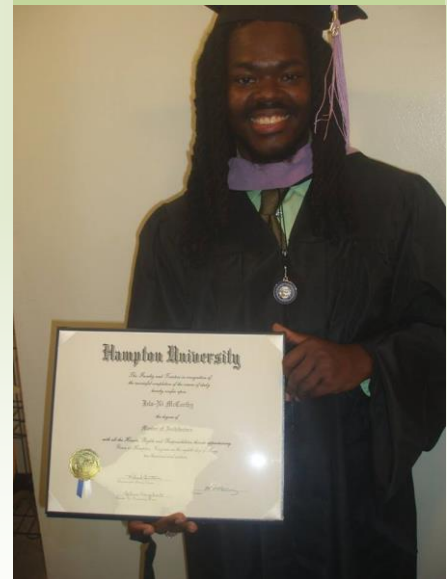


Au Naturel

The Best Mother's Day Week of My Life: A Personal Testimony

Well, I haven't written in a while because I've been pretty occupied--in wonderful ways! My two sons graduated from college on Mother's Day week. The eldest graduated from Hampton University on Mother's Day (Sunday, May 8th) and the youngest graduated from NC Central University on Saturday, May 14th. Can I say that this was the BEST WEEK OF MY LIFE!! I was on a cloud for the entire week!! It's been a long time in coming. Can I confess that I've been telling everyone?! My greatest delight has come from the fact that this journey was one of perseverance. My husband always says that the "race is not for the swift." And truer words were never spoken. I've been so over-joyed because only God knows the depth of the struggle that it took to get them to this day. Challenges began as early as the 2nd grade. These early challenges centered around the fact that we moved from Jamaica to the US. So, Jela-ni didn't know what the heck the kids in Pembroke, NC were saying, nor the teachers. Despite my intensive one-on-one tutoring with him, he was consistently failing his spelling tests. When I asked him why, he protested that the way I say the words is not the way he hears them. So, he was spelling the country-twang version of each word. Naturally, they were all spelled wrong. So, I had to translate *country* and *neutral speak* to him so that he would know that whichever pronunciation he hears, it's the same word. Then, I sat down and read one of his school books. After reading the American colloquialisms like "Gee whiz" and "Gosh", coupled with the terminology of baseball, I knew he didn't understand a single thing that book was trying to communicate. Jamaicans play cricket, not baseball and they speak a different colloquial language completely. So, I had my work cut out for me. **God sat me down for an entire year to make sure that I would focus my attention where it was most needed.** It took me that long exactly to find a job in the US. Crazy...but essential! I'm grateful that I didn't find one sooner. My youngest, who was later tested as academically gifted, synthesized country-twang instantly and was fluent inside of 2 months. Needless to say, I was ready to move fairly quickly but, I knew it would have to be after the school year was complete. I never expected to have to work this hard because my kids received the best education that Jamaica has to offer while they were there. They have been going to school since the age of 1. What can I say: In Jamaica, kids have to compete for a limited number of high school seats so, they start prepping their kids very early. Lloyd and I could barely afford it but, we put them in the Montessori Center in Jamaica as soon as they could walk--14 months for both of them. And from that day, we've been spending money on their education. When my eldest was having difficulty upon arriving in Wake County Schools



Masters of Architecture - Hampton University
Jela-ni Khari McCarthy (23 years)

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I felt something very deep was wrong because he was MORE THAN “ready for school.” The question seemed to be: Was the school ready for him? It was challenging to say the least. After two years of battling with teachers, I met a gem names Mrs. Townsley. (I feel compelled to try to find this woman. I need to investigate if she’s still in the area.) She suggested that my son daydreams a lot and so I may want to get an assessment for him. She noted that if he has a problem, the child psychologist can make a recommendation. So, we went to NCSU to “git ‘er done” because I wanted full control of the reports and the contents therein. Well, according to the expert, he had no learning disabilities of any kind but was prone to daydream which is pretty normal for a little boy. She couldn’t make an ADD diagnosis based on her observations, but she could write up a recommendation for an IEP--individualized education plan. So, that’s what we did. It basically mandated his

teachers to allow for periodic daydreaming and to allow him to catch up accordingly. It made all the difference in the world!! But, it also meant that he came home with A LOT of homework because he had to make up what he didn’t complete during class time throughout the day. The net effect was that I kept him up really late and he worked unusually long hours for his age. Because I used to wake him up at 4am in Jamaica to do homework when he invariably fell asleep on the long commute home and could not be awakened upon arrival at home, he was not prone to complain. He was used to fighting sleep to finish assignments. I thought it was cruel and unusual punishment though, and from that day vowed that another child would not leave my womb and enter into THIS MADNESS!! Wake County Public School System was the most effective method of birth control that I have ever experienced!! Truly!! But, persevere he must, and he did.

Bachelors of Political Science from NC Central University - Jamar Akil McCarthy (22 years). He just began full-time employment with the NC General Assembly 40th Senatorial District (Senator Joyce Waddell). He got the job all on his own!! His parents don’t have that type of pull!! ☺ #Itsmillertime#Wejustgotaraise#ThankGodforJesus#Ididntfaint!!!!!!!

