



# SoulVision®

M A G A Z I N E

**Jacqui Coles’  
Call to the Word**

**July 2020**

# BK Fulton



*Photo by Queon "Q" Martin*

| “. . . only the truth will set us free.”

Over the course of 50+ years of being American and Virginian, I have learned that we are all simply human beings sharing the same rock. I try to teach my children and friends who will listen that we are all cousins trying to find our way home. I also teach my sons that while they should enjoy the same rights and privileges as others, the reality is that they live in a nation that is not well. The sickness created by a culture that would rather teach lies about Christopher Columbus than acknowledge truths about Lewis H. Latimer (the Virginian son of runaway slaves who invented the filament for the present-day light bulb), means my sons exist in a world that does not always protect the value of their humanity. A culture that overplays white contributions and underplays the contributions of people of color will underplay the importance of who they are as young black men. The educational and political systems of our Land, formal and informal, have too often perpetuated a Eurocentric indoctrination of humanity

## BK Fulton – July 2020 (continued)

versus teaching critical thinking. It is up to civil society to close the gap between the two. This is where the “truth” lives ... in the gap. It is only the truth that will set us free.

This issue of SoulVision Magazine focuses on healing. You will hear a great word from author and Pastor Jacqui Coles. Her story of rejuvenation and spiritual awakening is powerful. Similarly, Keisha Green’s story reminds us to never give up. No excuses. We decided that comfort food should be on deck in this issue so we have a great recipe from Lynn Painter and some off-the-chain good soul mixes from Mrs. Glynis Albright. Finally, we showcase several artists who are bringing it with messages and images that are ripe for the times. Award-winning director Menelek Lumumba is tearing up the film industry with his debut film **1 Angry Black Man**. We can’t say enough about it. One national critic wrote that the film was “*the most important film release*” [in June]. Stacy Spikes, founder of *urbanworld* – the largest multicultural film festival in the world – put the film in his top 10 films to watch for real change. We close out our look at amazing artists with a story on HKB FiNN and folk-artist William A. Floyd. Thank you for selecting our magazine. You get a new look when you have SoulVision.



“We are all simply human beings sharing the same rock.”

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CELEBRITY

## Jacqui Coles' Call to the Word



*Jacqui Coles. Photos by Jeffery Mabry.*

### | “Know what you will and won’t tolerate.”

Jacqui Coles is from Goochland County, Virginia, a small rural town in central Virginia, where “everyone knew each other.” Her mom was one of thirteen and Jacqui would spend almost every Sunday at her grandmother’s and Papa’s house. “We grew up surrounded by love and laughter,” she says. “We didn’t have a lot of money but as kids, we didn’t know how poor we were. I would often tell Mom to just write a check if I wanted something and she said we didn’t have the money.” Her mother was a voice of reason for Jacqui as a child and young adult. She taught her the golden rule and the value of one’s character. “She would say, not to me in particular, ‘You might be pretty on the outside, but if your inside is ugly then you ugly,’” Jacqui says. Growing up, Jacqui’s dream was to be either a model, hair stylist, or airline stewardess. When she was in the 10th grade, she attended the Richmond Technical Center for Cosmetology. She accomplished two out of the three. She went on to model for the Ford Modeling Agency (now Ford Models) in New York City and later, opened her own salon. With the support and encouragement of her mentors, Dr. Myles Munroe and Dr. Kingsley Fletcher, Jacqui also became a minister.

## Jacqui Coles' Call to the Word (continued)



Jacqui does not just see herself as a salon owner or a hair stylist, but as a counselor. Her clients don't just come in to look their best, but to learn and to share wisdom. While Jacqui is the one who is usually giving advice, her older clients have taught her valuable lessons. She recalls one client in particular who spoke about the loving nature of women. "She told me, 'If you are dating someone, you need to date someone who loves you more than you love them,'" Jacqui says. "So many times, as women, we love people who don't feel the same way and then try to change them. They never do." While Jacqui believes her talent as a hair stylist and owner of a salon are her gifts to the world, she does not believe those things are her purpose. "Once I wrote my book, *Do You Want His Will or Your Way*, I began to feel I had a clear purpose on this Earth. I now feel like I'm on the right path and believe I can change many people's lives for the better through my ministry," she says.

