FAMILY SCHOLAR HOUSE

Stories That Define Us

Volume Three

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For more stories, follow Family Scholar House's blog at https://fshstories.com
Chapter Ten: Change ........................ 87
   *Kennedi’s Story*

Chapter Eleven: Learning ..................... 93
   *Janae’s Story*

Chapter Twelve: Thankful ...................... 99
   *Sean’s Story*

About the Author  |  107
How to Help    |  109
Additional books in the series  |  111
This volume of stories of the teenagers and young adults who grew up at Family Scholar House (FSH) is a first look at the impact of FSH on the second generation, an opportunity to see how coming to FSH changed the trajectory of each family’s future and ultimately transforms the communities in which they live, work, worship, learn, and play.

Each of these stories began with a parent making the brave decision to come to FSH, where they received support to complete their postsecondary education while living with their children in FSH’s safe, affordable housing. In the process, each person—parents and children alike—became part of our FSH family.

If you have visited one of our campuses, you know that the apartment doors are painted a variety of colors. From the beginning, this was not about the look of the color palette, but about making it easy for children, all of whom had experienced unstable housing, to identify home as the place where they belonged. It was especially affirming that each of the young adults interviewed, with the exception of one young man who lived in rented housing before the first campus was
built, remembered the color of their family’s door.

A place to belong. A family that welcomes everyone and provides unconditional love and accountability in equal measure. Compassionate, professional staff who nurture the tender goals and dreams of scholars of all ages and provide the support needed to bring those desires to fruition. This is Family Scholar House. And Family Scholar House is Family.

— CATHE DYKSTRA
Chief Possibility Officer,
President and CEO, Family Scholar House
Impact. Influence. Legacy. Most of us spend a good deal of time thinking about these concepts in one way or another. For some, it has to do with how people will remember them. For others, it has more to do with how much good they did for others. Some people even make careers out of serving other people in the pursuit of a positive impact. Social workers, health care workers, soldiers, and first responders are just a few examples.

For me, I chose to support this mission through education. I have a passion for education, but not just for the pursuit of knowledge or the advancement of degrees and credentials. I love education because of the value it adds to the lives of all those who receive it. I love it because it has the potential to start new cycles of success for families in which no such cycle previously existed.

But how can you see this value or measure this success? How can you quantify impact or put a numerical value on legacy? How can you tangibly determine whether a difference has been made in our world because we were a part of it?

The answer is actually quite simple. It’s found in the generations that come after us. There is no way to measure impact or legacy like the lives our children go on to lead. More
importantly, we can tell by the difference between the lives we have led, and the lives those children will lead.

This is why I have fallen head-over-heels in love with Family Scholar House (FSH). In all of my life, I had never seen an organization build an entire culture and structure around the premise of adding value to people’s lives and starting new cycles of success. This organization actually does it. Over, and over, and over, and over …

FSH offers a variety of community programs to help people overcome the many life barriers preventing them from reaching their potential. These services range from a response center open to any person in need, to a residential program to help homeless parents get through college.

This beautiful organization doesn’t just provide homes. It provides programs to teach young men and women how to be successful—not only in school and in a career, but in life. It’s a rigorous program, for sure. When you see an FSH graduate, you know that woman or that man has put in the work to rise up. Cathe tells the FSH candidates (her children), “You don’t have to do it alone, but you do have to do it.”

The numbers are amazing. Since its inception, FSH has welcomed 938 families into their residential program. These are single-parent families without stable housing—mothers and fathers who struggle to get a job and get food for their children, much less get a college education. Through FSH, however, 99% of participants leave the program with stable housing; they complete 91% of the credit hours they attempt in their college programs; and 81% exit the program to a stable career.

However, these numbers are not simply quantitative data points to be shown on a year-end business summary or quarterly stockholder report. Each and every one of these
numbers represents a life and a family that has been forever changed for the good.

