

# Red-Gold

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# Red-Gold



*“Plan and build your story in a way that helps you start (and keep) writing.”*

**T**he North Carolina nights had long overtaken the day, and the bitter cold forced us to move our anvils from under the ancient pecan tree inside.

*“Son, I’ll carry the anvils; you grab the ball-peen hammers”*

*“Ok, I’ll take the screwdrivers and the chisels”*

*“Be careful. Those chisels are sharp.”*

Dad brought buckets for the brass, barrels for the steel, and the red-gold. These replaced our kitchen table, and the forged scissors replaced knives for snipping the brass from the chard wires.

Dad hung one of those green Korean war wool army blankets to keep the dust from overtaking the rest of our modest home. Our kitchen had morphed into our workshop. Cold weather wasn't about to stop ***Geddie's Salvage***. This business was more than a way to make money. His starched uniforms would be delivered on Wednesdays. The dark blue pants were matched with a solid, lighter blue shirt. On each was a label that read "Geddie." That's what people called him - Geddie or Mr. Geddie. It was a way to be his own man. He had no boss. Sometimes, he hired people we didn't need rather than give them a handout - he wanted them to keep their dignity.

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He and my mother had started the business together. Unfortunately, they didn't stay together. Last year, she moved away, taking me to Brooklyn with her. This year, I was with Dad, and tonight, like many nights, it was just me and him pounding, screwing, chiseling, and snipping in search of the red gold. It was the most profitable of the metals we recycled. We worked with - steel,

tin, aluminum, die-cast, and copper. Copper was red-gold.

While chiseling the copper from the armatures required the most skill, my favorites were the generator and starter cylinders. **After removing the armature, bam bam - bam bam bam, I pounded, hitting the two screws** on opposite sides of the steel cylinders. Dad could loosen them with one hit. BAM! My smaller hammer and arms required many more tries.

I positioned it solidly on my anvil again and hit as hard as I could - BAAMMM! Then I reached for the flat-head screwdriver. It took both hands to release the screws and wad of red-gold tightly wound around metal flanges. **Yes!**

I must have been six years old, and the joy of accomplishment filled me each time I'd chunk the red gold into the barrel. Dad's approving smile would say, "That's my boy!" It was dirty work, but it didn't feel like work and in no way like dirt. It felt like, like - love. I felt powerful.

# The weekends were a whole different story



**O**n Saturday mornings, I'd wake up early at my Aunt Nell's house on Wilmington Road. She and Uncle Ballard had a black-and-white television set. My slightly older

cousins, Jean and Priscilla, and I would watch cartoons, The Lone Ranger, and just before heading outside - Tarzan.

Once outside, I'd grab at a low-hanging branch, swinging and belting out a Tarzan-like yell-yodle to strike fear into his opponents. For that moment, I was Tarzan, strong, smart, a friend, and a protector to the animals that only he could talk to. He had Cheeta and the beautiful Jane! Then there were those bumbling, idiotic "natives" who weren't even worthy adversaries. My yell-yodle was that of the King of the Jungle, and I didn't want to be anything like those who looked most like me.

I didn't think of those things then; I just was having fun on a Saturday morning. I didn't know the abuse or false ideas that were being implanted and induced. One day, walking to school, another black student called me a "Black..." Before he got from the "b in black to the "k," we were throwing punches and rolling on the ground

"Mission accomplished!" Tarzan's producers must have celebrated. The terrifying scent of their

centuries-old abuse mingled with “innocent” media-induced menticide convinced me to feel ashamed of the African part of me, to break apart - way apart - from it. It was to become “the other, the alien script in my history - alien wound in me. Though I couldn’t identify the commander, their orders were clear: **“control this Afrikan part, or kill it.”** Is that what I was trying to do when I punched my schoolmate who hurled my Africanness at me?

Fear and fear-mongering was shame’s constant companion. *“Welcome to Fayetteville, home of the Klu Klux Klan,”* read the gigantic billboard that greeted us when we entered town from the South Carolina side of Interstate 95. No one talked about it directly, but when I asked about it, I could sense **it** was something they were trying to protect me from.

**It was 1960. These currents - shame, alienation, and fear - had taken me far away from the kitchen workshop, from hammers pounding, the metallic dust, the army blanket doors, the red-gold, and far from the six-year-old feeling power and love, which was affirmed by collective work and, “That’s my boy!”**

Now, I felt power vicariously by pretending to be white Tarzan dominating Africans. Somehow, this felt safer, too.

