the last newsletter that he hoped to finish his exams by the end of the year. Do you think he left any room for error? (Maybe HE actually works better under pressure.) In any event, we are very proud of Wayne's commitment to his goal and we believe that the door of opportunity that will open in exchange for his hard work is right around the corner.



Spiritually, we would like to believe that Wayne had the help of a guardian angel whose middle name he shares. This ancestral angel would have been extremely honored to help further the education of a loved one since he was denied the opportunity to receive an education himself. Wayne, you have given your grandfather a wonderful birthday present and made your family proud!

We have just one bit of advice for you:

BE NICE TO THOSE COMPUTERS!!



VOLUME
THREE

REPORT CARD RESULTS

As you are all aware, a challenge was offered to our school-age children to post their grades in this month's edition of the family newsletter. We are proud to say that we were extremely pleased with the response and the results. For the first grading period of the school year, our children seem to be doing well and show real enthusiasm about getting the most from today's educational system. Some of them are actually making the honor roll!! Congratulations go out to all the children who were proud enough to publish their grades. We also wish to congratulate the parents for all their efforts in supporting their children in their educational pursuits.

Listed below are results for the first grading period:

Caprice Joppy (Honor Roll) - 1st Grade

Straight As



Lakisha Thomas (Honor Roll) - 5th Grade

Straight As, except 1 B

Crystal Christian (Honor Roll) - 9th Grade

2 As

4 Bs

1 C

Antoine Ambush - 5th Grade

3 As

3 Bs

1 C



Tara Christian - 7th Grade

5 Bs

2 Cs

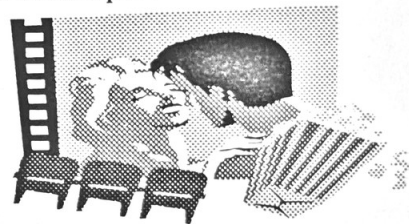
Congratulations and keep up the good work!!

MOVIE CRITIQUE



The movie, *Sankofa*, brought to us by the highly acclaimed filmmaker, Haile Gerima is a must see! *Sankofa*, an Akan word meaning "one must return to the past in order to move forward," is the story about the transformation of Mona, a self-possessed African-American woman sent on a spiritual journey in time to experience the pain of slavery and the discovery of her African identity.

Make no mistake, this is not your typical "Roots-type" movie. This is a movie that the major film industry did not want to see distributed because the producers would not compromise their original script. *The Atlanta Constitution* states that "*Sankofa* is a uniquely powerful, hard to shake film that stares unblinkingly into the dark heart of America's false promises."



Since first viewing this film several years ago at the Jennifer Theatre on Wisconsin Avenue, I have continuously sang its praises. (The major chains did not purchase the film and only a select few of the independent movie theatres were showing it.) Due to this movie's honest and direct portrayal of the slave experience, I would suggest that parents review the film before sharing it with viewers under the age of ten. (There are some scenes which might be emotionally challenging for young children.)

Sankofa is now available on video at a price of \$39.99 (well worth it!). This movie is produced and distributed through Mypheduh Films, Inc. located at 403 K. Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. Telephone: (202) 289-6677 Fax: (202) 289-4477. Call and order your copy today!!

THE THOMAS TRIBUNE



HAPPY BIRTHDAY WISHES GO OUT TO:

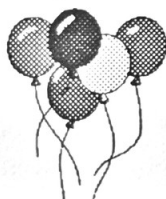
Happy Birthday to Carla Thomas whose birthday was January 18th.

Happy Birthday to Kristin and Christina Thomas who will celebrate their birthdays on February 4th.



Happy Birthday to Wilbert Cross who will celebrate his birthday on February 14th.

Happy Birthday to Carmen Thomas whose birthday will take place on February 15th.



Happy Birthday to Michael Moxley who will probably deny his age on February 23rd.

SPORTS UPDATE by Ronnie Thomas

All sports coach, *Brian Thomas*, has changed gears and is now head coach of the Wheaton High School JV boys basketball team. The Wheaton Knights are currently 3-1 and look to improve on a 8-9 record from last year. This is coach Thomas' first basketball coaching assignment as he looks to turn last years losing record into a winning season in 1997. (See schedule under Sports Events.)