No Child Left Behind

Recently while in the salon, I was styling a client’s hair and she said, “Wow, you have two sons graduating from college!. What advice can you give me? My son is not really doing all that he should be.” I thought about it, posed a few questions and answered the best way I knew how based on the information that she provided. I felt like it was so inadequate because I don’t know her child or her situation. But, I believe that there are some lessons that others can benefit from based on my experience.

Firstly, don’t let your child be left behind in school at any cost. That means, be willing to pay for tutoring, counseling, after school programs and whatever it takes to keep them engaged and interested in learning. If you can’t afford some services, go to your local church for assistance. There are many resources in the local church through youth volunteers, male mentorship programs and after-school tutorial services. Be willing to ask for assistance. Likewise, know your rights. As my Mother so skillfully informed me: *Education is a legal mandate that you don’t get to opt out of. Truancy laws exist to enforce this mandate. Therefore, schools must educate all children. Hold them accountable.* With that said, you must be present to assist teachers in every way possible to support your child. Many times, the depth of support needed is sacrificial. Do it!!

The strange thing was that I didn’t realize I was training him on God’s time and on God’s plan. When he got to Architecture school after two years of community college (because he didn’t make it into NCSU’s Architecture Program), the pace was brutal. All-nighters were a matter of course. After his first year, he told me, “Mommy, so many students have dropped out of the Architecture program--some of them are smarter than I am.” I said, “Why do you think that is?” He said, “I don’t know. I just know I’m going to be an Architect!! One day we were talking in a group and someone said, ‘What will you all do if you don’t make it?’ Some said the major that they would switch to instead. When it was my turn to speak, I said, “This is it for me!! There’s nothing else!! I don’t want to do anything else!” And so at the end of his 1st year, he moved into W.E.B. Dubois Hall--the Honors Dorm at Hampton University. He lived there for the remaining 4 years of his undergraduate and graduate studies. I felt like I was punishing my child but I was training him. He announced during his 3rd year, Mommy, I can pull 3 all-nighters in a row. I said, “WHAT?! Is that healthy?” He said, “It’s necessary.” And that was that. Architecture students are the only students allowed to ignore the campus curfew at Hampton University. The security guards knew him by name. And so, [what happens to a dream deferred](#)? If you single-mindedly hold onto the dream, fight with every fiber of your being and don’t give up, it blossoms into a most exquisite reality! His journey continues. He has several years of interning and a licensure exam to pass before he’s a RA (Registered Architect), but the hardest part of the journey is behind him. So the rest is merely a matter of time.

Jamar’s story is one of academic excellence. School was always easy for him. In the 3rd grade while walking down the hallway with him, his teacher stepped out to greet me. He said, “Are you Jamar’s mom?” Yes. “I want to shake your hand. He has got to be the brightest student that I have ever taught!” I said, “Thank you.” But, I thought, ‘Have you taught very many kids? Cause he can do some stupid stuff at home!’ ☺ He then continued, “His argumentation and debate skills are exceptional!! Truly!!” And the accolades continued. Well, he was telling the truth. This young man is gifted without a doubt. So, imagine my shock and horror when I saw him laid out on a hospital bed very near death after an alcohol poisoning incident the night he pledged Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity at ECU. He was later arrested for failure to appear in court as a result of the underage drinking citation that he received that night. I didn’t care that TKE membership boasts the likes of Ronald Reagan, Conrad Hilton, Willie Nelson, Merv Griffin and Elvis Presley. I wanted him OUT!! But, I couldn’t undo what had already been done. However if we were to finance his education, ECU was suddenly no longer an option that we would support. He wasn’t pleased but he knew a good deal when he had one. So, he did a year at community college and then enrolled at NCCU. While my approach was heavy-handed at the time, I knew why



My favorite picture this year - HANDS DOWN!!!

it was necessary. Because while all of his closest friends managed to graduate in 5 years like he did, he has a GPA that will get him into Law School. And that's why kids have parents to guide them. He still loves ECU and TKE fraternity; but, he also appreciates that by transferring to NCCU, he had the opportunity to correct some miss-steps and get on with the work that God has designed him to do. This is the child I pray for most because his sense of justice and fairness coupled with his iron will and a mouth like his Dad's (not a compliment :-o), he sometimes invites trouble into his life. Shortly after Sandra Bland's murder, he was arrested for defying a police officer's order to "shut up." He asked what was his charge, and the officer said being drunk and disorderly in public. He then demanded that a breath-a-lizer test be administered to prove that he was not intoxicated. The test was never administered despite his plea to have one. He told me while in the cell, he was placed on "suicide watch." Needless to say, he never slept that night. And despite vowing to never bail him out again after his first arrest, we quickly went to get him. But, he came away from this experience more determined than ever to pursue a legal and possibly political career. His road has been rife with social challenges. **But again, I acknowledge that God gave him the experiences that he needed to push him where he wants him to go.**

Indeed, the race is not for the swift, and as parents, we can only coach from the sidelines. But, the coaching is so important. I'm grateful that they didn't give up, and more importantly, that we didn't give up on them!! Embrace the beauty of the journey.