Jacqui felt the best way to tell her story was through writing. Public speaking has never been where she has felt comfortable, even as a minister. "I always laugh and say that God has jokes," she says. "I'm not big on speaking in front of a large crowd." This truth is hard for people to understand, at least for those who know that Jacqui Coles was once a model and is now a minister. With her book, Jacqui could express herself in a way that was authentic for her journey. "My book gave me the chance to say a lot of things that God had said to me," she explains. "My goal was to make my journey accessible to everyone. I made it a short read on purpose." She understood the need to create a text that focused on the important messages in the Bible, but in a more accessible way. "Oftentimes people say the Bible is so big and long that it is hard for them to read," she explains. "I really tried to highlight the lessons that changed my life the most."

**"Once I wrote my book, *Do You Want His Will or Your Way*, I began to feel I had a clear purpose on this Earth."**

Jacqui recalls a client who was a beautiful, young pageant queen. Jacqui taught her the importance of presence and how to enter a room. "Pull your shoulders back, hold your head up and walk," she advised. "When you go into a room your mind has to say, 'OK, I own this room.' This doesn't mean you are a conceited person. Inner confidence is the only way you're going to grab that stage when you walk out." Her client went on to be the first runner up for Miss Virginia and a couple of other pageants.

Jacqui blames poor use of social media and reality shows for too often limiting the scope of young women's ambitions and creating a culture that rewards outrageousness. "Media teaches women to not look at themselves as the queens that they are," she explains. "Some folk will do almost anything to get attention. I even tell my boys to draw the line with what you will and won't do

## Jacqui Coles' Call to the Word (continued)

or tolerate.” When Jacqui was working as a model, she was offered a job for a smoking ad. “I don’t smoke but I was offered the job for \$50,000,” she recalls. She didn’t have to go to casting. All she had to do was show up. She ended up turning the job down. “I didn’t want these young girls who looked up to me to think I did something that I didn’t do. They may not know that it was my job,” she says. Jacqui remembers when she was young, she wanted to be a smoker because she thought all of the pretty girls smoked and looked cool doing it. “I’ve always agreed with the saying, ‘If it cost you your peace of mind, it is too expensive.’” The temptation of money and fame can be tantalizing. Jacqui believes you have to have a sound moral compass. “If you wait until you are in a situation where the money is in front of you, a lot of times you will make the wrong decision,” she says. “It is easier to walk away when you have a set of values and morals as your guides.”

After readers finish her book, Jacqui Coles simply wants people to understand what God teaches. “Be holy for I am holy.” She urges her readers to develop *the fruit of the spirit*. This means living with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. “Just treat people the way you would like to be treated,” Jacqui says simply. “When you are in a situation, run it through your mind and think about if you would like that comment being said to you or that act done to you. If the answer comes back no then you shouldn’t do it.”

Jacqui believes we should all strive for God’s definition of perfection. This means making a conscious effort to be the best person that we can be. “We can’t always say that we’re just going to make mistakes,” she says. “Yeah, we’re going to make mistakes, but we can’t keep making the same mistakes because at some point it is not a mistake as much as it is a conscious decision.”



Jacqui hopes young people will contribute positively to the world and have their voices heard. She says that first they must develop integrity. “Develop your integrity and your character early,” she advises. “The fruit of the spirit is not necessarily a religious thing, they are just principles. Life is based on principles. When we develop good principles, our lives will change for the better.”

## *Jacqui Coles' Call to the Word (continued)*

At a time where citizens are protesting against police brutality, Jacqui Coles had to reread her book and reflect on what she wrote. "I had to ask God to guard my heart because it is natural to be angry. However, we have to be careful that the anger doesn't turn into iniquity," she says. "I asked Him to guard my heart and reflect back on myself through this process." Jacqui believes without citizens risking their lives on the front-lines of the protests, we would not have any change. Jacqui believes her job is to research, understand, and give financially to those protestors and help rebuild some of the businesses that were lost in the unrest.

“Change for good and deliverance from evil is going to cost you something.”

She compares Jesus confronting the money changers in the Temple of Jerusalem and destroying their property with the present-day protests that have caused some occasional destruction. "You get tired of evil, so you have to stand up to evil," she says. "I sent out a post, telling all of my friends that they cannot stay quiet."