There is hidden value within these numbers. It’s found in the lives of children who have yet to be born. It’s found in the communities that now have generations of productivity from new cycles of success. It’s the impact that each of these successful generations has—not only on a tax base or workforce participation rate, but also in the halls of our schools and pews of our churches.

As each branch of this family tree grows and blossoms, all of our lives are enriched.

It’s these new cycles of success that are so powerful, and it’s these new cycles of success that are represented in this book. You may not be able to finitely measure “it,” but you can feel it in the career paths of mothers and fathers who once had no chance of a career. You can feel it in the stories their children tell of the lives they created in their new homes. And it’s most certainly felt in the lives those children have gone on to lead.

It’s a new cycle of success, where success once seemed so impossible to attain.

Books one and two in this series, *Stories That Define Us*, provided accounts of many of the parent participants in the Family Scholar House program. It told of the strength these young men and women possessed, and of the love and support they found through Cathe Dykstra and her team.

The third installment of this series, however, doesn’t focus on the strength of the parents and their struggle to break a cycle of poverty or despair. This book tells the same story through the eyes of the children of those heroic parents. It’s these children who mark the beginning of a new cycle for every generation thereafter.

These children most often remember two things: the color
of their front door, and the space that they consistently were able to call their own. You see, for them, it was the first time in their lives that they had anything remotely close to consistency. And even though they didn’t know they were missing out on it, they recognized its value. They knew each and every day where they would be staying that night.

But they didn’t just know what building they would call home. They knew which specific residence. Each door in a Family Scholar House campus is painted a different color. This has nothing to do with aesthetic design or trendy architecture. It’s so each child, no matter their age, can recognize their home. This is a feeling they’ve never had.

That stability, and that pride in a front door they could recognize, gave them the chance to start discovering who they were. It gave them a chance to see what life could be. It gave them a chance to be proud of their families and their circumstances. It gave them a platform on which to build. And build they did!

These are the stories of the children who knew despair but will never experience it again. These are the stories of the children who may remember a bad relationship but will never be in one. These are the stories of the ones who once felt the pain of hunger but will forever keep their family fed. These are the stories of the children who will remember the color of their first front door and who will open many other doors for their children.

And of course, because of FSH and the immense sacrifices of their parents, the next generation in these families will never know what homelessness feels like. That cycle is long gone.

So, presented to you in this book are the stories of impact and legacy, as told through the experiences of the children who grew up in the homes their parents provided for them at
the Family Scholar House. I would challenge you not to smile, laugh, or be moved to tears—but that would be pointless. You will smile. You will laugh. And you will most certainly be moved to tears. Because in these pages you will find evidence that stars can be changed and new cycles of success are absolute, beautiful possibilities.

—JUSTON C. PATE, PhD

Originally from Harlan, Kentucky, Dr. Juston Pate began his career as a high school teacher and football coach. He transitioned to educational administration and after earning a PhD from the University of Louisville became the provost of Maysville Community and Technical College. He has served as the president of Elizabethtown Community and Technical College since 2017.

Dr. Pate started college at Southeast Community College, where he earned an Associate of Arts. More importantly, though, he learned the value of education and the power educators had to add value to his life. After a first-semester GPA of 0.8, it was the devotion of the faculty and staff at Southeast that turned his career and life around.

Now, his passion lies in doing the same for others. He has led many initiatives to improve student success rates and access to higher education, including plans for a University Center in Elizabethtown. Dr. Pate has also forged strong collaborations with regional employers, including Ford and Baptist Health Hardin, and is championing the opportunity to bring a Family Scholar House campus to Elizabethtown.
AUTHOR’S NOTE

When I went over to Stoddard Johnston Scholar House to have my picture taken for this book, I wore a strand of pearls around my neck. They used to belong to my grandmother and were part of a much more intricate pearl necklace, with multiple strands, that she had disassembled and made into four separate necklaces. She gave these necklaces to her four oldest granddaughters when we each graduated from high school. If treasuring “things” is a sin, I am guilty, because I absolutely treasure my grandmother’s pearls.