In addition, little Antoine Ambush is showing his athletic abilities again. He is now playing basket-

ball for the Upcounty Community Center Recreation Department every Saturday at Goshen Elementary School in Gaithersburg, Maryland. The games take place at various different times but the location is always the same. For details, please call Barbara Ambush at (301) 977-6392.

LOCAL SPORTS SHORTS

The Washington Redskins finished the 1996-97 season with a 9-7 record. This is a little disappointing considering the Skins were 7-1 at the midway point in the NFL season. The 7-1 record was the best start for the Skins in 5 years.

The areas newest NFL team is the Baltimore Ravens. The Ravens were the former Cleveland Browns and finished the season with a 4-12 record.

The Washington Bullets are 15-13 and have won 8 of their last 10 games. The Bullets are trying to make the playoffs for the first time in 10 years.

SPORTS TRIVIA

Which NFL Team has appeared in the most Super Bowls?

Answer: ehT sallaD syobwoC htiw 8 (spell words backwards to decode).

SPORTS EVENTS

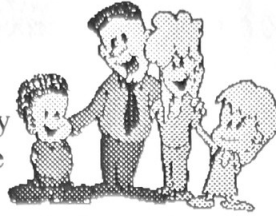
<u>Date</u>	<u>Attraction</u>	<u>Time & Place</u>
1/28	Bullets vs Magic	7:30pm USAir Arena
1/30	Wheaton vs Churchill	4:45pm Wheaton HS
2/1	Wheaton vs Einstein	1:45pm Einstein HS
2/4	Wheaton vs Kennedy	4:45pm Wheaton HS
2/7	Wheaton vs BCC	4:45pm BCC HS
2/11	Wheaton vs PB	5:15pm Wheaton HS
2/14	Wheaton vs Poolesville	5:15pm Poolesville HS
2/17	Bullets vs Bucks	1:00pm USAir Arena
2/18	Wheaton vs WJ	4:45pm WJ HS
3/1	Bullets vs Warriors	7:30pm USAir Arena
RM - Richard Montgomery, WJ - Walter Johnson		
PB - Paint Branch, BCC - Bethesda Chevy Chase		

NOTE: For Bullets tickets call Ronnie 703 404-2053. Tickets must be bought as a pair. Seats are lower level just above the entrance to Bullets locker room. Ticket face value is \$40 per seat. Two tickets for \$50 is a savings of \$30.

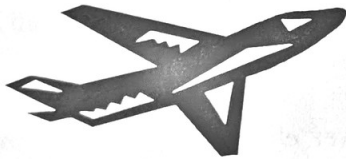
**VOLUME
THREE**

A SPECIAL REUNION

We should feel very sorry for the person who made the following statement:



"Happiness is having a large, loving, caring, close-knit family in another state." This person obviously was not truly blessed with a caring, loving, close-knit family. For if he/she had been, they would have appreciated the gift they had been given. Realizing the importance of this gift is due to your own personal family experience. It is for this reason, that *Junior* bestowed the "gift" of a family reunion to his wife, Cathy, this past Thanksgiving holiday. Having been greatly influenced by his grandfather, Pa-Pa, and his mother, Emma, it was easy for him to recognize the importance of family ties and not want his wife and children to miss out on those relationships because of distance. So for Thanksgiving, Junior generously sponsored a visit to Maryland for Cathy's father and her sisters.

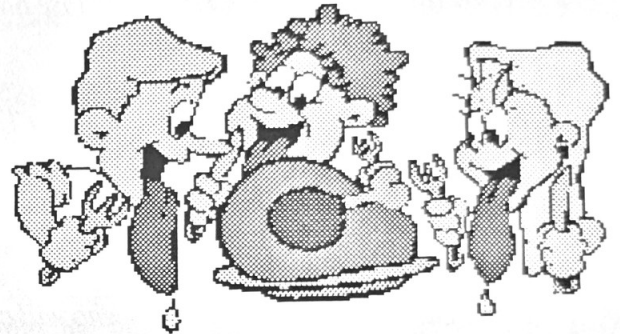


From all accounts, it was a wonderful success. Cathy was delighted to visit with her father whom she hadn't seen for many years and who now resides in Florida. She also had a ball catching up with her sisters who were in from Georgia. Ronnie, Carla, and Brian seemed to sincerely enjoy this "gift" of additional family to share stories with. Observing their reunion, although I was happy for them, I was truly thankful for the opportunity to live close enough to my family that I can see them (or not see them) as often as I wish.