Jacqui looks to future generations and hopes those who are older will have a change of heart, specifically those who are against having grandkids or great-grandkids who are mixed. "You might be part of the problem if you have an issue with that," she says. She hopes the religious community will give more than just prayers. "Prayer doesn't cost us anything. Prayer is free. If you are going to pray, you need to add fasting or help financially or be on the front lines. Change for good and deliverance from evil is going to cost you something."

*Buy Jacqui Coles' book [here](#).*

MOVIES

## Menelek Lumumba Reckons With America's Racism



Director and writer Menelek Lumumba on the set of *1 Angry Black Man*. Photo courtesy of Menelek Lumumba.

| “We have to face the reality of racism or history will just repeat itself.”

Menelek Lumumba was born and raised in Denver, Colorado. He fell in love with film after seeing *Boyz n the Hood* at 9 years old. “I didn’t know how to do it, but I knew I would dedicate my life to finding out,” he says. His directorial debut *1 Angry Black Man*, was released on video-on-demand and DVD earlier last month with critical acclaim and positive reception from audiences worldwide. With cinematographer Hans Charles, Menelek has created a work of art that is striking a chord with viewers, especially white viewers who are working on understanding their *privilege*. The film essentially explores what it means to be a young black man in America and feeling like the world is caving in around you. Menelek says the film’s inspiration is both practical and philosophical. “I have played with this idea for years. Can you keep a modern film audience in one space for 90 minutes? Let’s see how far this medium can go,” he says.

## Menelek Lumumba Reckons With America's Racism (continued)



*Dr. Gabbin with Nikki Giovanni and the late Maya Angelou.*

“The film is really about the power of conversation; no one *talks* like we should today.”

Due to *1 Angry Black Man*'s heavy subject matter, Menelek would like his next film to show people he can create something lighter. He has an idea for a Christmas movie. “It’s a simple Christmas story seen through the eyes of an 11-year-old kid,” he says. Menelek is always writing and spends an hour a day working on screenwriting. “I’m building a real war chest of material,” he explains. “TV pilots and feature films are all in the mix.” He is committed to learning more about how to write for TV. “The scale for TV is bigger, but the character scope can be much more intimate,” he says. “I’m enjoying the process.”

The release of *1 Angry Black Man* in early June of 2020 was divine timing. Although it was filmed years earlier, *1 Angry Black Man* helps to put the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and the worldwide protests for social justice in context for all people who have been traumatized. Menelek believes the jury is still out on the full impact of his film, however, it appears to be riding a wave right now. “The film is really about the power of conversation; no one talks like we should today,” he explains. “Well, people talk, but no one listens. We know so much about mental health. America has been in a constant state of denial about racial oppression. We have to face the reality of racism or history will just repeat itself in new ways.”

*To learn more about Menelek Lumumba, you can listen to his podcast with Hans Charles, [Back of the Theater](#), and follow him on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).*

## Glynis Albright: Cooking With a Nod to Healthy Eating



*Glynis Albright, creator of Glynis' Kitchen. Photo by Rachel Laukat Green.*

### | “Create a pathway for people to eat and live healthily.”

Glynis Albright was born in New Orleans, Louisiana. At the age of 10, her family left the Big Easy and relocated to Southern California. Glynis lived there for 35 years until she and her husband (saxophone great Gerald Albright) moved to Castle Rock, Colorado. As a child, Glynis found her love for baking and cooking. Today, Glynis is a nutritional therapist who creates foods for people with health challenges, a passion she has been working for over 25 years. “The first three gourmet food lines that I owned were Just Sweet Enough, Cookie Dots/Doggie Cookie Dots, and Mrs. Albright’s TeaCakes,” she says. “All are health conscious.” In 2017, she released her first comfort food line. She named the line Glynis’ Products and after two years, rebranded the comfort food line as Glynis’ Kitchen Products. The line consists of three flour mixes: Glynis’ Kitchen Waffle Mix, All Purpose Coating Mix, and Scratch Mix. Known as the “Waffle Queen,” Glynis says for the last couple of years she has traveled around the globe to promote her brand and connect it with customers.