Back with Mom in Brooklyn, I'd reach for the yellow tin can of Nu Nile Hair Slick Dressing Pomade on Saturday night. My spiraling kinks would yield under the incessant strokes of my wide wooden brush. I'd feel the waves by running my hands over them while looking in the mirror. **Then I reached for the preserver. The "stocking cap" would keep them from going back. I was going to be sharp for church tomorrow.**

## **Does That Make Them Biscuits?**

**I** was now in middle school, "***I Have Dream,***" and had inspired the over 200,000 Black men and women who marched on Washington, DC. Malcolm X challenged our delusion of being respected as American citizens by asking, "***A cat can have kittens in an oven, but does that make them biscuits?***" In 1964, after King had been gunned down, Black people took to the streets - shooting and being shot. Some youth charged the stage in Boston where James Brown was performing. What they did reached me in North Carolina. Brown's "Please, Please, Please, and his "processed" hair gave way to the Afro and the new voices from the

youth. I remember as plain as day. We were in the school gym, stomping and throwing our fists. Dancing defiantly, we shouted from the top of our lungs, *“We’re people too; we like the birds and the bees’ we’d rather die on our feet than keep living on our knees. **Say it Loud: I’m Black, and I’m Proud.**”*

With every beat of the song, every stomp, every Black Power fist pump, I was stomping down the induced shame and beating back the fear - and the fear inducers.

We were purging ourselves of the false ideas born of centuries of abuse like, “We’re inferior.” “we’re our own worst enemy,” “We deserve oppression,” and “We brought oppression on ourselves.” One purging phrase came from the Honorable Elijah Muhammed through his most powerful minister, Malcolm X. It was so sharp that many were afraid to utter it. For others, it was liberating and explained everything: ***“The white man is the devil.”***

## **Colonizing Morality**

***“The white man is the devil”*** pushed us beyond needed affirmations of our beauty, goodness, and worth.





I had bathed in the healing waters of *Nina Simone's To Be Young Gifted in Black!* The power in our resistance and rebellion in the streets - whether marching or burning helped me purge the idea that we were powerless. Curtis Mayfield's "*We're A Winner*" amplified our street movement and sought to put a nail in that powerless coffin with the line, "*We don't mind*

***leaving here to show the world we have no fear, cause we're a winner..."***

Still, Malcolm's "*The white man is the devil*" crossed into offensive territory, taking moral and spiritual aim at our oppressors. We were challenged. It called us to unearth poisoned preferences, emotions, values, behaviors, and tendencies distorted or created to serve Europeans at our expense.

Mount Carmel was the rockin' Baptist, just a stone's throw from the ancient pecan tree and our winter kitchen workshop. There, God, Jesus, and the angels were still European - white - white - on the handheld church fans, white on the murals, wall portraits, and stained glass windows. In the Bible, Joseph and Mary were also printed white, and - truth be told - they were still white in our hearts and minds.

Our spirituality and morality had been twisted to serve the aliens. While we're boldly singing about dying "standing on our feet rather than living on our knees," it somehow felt "wrong" to say ***The white man is the devil***. Any fear I had of white retaliation could be hidden under the cloak of morality - "It was just wrong to say that."

Having survived and fought against the most abject abuse for centuries - legal bondage, convict

leasing, Jim Crow, lynchings, mis-education, and media for subjugation, we had become strong from the victories. Still, we had wounds. Those wounds were portals for unseen poisons. Lighter skin signified beauty and intelligence. Big noses had to be pinched, while lips and butts had to be tucked in so they would appear smaller. Roberts Rules of Order still ran our meetings, and we worked to convince “them” that our story was worthy of being included in their story that we and they called “History.”

This flushing would take more than a minute. It would be a recurring process. Some poisons I would have to discover over time. Some poisons I already knew had to go. I hadn’t figured out how to hold on to my Aunt Rosie while flushing the Jesus she prayed to heal my fractured skull.

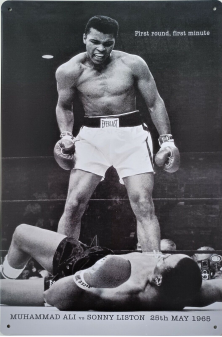


# The Long Envelope

**A**s usual, Dad was there to pick me up from the Grey Hound Bus station. I'd been living with my mother in New Jersey the summer before I was to be transferred to high school in N.C. We hugged. Then, holding me at arm's length, he said, "Let me look at you! Boy, you've grown over the summer!" On the way home, I got caught up. I hadn't focused on high school all summer; everybody from Belt Blvd to Person Street was going to E. E. Smith. Our Jr. High School colors were the same; our band sometimes played with theirs. Kenny Wells would be throwing the pill. DJ Johnson would run under it and straight to the endzone. My good friend, Dirk, had the fastest first step of any power forward. I couldn't wait for school to start and to become a Golden Bull!