Congratulations to Junior on a job well done. We hope that his family will realize the true value of his "gift" for many years to come and will continue to pass on the tradition of family reunions just as Pa-Pa passed this tradition on to his daughter and, she, on to her son.

A CHRISTMAS FEAST

We sincerely want to thank Keith and Joanne for their hospitality on Christmas Day 1996. Although many family members could not attend, our hosts had certainly gone out of their way to make sure everyone was happy. (If I'm not mistaken, this is one of those occasions where I probably added several inches to my waistline. Thank you, Keith and Joanne!)



The meal we were served was fit to honor a king. I used to say that I hadn't acquired a real taste for lamb, but the lamb I ate that day certainly made my taste buds happy. After everyone stuffed themselves with such delectables as turkey, rice, greens, candied yams, etc. etc., we were offered apple and pumpkin pie. Many guests were later seen taking a little somethin' home for the next day. Yes, although the family members who couldn't make it were missed, it certainly left a great deal of good food for the hosts to share with those who did. All in all, I believe everyone had much more than they needed.

Again, we would like to extend our sincerest thanks to Keith, Joanne, and little Raja for a Christmas Day we will certainly remember for years to come. We don't know how they will improve upon their Christmas tree in the upcoming years, but it will definitely be a challenge! We hope the New Year will bring them continued health and happiness!



THE THOMAS TRIBUNE

IN REMEMBRANCE OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a true soldier for nonviolence and racial justice. Although I, personally, do not know if I believe that a nonviolent struggle against a society which strongly believes in the right to

bear arms, white supremacy, and quick military action against it's neighbors will ever result in any substantial "freedom" for the oppressed, I do, without hesitation, give Dr. King my total respect for his commitment to his dream of helping to tear down the great wall of segregation and help a society overcome its ignorance of one another. This national civil rights leader and Nobel Peace Prize recipient inspired and sustained the struggle for freedom, nonviolence, human brotherhood, and defined the conscience of a nation by advocating social justice worldwide. For these many reasons, I have printed an excerpt of a speech Dr. King wrote for *Christian Century* in 1960 to remind us that although it is easy to have a controversial opinion, it is a heavy burden to lift your life and voice everyday in the struggle to defend it.

Suffering and Faith

Some of my personal sufferings over the last few years have also served to shape my thinking. I always hesitate to mention these experiences for fear of conveying the wrong impression. A person who constantly call attention to his trials and sufferings is in danger of developing a martyr complex and of making others feel that he is consciously seeking sympathy. But I feel somewhat justified in mentioning them in this article because of the influence they have had in shaping my thinking.

Due to my involvement in the struggle for the freedom of my people, I have known very few quiet days in the last few years. I have been arrested five times and put in Alabama jails. My home has been bombed twice. A day seldom passes that my family and I are not recipients of threats of death. I have been the victim of a near-fatal stabbing. So, in a real sense, I have been battered by the storms of persecution. I must admit that at times I have felt that I could no longer bear such a heavy burden, and have been tempted to retreat to a more quiet and serene life. But every time such a temptation appeared, something came to strengthen and sustain my determination. I have learned now that the Master's burden is light precisely when we take his yoke upon us.

My personal trials have also taught me the value of unmerited suffering. As my sufferings mounted, I soon realized that there were two ways that I could respond to my situation: either to react with bitterness or seek to transform the suffering into a creative force. I decided to follow the latter course. Recognizing the necessity for suffering, I have tried to make of it a virtue. If only to save myself from bitterness, I have attempted to see my personal ordeals as opportunity to transform myself and heal the people involved in the tragic situation. I have lived these last few years with the conviction that unearned suffering is redemptive.