Nana became a single mother in the instant it took my grandfather’s heart to stop, leaving her with three children under the age of twelve. She never remarried, but she built a life for herself, my father, and his sisters, in the shelter of both a faith and a wider community that never failed her.

I became a single mother when my daughter’s father died. She was nine years old at the time. She is fifteen now.

As I listened to, and then wrote, the stories of the young men and women you’ll find in the pages of this book, I thought often of both my grandmother and my daughter, because I heard in the voices of these young people the same resilience, the same hope, and the same commitment to loving the world that my grandmother had, and that my daughter now has.
This kind of resilience, this kind of hope, this kind of commitment to loving—it is often born of deep pain and fierce struggle. It is often a result of having known what it is to suffer—and then rising into something new.

It is tempting, I think, to want to know the whys and hows—the backstories, so to speak—of those I’ve written about here. And it’s true, many of them have known tremendous heartache, and this heartache will always be part of who they are.

But these stories? They celebrate the rising. They honor the resilience. They foster the hope. And they bear witness to the commitment to love.

These stories are theirs. But they could have just as easily been mine. Or even yours. What happens to one of us, happens to all of us, and our salvation as people lies in this truth.

It has been one of the great honors of my life to put these stories into written word. I am humbled beyond measure, and I give thanks for the courage it took for each of these amazing young people to share their lives with all of us.

—JULIE E. RICHARDSON , 2022
Stories That Define Us
Dubai, United Arab Emirates, is a long way from Louisville, Kentucky.

7,373 miles over land and sea, to be exact.

James didn’t even know Dubai, or the UAE, existed when he was a resident at the organization that became Family Scholar House. And yet that’s where he lives now, teaching English to middle and high school internationals. He’s joyful. Centered. He’s a man with purpose, that much is evident, and he lights up the Zoom screen when he’s asked to talk about his path from there to here.

Family Scholar House, then known as Project Women, was located downtown on Chestnut Street, at an apartment complex known as The Cloister because it was once an Ursuline convent. While FSH relocated in 2008 with the completion of the Louisville Scholar House campus, the families that lived at The Cloister have fond memories of their time there.

James and his mom, Renee, found their way to The Cloister somewhere around his sophomore year at duPont Manual High School. He beams with pride when he tells you he’s a Manual alum and will remind anyone within earshot that it
is consistently rated the best school in Kentucky. James says they’d been struggling for a while, and all he’d ever known was living with someone else—most recently his grandmother. But his mom had been after something more for a while, and when she found out about the program, she found a way forward for her and her son. She applied and was accepted to nursing school, and they moved into the supportive housing shortly thereafter.

It was an adjustment for James; he readily admits that. Most of his life had been spent in the far east end, clear on the other side of town from The Cloister and Manual, and downtown life was very different. “But Manual was close,” he says, “and that was good.” He remembers being excited, too, at him and his mom having their own space: “I hadn’t lived with just mom in so long.”

James recounts how “everyone involved” wanted to help. “It felt like extended family, that’s what I remember,” he says, a smile spreading across his face as he talks about coming down to the computer room to work on homework and finding new friends to talk to, a community, people who just wanted to be friends. “If we needed anything,” it was there, James says, and goes on to talk about how much it meant that people were willing to make sure he had clothing, food, school supplies, and whatever other needs emerged. He calls that the best kind of support system, for him and for his mom.

James finished high school at Manual while his mom finished nursing school, and they found themselves ready to launch at about the same time. “It was bittersweet,” James recalls, knowing they accomplished so much in just a couple of years, but also knowing it was time to leave a place that had meant so much to them.

James left Louisville after high school graduation and
James headed to Tennessee State, where he majored in Political Science and minored in English. He’d planned to be a lawyer, and he came back to Louisville for law school. He realized partway through that it wasn’t really what he wanted to do, so he moved to Washington, DC, where he earned a Master of Divinity at Howard University. Along the way, he discovered teaching and, around 2011, decided that was his life’s calling. He eventually found his way to Abu Dhabi, UAE, and then to Dubai.