## *Glynis Albright: Cooking With a Nod to Healthy Eating (continued)*



*Photo by Rachel Laukat Green*

She recently completed a new product called Glynis' Secret Sauce Mix. "It was born out of people asking for a sauce with a kick to it and can be used for chicken, beef, pork, lamb, fish, and plant-based meat sandwiches," she says. She has a sandwich that goes along with it too. She planned to debut the sandwich at the Berks Jazz Festival last April but due to the pandemic, the festival was postponed until next year. "I couldn't allow the sandwich to sit for a year," she says. So, she created Glynis' Kitchen on YouTube channel to show her audience how to make the sandwich. "I am also giving away a free packet of the Secret Sauce Mix to anyone who places an order from now until July 15 at [glyniskitchen.com](https://glyniskitchen.com)," she adds. "After the giveaway, the Secret Sauce Mix will be for sale on the website."

Along with a YouTube channel, Glynis is working on a merchandising line. "Aprons, spatulas, and other kitchen utensils are being created as we speak," she says. "My audience will enjoy the cuteness of The Waffle Queen in their own kitchen while making Glynis' Kitchen meals. One of her fans has asked for a "Waffle Queen" doll for young black girls to dress and play with. "As Glynis'



*Photo by Rachel Laukat Green*

Kitchen grows, I will use my capital to create and satisfy the needs and wants for the cool things that my audience is requesting," she says.

Glynis hopes to make public appearances that will consist of free waffle tastings, autograph signings, and photo opportunities. But right now, she is grateful that she can connect with her audience through Facebook Live interviews and podcasts appearances. She will also continue to feature how-tos on preparing treats and meals with Glynis' Kitchen and Glynis' Products on her YouTube channel.

## *Glynis Albright: Cooking With a Nod to Healthy Eating (continued)*



*Glynis' Kitchen Waffle Mix is one of the three flour mixes. Photo by Jimmy Dozer.*

*To learn more about Glynis Albright and her cooking products, visit her website [glyniskitchen.com](http://glyniskitchen.com) and follow her on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).*

# Tre Tennyson's Cathartic Stories About Humankind



*Tre Tennyson. Photo by Dr. Brenda M. Petteway.*

## | “Compassion is the writer’s greatest tool.”

Tre Tennyson is a Richmond-based writer, composer, stage director and performer who centers his work around death, time, race, class and power, and how these themes impact daily life. “I have always believed that at the center of mankind’s striving and struggle lies its preoccupation with time and the limits time places on experience, agency, and self-determination,” he says. “So, through my work, I examine the lives of the characters who come to me and see, as best I can, what they might reflect about the rest of us.”

Tre was drawn to playwriting at a very young age. He was 7 years old when he wrote his first play *The Representative* about a congressman during World War II. He admits it was a “meandering 28-paged mess,” but he still loves to read it. Because he was an only child and didn’t live near his classmates, he often spent time alone, even though he was social and loved being around people. “Playwriting, I knew, from the short skits we read in class, was a communal art form,” he explains. “It required everyone’s participation, and it was a place where your friends got to share openly in your solitary imaginings. So, it was a natural fit for me.” Tre’s enjoyment and appreciation for the form only increased as he got older.

## Tre Tennyson's Cathartic Stories About Humankind (continued)



Tre Tennyson directing Margaret Edson's play *Wit* in Shenzhen, China (2015). Photo by Marco Fleg.



Tre Tennyson on the set of Margaret Edson's play *Wit* in Shenzhen, China (2015).

As Tre explains it, a playwright has to work with directors, actors, set designers, costumers, and many others while a poet or a novelist usually works solo or with an editor. He appreciates how the audience is experiencing what the actor is experiencing on stage. "There is something about this shared existence that will always remain unique to live theatre, binding us closer together," he says, "and allowing us to experience the full language of a moment as it happens, with our hearts bared and souls attuned."