*"That Blue and Gold, it looks so good to me, yeh, yeh. That Blue and gold!"*

On the dresser in my room was a long envelope. It was from the school system. Dad hadn't opened it, and I wish I hadn't either. The words, "You are assigned to Terry Sandford Sr. High School," hit me like Muhammad Ali hit Sony Liston.



Terry Sanford was the high school in the upper-crust white neighborhood. They had a huge lot for student parking and a student smoking area. They had John T. Sasser - a principal from Mississippi! While a handful of Black parents had enrolled their children, it was a white school, and I didn't want to attend - at all!

Despite protesting, my family had neither the money nor the influence to create an exception for me. When the time came, every Black rising 10th grader I knew boarded the special buses to take us to a foreign land. As the buses rolled up to the school, I saw other Black students I'd never known. They came from other black neighborhoods. Somehow, we were all drawn to the gym. That's where we hung out before classes started.

It became our haven, our command central behind enemy lines. We were not alone and would become a force to be reckoned with.

Larry Williams and Ron George became my big brothers and life-long comrades. Brother Jackie Mosley introduced me to *The Mean Machine*, *The White Man's Got a God-Complex*," and other



prophetic wisdom from *The Last Poets*. The more militant of us refused the Pledge of Allegiance, and for the Star Spangled Banner, we stood with our heads down and clenched fists thrust to the ceiling. John Carlos and Tommie Smith

led the way at the '68 Olympics. Almost everyone resisted or protested in their own way.

Our first organized effort took aim at the curriculum. We wanted no more white and white-washed history!

Some of us had been coached in Jr. High. Back at Spivey, the librarian introduced us to a set of Black History encyclopedias published by **Carter G. Woodson** and the **Association of the Study of African American Life and History**. She'd helped us discover the truth about our history and flush the lies. Her name was Ms. Metterine McClean. Blacker than the midnight sky, she stood proud and straight. She reminded me of a slightly taller Nina Simon. That she was a woman of few words added to her mystery and power.



She, too, was behind enemy lines. We found her in the library! She and some other teachers were from our community. They had received the same kind of letter assigning them to this hostile place. And some of them, like us, didn't want to be there. When I was protesting by not trying in Geometry class, Ms. Fannie Jenkins confronted me after class,

*“You know you can do this work”*

*“I know, Ms. Jenkins, I just don't want to be here!”*

*You're not alone, I don't want to be here, either. We were assigned here just like you. But since we're here, at least make the best of it. Failing geometry isn't going to change it.”*

It was the first time that I thought about Black teachers being directed against their will. It helped me feel a stronger connection and broadened my scope. She was right; failing geometry would only hurt me.

*“But, Ms. Jenkins, I don't like how they do the proofs in the textbook. Can I use other proofs?”*

*“As long as your proof is valid, you can be as creative as you want!”*

I went from rebelling and failing to loving geometry and making A's.



Black teachers bolstered our burgeoning organization in quiet yet powerful ways. When we needed a faculty advisor for our new Black Student Union student organization, I knew where to go - Ms. Fannie Jenkins. Some of our meetings were in her room.

Sasser and his bull-dog assistant principal, Warren - banned our Black Student Union, forbade us from passing our newsletter, and forced our faculty advisor to resign. She wanted to fight them but confided in me that somehow they'd also put pressure on her husband's job, although he didn't work at the school. She was livid.

*“We can't afford to lose both incomes,”* she said.  
*“Ms. Jenkins, you've been great. Take care of your family, We'll take care of this.”*

I left appreciating her and knowing that this would be a real fight, but if they thought that would stop us, they had another thought coming.

We connected with a local chapter of Y.O.B.U. - Youth Organization for Black Unity based at

Fayetteville State University to help us print the newsletters. In 1963, Fayetteville State students challenged local segregation and racial oppression. They collaborated with soldiers and Black community leaders to bring it to the forefront just as Black students in Greensboro's A&T and Bennet College had done the same in 1960. Y.O.B.U., also out of Greensboro, was continuing that work. National Chairman Nelson Johnson said Y.O.B.U was "working to build an effective nationally coordinated revolutionary youth movement within this country..." We were plugged into a national movement and weren't about to stop.

We cranked those mimeograph machines through the wee hours of the morning. We were running on liberation energy. The few of us with cars rushed the newsletters to Black students' school bus pickup points. Banned from distributing on school grounds, the buses became our distribution channels. By the time they got to school, everyone knew the plan.

Organized, strategic, and loud, we demanded a Black history course to be taught. The

administration relented. We couldn't wait for the course to start. I was the first to enter the classroom, and I was the first to turn around to exit. The teacher stood in the front of the class as a silent stream of Black students made u-turns, exited, and sat down in the hallway - present, but not present.