There are some who still find the cross a stumbling block, and others consider it foolishness, but I am more convinced than ever before that it is the power of God unto social and individual salvation. So, like Apostle Paul, I can now humbly yet proudly say, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." The suffering and agonizing moments through which I have passed over the last few years have also drawn me closer to God. More than ever before I am convinced of the reality of a personal God.



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DANCING FOR A GOOD CAUSE

Pure, raw, unlimited talent. That's what *Shauntrese Ambush* seems to have when it comes to dancing. If you missed her performance in December at Union Temple Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., then you really missed a special treat!

On Saturday and Sunday, December 14 and 15, 1996, Shauntrese had the honor of participating in a special Christmas program at the request of Dr. Linda Wharton Boyd of the Mt. Gilead Cultural & Performing Arts Center located in Washington, D.C. This program, which took place at Union Temple Baptist Church included such artists as the popular gospel singer, Richard Smallwood, the talented evangelist singer, Beverly Crawford, Washington, D.C.'s own talented songstress, Vanessa Williams, and the gifted D.C. Youth Ensemble Dancers.

In this program, which featured a two-act play celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, Shauntrese spiritually portrayed the role of Mary, through dance, as the song, "Now Behold the Lamb" played softly in the background. Without speaking a word, the choreography of her movements told this special story in a way which made you feel it's miracle as well as understand it's true meaning.



In addition to Shauntrese's performance as Mary, she also delighted the audience as she danced gracefully to a rendition of "Rejoice" sung by Richard Smallwood and Beverly Crawford. It was definitely beauty in motion and song, performed at the level of perfection by everyone involved.

We are very proud of Shaun's talent as a dancer, but we are especially proud that Shaun recognizes her talent as a "gift" and will use it to promote worthy causes such as these, without monetary reward. We realize one can't make a living doing charities for free, but every once in a while there is a cause that warrants our commitment without the obvious compensation. We believe that Shaun's efforts to help a church raise funds to help others will be rewarded in much more important ways.

But this is certainly not Shaun's first performance for charity without compensation. The Thomas family is especially indebted to Shaun for her performances on both the piano and in dance to help us in our endeavors as members of the Warren United Methodist Church. We will never forget Shaun's contribution to the program which was held at Montgomery College on our behalf. She did a spectacular job which was the result of a lot of hard work and we are truly thankful. We hope that Shaun will continue to want to dance "to the Glory of God" from time to time.

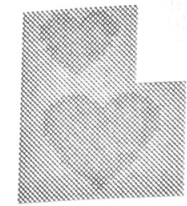


ANOTHER WORTHY CAUSE

It seems we all have a problem during the holiday season finding cards geared toward the African American family. Well, we have a solution to the problem. By purchasing your cards through Umoja Children, Inc., you not only get a quality African American holiday card but you also help youth trying to help themselves. Their motto: "Youth from the Hood, Working for Good." Umoja Children, Inc. is owned and operated by young people who live in West Baltimore City and they are selling their product nationwide. The cost per box (15 cards) is \$12.00. If interested in seeing their selection or getting more information, please contact: Emma Thomas at (301) 428-9296.

THE THOMAS TRIBUNE

A SPECIAL "LOVED ONES" DAY



Have you ever heard anyone say that they weren't celebrating Valentine's Day because they weren't dating anyone at the time, or they weren't married? Did anyone ever officially limit a Valentine to being a lover or a spouse? I strongly believe that Valentine's Day is a special day set aside to acknowledge (in any manner you desire) any loved one, living and/or deceased. It's nice to be taken to dinner or receive flowers from a friend or lover, but that certainly should not define the meaning of the day.