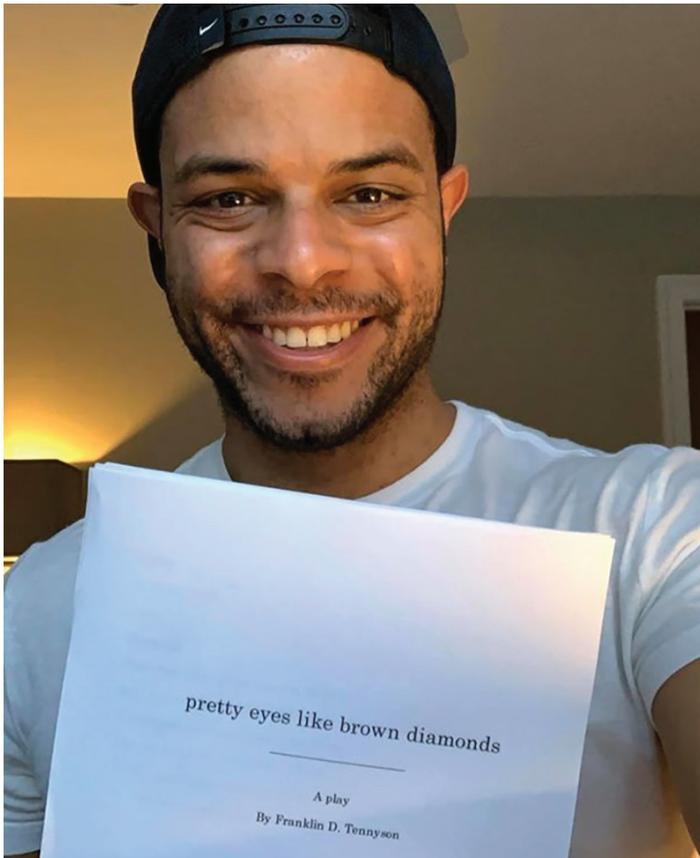
Tre says his education has had a profound impact on his writing. He grew up in the church and went to a private all-black Baptist school. In high school, his education centered around the humanities—art, literature, and religion. As an undergraduate at the University of Virginia, he majored in English and Religious Studies. "Religious themes feature prominently in my work," he explains. "In my work, I am not only examining the role faith and spirituality may play in people's lives but also how their understanding of the different socio-political structures built around religion enriches and complicates their lived experiences." While completing his master's degree at Harvard, he worked on observing, understanding, and analyzing group dynamics and how our identity is expressed or "occluded" in language. He says this has given him a better understanding as a writer and person in understanding what it means to be human.

While being a highly-educated individual, Tre believes everyday life and experiences have been the best education. "This means observing people, how they move, what moves them, but keeping at the center of these observations, at all times, an abundance of compassion," Tre says. "For compassion, in my opinion, is the writer's greatest tool." As Tre sees it, if a writer believes, grants, and loves their characters' full humanity, then their audience will too. "Your audience will then be more ready to see themselves in what you create," he suggests.

**"Through my work, I examine the lives of the characters who come to me and see, as best I can, what they might reflect about the rest of us."**

His latest full-length play, *pretty eyes like brown diamonds*, is set in the Richmond, Virginia, of the 1980s. The play's protagonist is a woman who will do anything to make it back onto a local TV show she was a part of as a child. "The play plumbs the bleak landscape of ambition, narcissism, and the disordering of loves," Tre says. "There might also be a little room for grace if one is primed to see it."

## *Tre Tennyson's Cathartic Stories About Humankind (continued)*



Tre Tennyson holding the finished stage play of *pretty eyes like brown diamonds*, his latest full-length play.

Photo courtesy of Tre Tennyson.

Since writing *pretty eyes like brown diamonds*, Tre is back to tinkering with ideas for his next project. He's thinking either a new script or a concept album. "I've been kicking around a few ideas for an album, and I think quarantine has granted me ample time to actually start writing, producing, and recording," he says. "I've composed songs for the stage recently, but I haven't written and produced songs for myself since 2017." The medium doesn't matter, what's at the heart matters: "It'll be great to get back to it and see what may have changed and what I may have to say next."

To learn more about Tre Tennyson and his writing, you can follow him on [Instagram](#).

MOVIES

## HKB FiNN Focuses on the Beauty of Black People



*Self-portrait of HKB FiNN. Photo by HKB FiNN.*

| “The African presence in this world is profound and beautiful.”