“These devils!” I said to myself, “What made them think that we'd stand for a white teacher for our Black history class? I know they think they are superior and that we are fools.” We'll that ship had sailed. Every day, we sat outside the classroom, refusing to enter. We didn't argue with the white teacher standing alone at the front of an empty class. Our actions spoke for us.

As the tension mounted, some wanted discussion and a softer approach. We knew instinctively that it wasn't enough to say we're “Black and proud” or that “we're equal, too.” In addition to “you're inferior, unworthy, yada, yada, ya, oppression's bullets and brutality hurled the message:

*“You are powerless” to create or change your personal or group's reality. Even if you correct the lies that you're worthless or are to blame, you are still powerless to stop*

*our abuse or to create a family, group, community, or nation that nurtures your greatness.”*

We couldn't counter that with stories, slogans, and songs. They had done their job to inform and inspire us. Our job was to act, push, expand our territory, and create a safe space to continue our journey to authentic growth and power. We stood our ground for days until a Black teacher stood at the front of this class to further our journey of discovery and healing.

Her name was Katie Forshee. We didn't know whether she'd been snatched from that Blue and Gold of E. E. Smith or retirement. At that time, it didn't matter. We strolled into class with swag and pumping Black Power fists. We had defied their limits and won. We also started to heal the lies of powerlessness hidden in the shadows of our minds.

The victory and quest to learn our true story was exhilarating. With each class, a discovery:

- Was Jesus really Black?
- When did we fight back?
- Who were the Black inventors?

- Did Pablo Picasso copy African culture and claim it as his own?



- Did you see Bill Cosby's Black History Lost, Stolen, or Strayed?
- What part of the Constitution did the Panthers read at police stops?
- Where was Malcolm X Liberation University?
- Who are the Zulu?

These strengthened us, and we continued to win smaller victories. The next: Black History Month. We expanded it from the Black History Week started by Carter G. Woodson, which we'd celebrated at our Black schools and churches.

It wasn't all smooth sailing. My classmates picked me to present a message to the entire school for Black History Month over the intercom. I prepared. I over-prepared and came to class ready! Ms. Forshee seemed more nervous than usual. Ms. Forshee was old school. We all had family members who powdered their faces to appear lighter. She wanted us to learn to prove ourselves "as smart and worthy as anyone." Pulled into this Black power tug-a-war by our demands to the administration, she chose to put her head down and teach us Black history! I just didn't know how far down.

When I approached the front of the room to make my presentation, Ms. Forshee said, "*I'm sorry, Phillip,*" *there will be no Black History Month school-wide presentation.* "What!?! It was a gut punch! She had caved in to administration pressure meant to silence other leaders of the

BSU and me. I plopped myself in my seat as hard as possible and slammed my books to wake the dead. I was steaming - angry about her silence, her collusion. Ms. McClain or Ms Jenkins would have alerted us to the pressure so we could have prepared a counter.

Though my grandfather was a minister and my mother an evangelist, I was more an organizer than a public speaker. This was a chance to step out with something I was passionate about - us. I'd planned to let Black power resonate with every syllable, every word, and every sentence. It was a personal opportunity lost.

In my junior year, we started to plan the biggest thing yet: a school walkout with Y.O.B.U. students joining and media coverage.

The administration strategy changed from challenging us to warning Black teachers of the consequences of our organized actions and enlisting their help to thwart our bold actions as a form of protection for us from the horrible consequences that might follow. A small group of these teachers were convinced and got busy:

*“Hello,”*

“Hello, is this Ms. Maggie Wright?”

*“Yes, it is.”*

“Is your son Phillip Geddie?”

*“Who wants to know?”*

“Ms. Wright, My name is Ms. Taylor. I’m an English teacher at Terry Sanford calling to alert you that your son, Phil Geddie, is involved in an organization banned from the school and that we believe is being influenced by outside organizations. Were you aware of that?”

*“I know my son is involved in fighting racism at the school.”*

“Ms. Wright, I’m a Black parent just like you. I know these are challenging times, but I don’t want your son to get hurt.”

*“Hurt how?”*



“We believe he is involved in a plan to disrupt the school tomorrow. And we’re calling parents to protect them. Not only is this forbidden, but his participation could threaten his graduation and any scholarship he has received from colleges.”

*“Keep talking”*

“Can we count on you to speak to him and ensure he’s not involved?”

*“Listen, Ms. Taylor, I appreciate your concern, but I want you to know that I trust my son; if he’s involved, I’m behind it 100%.”*

Then, I got a call from my mother:

*“What y’all planning at the school? I just got a call from Ms. Taylor - talking ‘bout how you may not graduate or some may lose their scholarships.”*

I filled my mother in on the details, and she remained solidly behind me. *Where did they think I got it from?* But the calls did cause a tremor in the force. Some parents hadn’t known. Some did and had become frightened for us.