Fr. Richard Rohr's Daily Devotional Watching the River - Tuesday, May 10, 2016

Last month, I wrote an article called "Contemplating the Emotional Body" that some may have found a little quirky, or difficult to understand. Well, true to form, Fr. Richard Rohr has penned an article which more brilliantly captures the essence of my meaning in a rather succinct and thought-provoking way. This man co-writes me in ways that are frankly eerie considering I don't know him and have never met him. But, then I do follow his posts regularly. So, perhaps I'm just ingesting the full depth of meaning when I regurgitate ideas.

To live in the present moment requires a change in our inner posture. Instead of expanding or shoring up our fortress of "I"--the ego--which culture and often therapy try to help us do, contemplation waits to discover what this "I" consists of. What is this "I" that I take so seriously?

To discover the answer, we have to calmly observe our own stream of consciousness and see its compulsive patterns. That's what happens in the early stages of contemplation, which does not yet feel like prayer. We wait in silence. In silence all our usual patterns assault us. Our patterns of control, addiction, negativity, tension, anger, and fear assert themselves. When Jesus is "driven" by the Spirit into the wilderness, the first things that show up are "wild beasts" (Mark 1:13). Contemplation is not first of all consoling, which is why so many give up. Yes, the truth will set you free, but first it will make you miserable.

Most teachers insist on at least twenty minutes for a full contemplative "sit," because you can assume that the first half (or more) of any contemplative prayer time is just letting go of those thoughts, judgments, fears, negations, and emotions that want to impose themselves on you.



My son's with their grandmother--Greta McCullom Hawthorne, who set a standard of excellence that the rest of us are just trying to keep up with!! 😊

No Child Left Behind II

But, our young men are not only challenged on the academic front. They are also challenged socially by the penal system, by peers, by unwarranted labeling. When my youngest was 10 years old, he was with some neighborhood boys playing with a BB gun--not ours. The Black female police officer sent the boys (all White) home but escorted Jamar home with the gun. She showed it to me and said, "I wanted you to know what your son was doing and with what." She continued, "He could be shot for playing with this same gun that the other boys took for granted." I thanked her immensely and sat my son down to talk. When he turned 15 years, I told him to stop cutting through the neighbors' yards to come home. He didn't understand so, I explained that based on his size and skin color, he was now a Black man--not the Jamar kid from up-the-road. His brother didn't have these experiences but apparently, Jamar was the one who needed them. **So, I say also, trust that your child has a destiny and believe in it! MAKE them believe in it!** When I birthed two sons, I spoke to God and said, "Okay, two male children. You expect me to raise men worthy to strengthen the Black family. I accept the challenge." And I lived every day of my life like I had made a promise to God. Sometimes, I fought my own husband to make sure that they had what they need. But, I made the promise. He didn't always agree with me but he rarely overturned my decision. One time, he did, and he was right. I was just tired. He knew that and stepped into the gap. See their development as your life mission; take it seriously. Persevere. I truly believe that if I die tomorrow, my life would have been well spent. I could ask for no greater gift. Today, I only ask that God continue to protect them in this fallen world. I pray the same protection over your children. Amen.

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We fixin' to go on vacation y'all!!!!

You have to become the watcher, where you step back from those things and observe them without judgment. You separate from them and you watch them "over there" until you realize that feeling is not me. I'm over *here* watching that over *there*, which means it isn't me.

Thomas Keating teaches a beautifully simple exercise to use in contemplation. Imagine yourself sitting on the bank of a river. Observe each of your thoughts coming along as if they're saying, "Think me, think me." Watch your feelings come by saying, "Feel me, feel me." Acknowledge that you're having the feeling; acknowledge that you're having the thought. Don't hate it, don't judge it, don't critique it, don't, in any way, move against it. Simply name it: "resentment toward so and so," "a thought about such and such." Admit that you're having it, then place it on a boat and let it go down the river. The river is your stream of consciousness.

In the early stages of beginning a contemplative practice (and for the first few minutes of each new contemplative experience), you're simply observing your repetitive thoughts. The small, ego self can't do this because it's rather totally *identified* with its own thoughts and illusions, which are all the ego has. In fact, the ego is a passing game. That's why it's called the false self. It's finally not real. Most people live out of their false self, so "they think they are their thinking." They don't have a clue who they are apart from their thoughts. What you are doing in contemplation is moving to a level beneath your thoughts: the level of *pure and naked being*. This is the level of pure consciousness. This is not consciousness of anything in particular; it's simply naked awareness.

You may be wondering what's the point of such contemplation. The point is that if God wants to get at you--and my assumption is that God always does--if God wants to get through your barriers and blockages, God has the best chance of doing so through contemplative practice, quite simply because *you and your limited mind* are finally out of the way!

Gateway to Silence

AND

References:

Adapted from Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* (The Crossroad Publishing Company: 1999), 75; and *Contemplative Prayer* (CAC: 2007), [CD](#), [MP3 download](#).

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