HKB FiNN (pronounced Aitch-Kay-Bee-FiNN) is a multi-disciplinary artist from London, UK. “I describe my crafts as performance poetry, photography, filmmaking, music composition, and production,” he says. His poetry has taken him all over the world. He has performed in over 70 countries. His poetry is spoken word backed by hip hop-infused jazz with hints of reggae and gospel. This has been going on for over twenty years. His traveling has expanded his mind and helped him appreciate the “enormous” influence of black culture on the world. He explains this sentiment further. “Wherever we are in the west, we’re called minority, but it’s only when you travel to Brazil, across the 55 countries in Africa, Reunion Island, or the Caribbean that you realize ‘minority’ is just marketing,” he explains. “The reality is that the African presence in this world is profound and we are part of a beautiful global reality with many dimensions to it.”

## *HKB FiNN Focuses on the Beauty of Black People (continued)*



*Photo by Yoshitaka Kono*

Since graduating from the University of East London where he studied filmmaking in the 90s, he has made many films (shorts, documentaries, and features). He now runs a small film company called Just Jazz Visuals. There, he creates stories covering the global black experience. FiNN explores themes surrounding mental health and love and romance. His short *WAI TiNG (Anxiety is Real)* — winner of best ‘Short Film’ Afrikaba Film Festival, Hastings, UK, 2019 — is a black comedy about a successful black man working in the arts and how he deals with his anxiety. Anxiety is personified in the form of a woman who follows him around. It’s humorous and refreshing. The short explores an issue that is not often shown on-screen with black characters. Along with his films, his **photography** features black faces clothed in bright colors and eccentric accents.

HKB FiNN is currently hosting a soulful music program where he plays music from across the globe that, as he



*Self-portrait of HKB FiNN. Photo by HKB FiNN.*

believes, “conveys a soulful blueprint.” The show is called FREEDOM SOUL. “I spin music that ranges from Mos Def to Rachele Ferrell, Kaytranada, Buika, Syd, Oddisee, Mayra Andrade, Al Green, Mereba, Omar, Maxwell, Bilal, Pericles, Robert Glasper, Nitin Sawhney, Nate Smith,” he says, “and so many more artists whose music lifts our spirits no matter their genre or groove.” His new 50-minute art film “Le Voyage” explores the story of an African prince who leaves his kingdom in search of happiness. “On his travels he meets the woman of his dreams,” he says, “but he’s not sure if ‘love’ is the happiness he’s searching for.” He is hoping to finish editing the film by this summer.

*To learn more about HKB FiNN, you can visit his website [justjazzvisuals.com](http://justjazzvisuals.com) or follow him on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).*

CHEF'S CORNER

# Chef Lynn Painter



Photo by Dab Studio

“An esy, affordable meal that you can cook in 30 minutes or less.”

## Chickpea Tacos

**Course:** Lunch or Dinner

**Cuisine:** Indian

**Prep Time:** 15 minutes

**Cook Time:** 15 minutes

**Total Time:** 30 minutes

**Serving Size:** 8-10 small tacos (soft or hard shell)

## Ingredients

- taco kit
- 1/2 cup almond/coconut milk
- 2 cans of chickpeas/garbanzo beans
- vegan cheese, to taste
- spinach (baby), to taste
- 1 pack of taco seasoning 1pk
- salsa, to taste
- vegan sour cream, to taste
- vegan Butter 1/2 stick
- black pepper, to taste
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder

## Preparation

1. On a medium-high-temperature melt vegan butter in a saucepan.
2. Add almond/coconut milk and taco seasoning. Stir until it is well-blended.
3. Add chickpeas, seasoning to taste with black pepper and garlic powder.
4. Mix on medium-high temperature for 15-20 minutes.
5. Stir until chickpeas soften.



Photo by Latika Lee

Recipe courtesy of Chef Lynn Painter and JayRon of Comedy in the Kitchen. This recipe first aired on Beyond the Plate RVA in April 2020. To learn more about Chef Lynn Painter, you can follow him on [Instagram](#) and subscribe to his [YouTube channel](#).

COMMUNITY

## Keisha Green's Loving Legs Foundation Creates Opportunities for People with Disabilities



*Keisha Green, founder of the Loving Legs Foundation. Photos by Calvin Finklea.*

### | “Disability has no physical look.”

Each month we highlight a community program that aligns with the values of SoulVision Magazine. We believe engaging with one's community is critical to fostering positive change in the world.