While I was a junior, Ron and Larry were seniors headed to UNC-Chapel Hill; understandably, their parents and other graduating students were worried about college implications. Other parents stood with us. It was a nervous night. There were no cell phones, no texting, no emailing. These hadn't been invented yet. We'd have to wait 'til the next morning at command central to assess the damage and decide to proceed or cancel our planned mass Black student walk-out.

Anyone suspected of being in leadership or supporting the BSU seemed to receive the same call.

*“Yeah, they called my mother. I’m still in.”*

*“I’m out, my pops said; it was too risky.”*

*“I’m still in. My dad said, “Stand your ground.”*

*“I’m out. Man, I can’t risk my scholarship.”*

*“In!” “In!” “Out!” “In!”*

While we still had more “Yay’s” than “Na’s, the split and the hesitancy weakened us. Because of the mixed parental response, we reasoned they didn’t know how effective they were. We’d seek to use that somehow, but for now, we scaled back

and redirected Y.O.B.U., other organizations, and media that were key to our plan to expose the racism at the school and to continue to force change.

They had won that battle. Lesson learned! We weren't deterred; we were riding a wave of Black power. African history, African clothes. Afros and more. We had begun to conceive of ourselves as African powerful, and our demanding, pushing to define and extend our territory was a way to nurture it and protect this new conception, a way of bringing it to life. This is why some parents told us to stand our ground and why the BSU started planning its next challenge.

## **How I Got Over**

*How I got over, over, my soul looks back and  
“wonder” how I got over!*

**U**NC's Black Student Movement Gospel Choir had the Memorial Hall rocking. Riding on the spirit of Mahalia and Aretha, they called us to spiritually celebrate

black power - not a white savior. Black students from all over the State and country waved, rocked, clapped, and shouted. Their Black student organization dwarfed ours back at Sanford. Theirs was BSM - the “m” for movement had replaced our “u” for union. They had a budget and an office that came from student fees. In the foyer, Black medical students passed out pamphlets and educated us about a strange disease called Sickle Cell. Further outside, some members of the Winston-Salem Black Panther Party sold newspapers.

I was overjoyed. I wasn't even supposed to be there. Larry and Ron had graduated. I still had one more year at Sanford, but agreed to pack their stuff in my 1964 Pontiac Star Chief and take them to Black Freshman Pre-orientation at the University of NC at Chapel Hill - UNC. I stuck around for a few days pretending to be an incoming freshman myself. Anticipating questions about my eventual departure, Ron came up with this rich story about how I'd been accepted at multiple schools and used the Black pre-orientation to see which I would attend. *It worked; I had a ball!*

The campus was vast. Co-ed dormitories, huge academic department building. Because we were early to the campus, Black students got to connect and learn the campus days before the deluge of nineteen thousand mostly white students covered the flora and fauna.

The ninety-minute drive back home took forever. My best friends were in their new home - making their future. I had another year at Sanford. My uncle's expression said it perfectly, "I felt so low that I could walk under the refrigerator without bumping my head!" I tried to console myself by telling myself, "*You just had to make it through this year to join them.*" My mind went backward.

Ron was the one who had pulled me into the Sanford cafeteria to hear Benny Renwick, a Black man on a mission to recruit black students to UNC. Before then, the future was fuzzy, and when I thought about college, it was Fayetteville State University or North Carolina Central University (NCCU). But it was more of a pipe dream than a plan. Neither of my parents had completed high school, and I only knew of a distant uncle - Uncle

Will - who had attended college. My parents knew nothing of college visits, admissions, or financial aid. Joining the military was the accelerated path to homeownership and success in this city.

My father, who had served in the Korean War, created Geddie Salvage to give me another path. He didn't care about me going to college. It didn't make sense to him because I was already making money - **good money**. He was right; I was making good money with the family business and a nightclub photography business he helped me launch and grow starting at fourteen. Before I had a license, I had purchased a 1966 Chevy Sport with a Holly Four-Barreled Carburetor with dual gas intakes and "four in the floor." That car could fly! I helped to support my mother with money. Sometimes, for my younger sisters, ***I was Santa Claus***. I expanded the photography beyond The Savoy Supper Club to include contracts with Shafts Den and the Upendo Lounge.

Dad asked, "*Son, you're leaving money on the table - for what?*"

I couldn't answer his "for what?" This seed had been growing. It was time for me to leave home.

Sitting at the same kitchen table, we had moved to make way for the anvils, barrels, and red-gold; Larry helped me complete the college and financial aid applications. Ask anybody; we were "joined at the hip." They were my "ace-boon-coons." Today, you might call them my "road dogs" or "ride-or-die" partners.