Therefore, with the above philosophy in mind, let's make a conscientious effort this year to recognize all of our loved ones. In addition to doing something "romantic" with that special Valentine, be sure to acknowledge your children as your "little" valentines. This could be accomplished with an extra hug or kiss or simply being sure to tell them "I love you." This acknowledgement could be fulfilled through saying a special prayer for all your loved ones before going to bed. We could also be creative and proclaim our love by giving up some particular bad habit for this one special day. For example, if you smoke cigarettes but realize that those who care about you would like to see you quit someday, maybe you could give up this habit for at least one day out of love for them. Who knows, this one day commitment might be just the push you needed to get started on that long-term goal of quitting permanently. Can't hurt!!

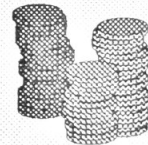
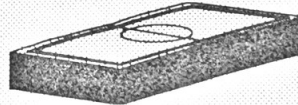
And let's definitely try to include our sick and shut-in loved ones who most definitely would appreciate the attention. Just a call or card would go a very long way! And, maybe, if we can find a minute or two, we could light a candle as a symbolic reminder of those special loved ones who have gone on before us.

We believe everyone recognizes the difficulty in speaking with, visiting, or doing something special for all the loved ones we would like to acknowledge on Valentine's Day. But the consequences for slighting someone on this day can be immensely diminished when we sincerely try to treat our loved ones as the special "gifts" they truly are on a daily basis.

The entire Thomas family wants to extend our sincerest Get Well wishes to Cathy Thomas who recently had a short stay in Shady Grove Adventist Hospital. We pray that her recovery is speedy and that she will be up and about real soon!



Congratulations to Wilbert Cross on being the big prize winner \$\$\$\$!!!!



Well, Santa Claus didn't bring it to him, but he didn't have to wait for the Easter Bunny either. Wilbert received his blessing on Friday, January 24, 1997, when he purchased, not one, but several winning tickets. We won't mention his exact jackpot (we don't want strangers coming out of the woodwork!), but needless to say, we can expect Mr. Cross to be smiling for a while. Again, congratulations Wilbert from all of us. Try not to spend it in one spot now (and don't forget to count your blessings... before you spend them)!!!!



VOLUME
THREE

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MESSAGE TO MY FAMILY...contributed by Emma L. Thomas



All too often, we go from day to day taking life for granted and not giving thanks to the one who makes it possible. Although I feel confident that I have taught my children how to pray and how to give thanks, I am always concerned, as a Mother, about how often they do both. So, the following letter which was shared with me is being offered as a reminder to my family that HE would like to be acknowledged every once in a while for the many wonders HE performs so that your needs are met. I hope that you will pass the message on.

My precious friend,

I am sending you this letter by way of one of my disciples. I just wanted to let you know how much I love and care about you and how I greatly desire to become a meaningful part of your life.

This morning when you awoke, I was already there with you in the light of my beautiful sunshine that filled your room. I was hoping that you would say good morning to me, you didn't, so I thought maybe it was just a little too early in the day for you to notice me.

Again, I tried to get your attention when you stepped out your door. I kissed your face with a soft gentle breeze. I breathed upon you my fragrant, sweet breath scented with flowers. Then I sang a love song through the birds in the trees....you just walked right past me.

Later that day, I watched you as you were talking with some friends. Oh! how I wished that you would talk to me also. I waited and waited, but you just went along your way.

This afternoon, I sent you a refreshing shower and glistened to you from each rain drop. I even shouted to you a time or two with thunder, trying to get your attention. Then, I painted you a lovely rainbow in the mist of my fluffy clouds. I just knew you would see me then, but you were unaware of my presence.

This evening, to close your day, I sent you a beautiful sunset. After that I winked at you a thousand times through my stars, hoping that you would see me and wink back....you never did.

Tonight, when you went to bed, I spilled moonlight upon your face to let you know that I was there with you. I was hoping that you would talk to me a little while before you went to sleep. You never said a word. It hurt me deeply; however, I continued to watch over you all through the night, thinking that maybe.... just maybe you would say hello to me in the morning.

Each and every day I have revealed myself to you in many strange and wonderful ways, hoping that you would accept me as your sheppard, for I am the only one who can supply you with all your needs. My love for you is deeper than the deepest ocean and bigger than the great blue sky. I have so much to give to you and also share with you.....

Please let me hear from you soon.



Your loving friend forever,
JESUS