Keisha Green is the founder of the Loving Legs Foundation based in Atlanta, Georgia. “Our mission is to build up and inspire legless and wheelchair divas, while providing accessibility items to people in need,” she says. “Disability has no physical look. Whatever your disability may be, we are here to help you overcome those obstacles while turning them into abilities.” The foundation hosts community enrichment events and interactive family workshops that help with emotional, spiritual, and physical health, computer and technology training, and expression through the arts.

*Keisha Green's Loving Legs Foundation Creates Opportunities for People with Disabilities (continued)*



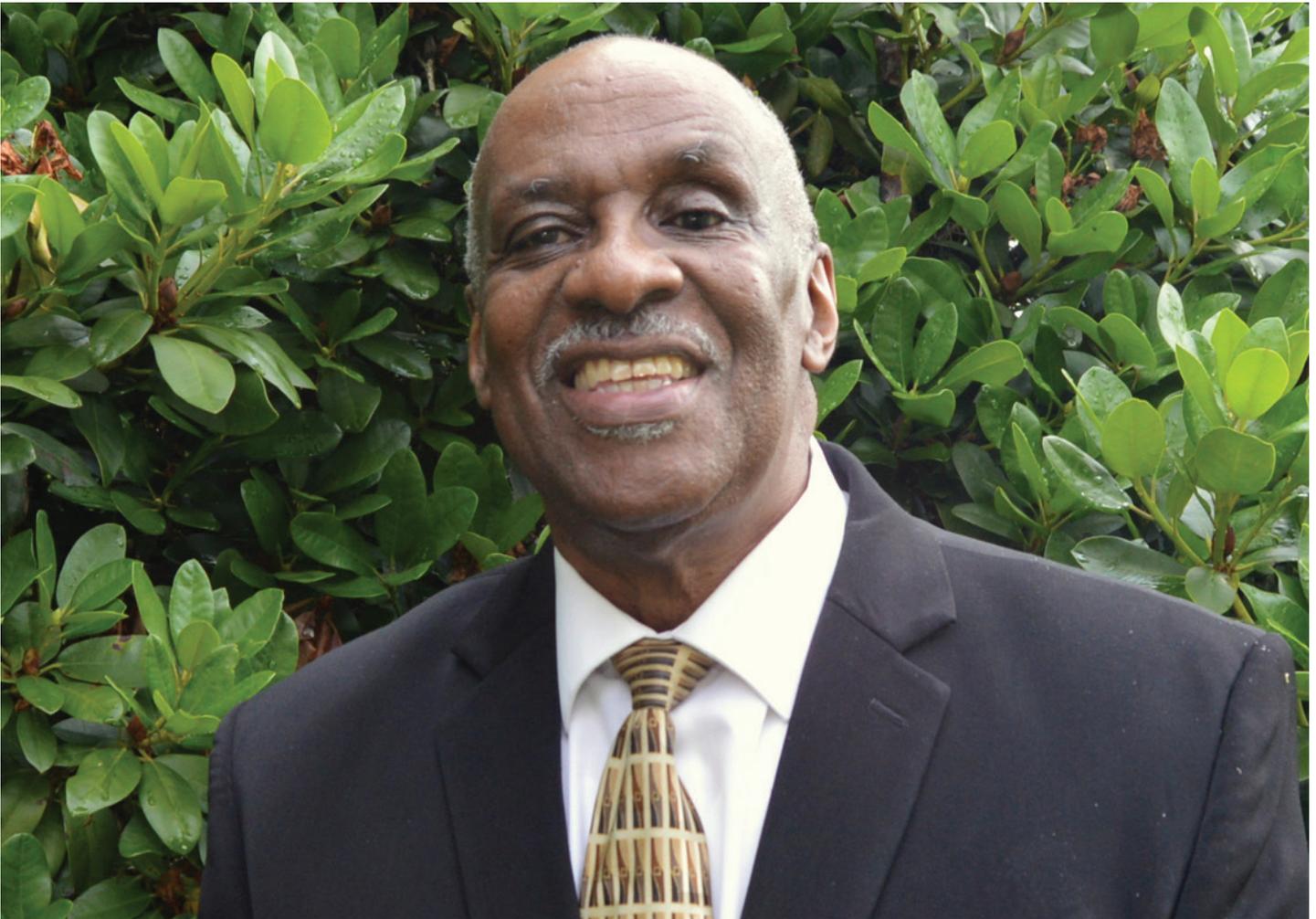
Keisha's inspiration and motivation to start Loving Legs Foundation is one that is personal. She was born in Syracuse, New York, and was a teenage single mother of three and a high school dropout. Refusing to be a product of her environment, she moved to Atlanta, Georgia with her family in the early 2010s and started her own hair and beauty business named Xxotic Extensions. She then decided to go to school. In August 2013, as a college student pursuing a degree in radiology, Keisha severed both of her legs in a car accident. With her continued faith in God, support of her family and children, and a concerned medical staff, Keisha made it through. While Keisha was now a bilateral amputee, she refused to wallow in self-pity. She knew her story could inspire those who have gone through similar tribulations. She created several brands and a foundation to help and inspire anyone who wants to succeed, despite their challenges.