Now, I was driving away from them. What was I to do for this year at Terry Sanford? I reached for my Donny Hathaway eight-track cartridge. Donny never let me down.

Little ghetto boy  
You already know how rough life can be  
Cause you've seen so much pain and misery

Little ghetto boy  
When, when you become a man,  
You can make things change, hey, hey  
If you just take a stand  
You've got to believe in yourself, and all you do

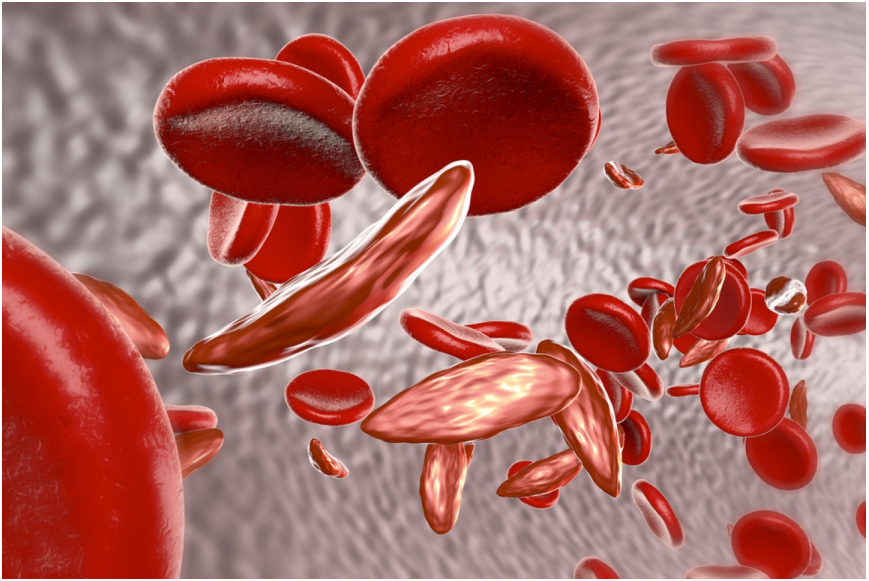
You've got to fight to make it better  
You'll see others will start believing, too  
Then, my son, things will start to get better!

Everything has got to get better  
Everything has got to get better

I declare I believe it today.  
Everything's got to get better



# Sickle Cell to the Authentic Self:



**I** noticed on the seat the green and red pamphlet and remembered the soon-to-be Dr. McArthur Newell talking passionately about how we need to learn about and do something about this blood disease that rarely affects whites but occurs in 1 in every 365 African Americans. I decided on that drive to do something to get this information out to the community and get us the needed help.

This was perfect - another discovery, another project, another movement. This time, the discovery wasn't about our greatness; it was about an affliction. Like those Black medical students, I got the opportunity - no - ***the responsibility*** to help our people.

Back at Sanford, I sought out my rock - Ms. McLean. I explained what I'd learned and my vision. She believed there was always a step to get us where we wanted to go. The first step, she said, was to talk to the director of the health department. I didn't even know what a health department was. I followed directions and got an audience with the director. The white director seemed open but erected a high bar for this Black senior from a working-class family. He required me to get a medical doctor and representatives from various Black communities involved. I didn't know any doctors. I didn't grow up with regular doctor visits. Emergency rooms, yes. But if it weren't an asthma attack, broken bone, gunshot, or a deep cut, Grandma Caldonia's castor oil or Grandma Hettie's pine top tea would do the trick.

Fayetteville State provided a wonderful meeting place. Flyers went up. I got busy telling other students, families, and everyone about Sickle Cell Disease and exhorted them to join me in organizing our community and the health department to address it. My chest stuck way out when, unexpectedly, my mother, father, and other family members got involved.

Now, I only needed “*the doctor.*” Dr. Herbert Vick was an MD and long-time activist. Years before, he, Marion Jones, Black military servicemen, and students were protesting so that Governor Terry Sanford called in 40 additional Highway Patrolmen to contain Fayetteville.

Yes, the school I was forced to attend bore the name of that Governor.

When later asked about it, Dr. Vick said, “It was my responsibility. If I went to school and got an education, I should fight for the rest of them to (be able to) do the same.”

I didn’t know Dr. Vick’s protesting history. I did know that he was one of Fayetteville’s larger-

than-life figures. I called. He asked that I come to his home the following evening. In those days, the economic gap between Dean Street - where I lived, and Seabrook, where Dr. Vick lived, seemed like an ocean. I couldn't believe how frightened I was to approach him. I was shaking as I walked down his driveway toward his door. When I made it, he invited me in, and he, too, agreed to support the effort.