Today, she is working towards a fashion show for "Divas and Dons" with physical disabilities to showcase their confidence and beauty. In early 2021, the Loving Legs Foundation will be hosting its first annual 'Elevation Through Triumph' retreat. Kiesha and the Loving Legs Foundation are also working with multiple organizations to build a library in Nigeria, as well as provide wheelchairs, canes, medical supplies, and walkers to the Nigerian community. Keisha keeps going because her spirit is unstoppable!

*To learn more about Keisha Green and Loving Legs Foundation, you can visit her website [keishagreen.com](http://keishagreen.com).*

LIVING LEGENDS

# William A. Fields



*Photo courtesy of William A. Fields*

Artist William A. Fields' upbringing in Chilhowie, Virginia, influenced his outlook and appreciation of life. He went to the Carnegie High School in Marion, Virginia, where each year the Smyth County School District would put on an annual music and cultural arts festival.

The festival was one of the only times in the segregated school system black and white kids would interact with one another. He remembers his first grade teacher, Ms. Evelyn Thompson Lawrence (better known as Ms. Thompson), who taught the racially mixed assembly to respect and love each other. Between his family, community, and school. This was where William found his artistic appreciation. In 1969, he graduated from the newly integrated Chilhowie High School and went on to study at the Virginia Art Institute in Charlottesville, where for the first couple of years, he was the only black person in his class.

## *Dr. Alexander Gabbin (continued)*

Years later after dropping out of art school, William worked as a temporary arts and crafts instructor and eventually became the student government advisor and leadership coordinator. He retired in 2016. For 31 years, he helped young people, mainly young women, find job opportunities and overcome their personal struggles. It was not until 2008 that he started seriously placing his art in exhibits. He stopped at the Appalachian Spirit Gallery when Ned Johnson, who William had admired for years, approached him. He knew William was into leatherwork. He was so impressed that he encouraged William to put some of his artwork in the gallery. William replied that he didn't have much time to do his art with his family and job. Ned told him, "One day you are going to have to give an account to the Lord of why you are not using your talent." His words stuck with him.

At the time, he had an exhibit at the local library that showcased black and white photos of the black citizens who lived in the area, as well as some of his paintings. William ended up having an exhibit at the Appalachian Spirit Gallery by the end of the year. William then entered a couple of paintings in an art show at the Crossroads Gallery in Richmond, Virginia. His painting *Old Faithful* won third place. The exhibition juror, who didn't even know the title, praised his painting: "The

exaggerated patterning of the clothes and the characterization of his subjects reflect a vision that is unique and comes from a place deep inside...this is clearly one of the most personal approaches to painting that I saw." Today, William is the executive director of the Mount Pleasant Preservation Society Inc., in Marion, Virginia. Ms. Evelyn Thompson Lawrence founded the organization to highlight and showcase the contributions of African Americans from the local community and the world. A man of faith, William paints to inspire and uplift others. The poem below is a loving letter to those who we care for the most. William wrote the poem many years ago and shared it for the first time at his mother's funeral.

## **"Thinking Of The Things We've Shared, Reminiscing About The Past, I Wonder Why We Treasure Most, The Things That Never Last!" – William A. Fields**

*To learn more about William A. Fields and his work, visit the website [roundthemountain.org](http://roundthemountain.org).*