During a lull at one of our regular sickle cell meetings. I realized that I'd done it. I created an organization of high school students, college students from FSU, Ms. McLean, my family, Black community members from different income sectors, and public health representatives. I'd also busied myself for the entire school year.

It was nearing time for me to go.

The Cumberland County Operation Sickle Cell - as it came to be called - was growing. A fundraiser with Smoking Joe Fraizer - the Heavy Weight Champion, was in the works. I asked fellow student - Andromeda Monroe to hold it down for

me. Given the popularity and my absence, it was just a matter of time before adults took the reigns. I'd given it a strong foundation and vision, plus Ms. McLean was there.

*I felt conflicted, but had to “let do what it would do.”* My father's query was compounded.

“Walking away from money on the table plus a solid foundation for community respect and leadership. Why are you going?” “Still. I couldn't answer as deeply as he required. One thing I was sure of - my future was calling, and calling fast. *“Like in two weeks!”*”

I'd been cleared to start classes as a legitimate freshman at UNC, starting with summer courses before the official fall start.

Yikes - My last class at Sanford was on a Friday. On Monday, I would start classes at UNC. I will miss commencement practice and will have to return home to attend my high school graduation ceremonies.

John T. Sasser, remember him - the principal at Sanford, couldn't resist taking one last swipe. He

made it known that since I missed the graduation practices, I wouldn't be allowed to participate in commencement exercises, although I would get my diploma. He must have been out of the building that day - a month ago when my mother responded to a trusted rumor that I might not be allowed to graduate. She made appointments with each of my teachers. She entered the building, stopped by the office, and proceeded to her appointments. I was clueless on the other side of the building when a student ran up to me, "*Do you know your mother is here? She just left talking to Ms. Boyd!*" I just smiled and nodded my head with pride.

I'll never know what Mom said, but rumor has it that she asked to see their grades for me; when satisfied, she looked them dead in the eye, asking, "***Is there anything from your class that will keep my son from passing?***" I didn't see her the entire time. I heard the rumblings and felt a tremor in the force. Sasser was absent that day. But his comment - about not letting me march during commencement to receive the degree earned him a visit. On the phone, Mom would say, "Lord knows, if you were white, they would

lay out the red carpet and praise your success as you stepped out *to get your Sanford Diploma.*”

Sasser was in the office this time.

When my name was called at the commencement, you better believe I was stepping with Swagg and pumping the Black Power Fist. And I could swear that my Mom’s voice was the loudest!



# The Harvest

**T**hese stories about my UNC years must fly by, or I risk making you happy twice.

- My time @ UNC was sweet because of the work of Black students before me who struggled there and the collection of Black students, Black Faculty, and Black Staff who continued that struggle with whom I got to share space. Pushing, pulling, dreaming, gaining, and losing ground, we became a microcosm of Black America in a quasi-liberal racist white space.
- The BSM and the Afrikan and Afrikan American Studies Department were my chief growth vehicles.
- Sonja Hayes Stone, head of the Afrikan American Studies, was a teacher, sister, and comrade. Don't even get me started!
- Durham and its WAFR radio station were cultural and musical gifts.
- Dips Country Kitchen in Chapel Hill and The Green Candle Restaurant in Durham kept me alive!



Durham's North Carolina Central University (NCCU) was near The Green Candle. UNC brought in Dr. James Brewer from this famed Black University to teach a Black Studies course. I called him a black star in a sea of whiteness. We called him Doc. His pipe was part of his presentation. Each class was filled to the brim, and each time, this scholar and master story chief would serve up our stories on a plate of call and response. Before we knew it, class was over. One particular spring day, the class lingered with me as I walked to my next class. I don't know what he said in that last class. It was a wave. His powerful, nurturing, instructive, and affirming stories flowed in and through me. I kept walking and thinking of a way to celebrate this African in me. I thought of a party, but they are too fleeting. I wanted this celebration to last, and last, and last.

Just before reaching Bingham Hall - the speech-communications building - I heard a voice seeking to solve my dilemma. "*Change*

*your name. Take An Afrikan name,” it said. “That way, anytime anyone called your name, they were joining your celebration of your Afrikaness. I thought of organizations that required or encouraged name changes, but I wasn’t a part of any. The voice spoke again in deeper tones, “Change your name.”*

When I started seriously considering it, two other voices rushed forward. One belonged to my mother - *You’re gonna do what? In deeper tones, Dad said, “Son, you gon’ do what?”* I pushed those two away to give myself more time.

Over the next few weeks, I walked around in the idea, looking from multiple angles. My Dad would have the most problems with it, but he’s the one who taught me to do it all the way or not do it at all!

I decided to arrange for that life-long party by changing my name from Phillip Mark Geddie to an Afrikan name. Which one? I

had no clue. How do you choose an Afrikan name?

My research started with my friend, Omondi, from Kenya, at the International Student Center. I decided that one of my three names would come from East Afrika. There was a peacefulness about Omondi. I became all ears and finally settled on **Wekesa** from the Luo of Kenya. It translated into "**The Harvest**." I embraced the idea of working to become a man representing a harvest to my people through my life and work. I hit the Stacks (library) to study more about Kenya.

I had also crashed some Nigeria events with another friend, Namdi. I related to the West Afrikan passion. Namdi mentioned a name - Olatunji. "*Like Baba Olatunji and his Drums of Passion*," I said. His album was in my collection. Jingo, Jingo Ba was my favorite cut. I left to study more and listen more.

***“Honor and riches reawakens”*** - the words touched me. The Africa that had languished beneath my shame or cower in fear was reawakening. **Olatunji** would become my middle name.

All the North African names I heard or read about were Muslim. I wanted an indigenous Afrikan language name. My idea about a name from North, East, South, and West was becoming a bit too ambitious. I scaled back to look for one more name. Talking to both Afrikans and Afrikan-Americans, someone mentioned Madzimoyo. It represented the Ngoni from South and Central Afrika. The translations ***“Water of life” or Big Sprited, One with a big heart - who gives a lot of himself*** were on target. One of my father’s instructions was, *“Don’t let nobody beat you giving.”* Madzimoyo would become my last name.

I used the University law library to review state statutes and successful briefs. It was not complicated. I started wearing the name

on campus to get a feel for it. It felt good; everyone was supportive. Still, I couldn't shake a fear about what it might mark me for. Brother Pete Oneal had not long ago been arrested on trumped-up charges, and the Chicago police had assassinated Fred Hampton. I wasn't in the Black Panther Party, nor did I share such limelight. My fears persisted but were no match for my family's instructions, "*If you're gonna do it, do it all the way.*"

A friend typed up the paperwork on the appropriate legal paper. I placed it into a slim Samsonite briefcase, put on my rarely worn three-piece suit, and headed to Hillsborough - the county seat. I was alone.

They called my name; I walked up and presented my paperwork. The judge barely looked at me; he scanned the paperwork, stamped it, and said, "*That will be 15 dollars.*" No questions. No evil looks. No photographs or gathering of police. I was relieved and excited. "***I did it!***"

***Now, I was legally Wekesa Olatunji  
Madzimoyo.***

I had just two more hurdles - Mom and Dad.

I traveled home and met with each separately.

Remember, they separated when I was five. **“Why?”** Mom wanted to know. Why did I decide to change my name? She was concerned that some organization had “poisoned my mind.” I told her the story of Dr. Brewer and about celebrating my Africanness. I translated each name and shared what they meant to me. After practicing my name a few times, she smiled and shocked me.

***“Can I take an Afrikan name?”***

***“Absolutely”***

After looking through some of my African name books I just happened to have in the car, she fell in love with “Tulenagwe.” It means “*God is with us.*” Mom was an evangelist, so that lined up perfectly. Overhearing our conversation, my sisters followed Mom’s lead; each chose Afrikan

names: Weseme, Mandisa, and Kiziwande. Later, another of my sisters would add the name Olibisa, and my brother would be inspired to add Fadil Akil Montsho.

I'm glad I stopped by Mom's first. Dad asked the same questions, I gave him the same answers - the harvest, the honor, the big spirit giving a lot of him or herself.

*"I will not call you by that name,"* he said.

*"Dad, my fight isn't against you. I'm not trying to embarrass you or separate from you. It's against this racist system.*

He was unmoved.

*"Dad, I'm your son. You can call me whatever you want to call me! Taking this name is the way I stand on your shoulders. The best of what you taught me is Afrikan, and I don't want to live it out under the Scotch-Irish oppressor's banner."*

I had hoped that my words would touch him because every one of them was true, but

they were anemic. He remained steadfast and wouldn't call me by my Afrikan name. I remained steadfast that I wouldn't let my name change drive a wedge between us. Somehow, I'd use my newfound African culture to bring us closer.

It would take time.

Driving away, I counted it as a good day. I still had my family, and a new man had been born - Wekesa Olatunji Madzimyo - rooted in African-American strength, survival adaptation, insights, and recreations of Afrika on these shores while reaching for the ancient wisdom and cultural traditions that made Africa great, our survival possible, and the future bright.

***A Luta Continua!***













# About the Author



Wekesa O. Madzimoyo — Tap or click this placeholder text to add an author biography to your book. Help readers learn more about what makes you and your books interesting, or why they should pick up your book.