He laughs when you ask what it’s like teaching middle school. It’s obvious how much he loves the work, how deeply it fulfills him. “It’s more like a ministry—I was in middle school at one point, and my mother had to go through that. It will get better; this is what I tell parents. It will get better!”

James isn’t done dreaming yet. He has his sights set on living in Europe one day—Paris, or somewhere in Spain, maybe. He carries himself as one who has discovered that the entire world is his stage. And he speaks with such real affection toward the role he believes FSH played in leading him to such a life.

“Gratitude. Inspiration. These are the words that come to me. I am so grateful for it.”

And then, quieting a little, his voice reflective, he adds, “You never know what a child is going through at home. I didn’t tell all our business [while I was] at Manual, and looking back at my journey [into a safe, stable environment], I wasn’t so angry anymore, I quit acting out.”

He uses the word “space” often when talking about his family’s experience with the organization—not just space for him and his mom, but space to simply be, space to learn who he was and what was possible for his life.

“All that space—it was ours, and we could come back to it … all of the things we needed, and someone willing to reach
out and take a chance on a single mother and her son.” He speaks these words with reverence, the impact of it all evident as he nods his head.

One of the real gifts of a conversation with James is his desire to give back. He has dreams of starting a nonprofit for young boys, focused on literacy. “Kids like I was,” he says, “just need an extra push to get where they need to be.”

He nearly jumps with excitement when asked if he’d be willing to do a Zoom call with current FSH kids from Dubai. “Yes! I’d love to do that! I’ll put on my Dubai clothes and everything!” He’s clearly pumped at the idea, but then he gets serious and says, “I want them to know, you have this opportunity—use it to get to the next level.”

Yes, Dubai is a long way from Louisville. And so much has happened for James, and for Renee—a successful nurse for those same twenty years now. But you get the sense after talking to James that a piece of him will always find its home—its space—down on Chestnut Street.
James in His Own Words

What was the color of your door when you lived at FSH?

I love what they have done with the colored doors. Unfortunately I lived there before they had their own campuses, so I did not have a special color.

Do you have something you want to say to mom/dad?

To my mother, I say thank you for having the faith and courage to take a chance on Family Scholar House. Your decision to step out and ask for help allowed both of us the room we needed to spread our wings and take flight into our future and destiny. The life we are living now is due in large part to your choice to take a chance on a program that was—and continues to be—a blessing to single-parent families. In short, to you, Mom, I say thank you and job well done!

What advice would you give to a child who will be living at FSH in the future?

To the child there today I say take advantage of every opportunity and resource that you can. You are blessed beyond measure to have the people and those resources at your disposal. FSH is a part of your journey for a reason, so use it as the launching pad to a bigger and brighter future like it was designed to be.
What’s a place you’d love to visit one day but haven’t yet?

Even after traveling to 70 countries worldwide, the place that I would absolutely love to go to one day is Bora Bora.

What’s something you think we need more of in the world?

In this world, we need more love! If we could just love one another as human beings regardless of skin color, socioeconomic status, gender, religion, or background, the world would be a much better place.
Reflection

How does James’s story inform my understanding of the experiences of the children from Family Scholar House?

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Where do I see myself in James’s story?

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What does James’s story mean to me personally?

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What does it mean for the future of our communities and our world?

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How will I carry it forward?

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Erica is a Family Advocate for Family Scholar House. She was once a resident of the Chestnut Street apartments, where FSH was once Project Women. And she was one of the first residents of the original FSH campus, Louisville Scholar House.

She sits in the very same office where another such advocate once talked with her as a teenager. She makes home visits to the very apartment where she, her mom, and her little brother once lived. She focuses on children just like she once was, pouring her compassion and experience into their lives in the same way it was once poured into her.

“People talk about full circles, and my life truly is one,” she says, pointing at a chair in her office, “I sat right there as a kid, getting help when I needed it.”

Erica was in middle school when she and her mom moved in. Her brother, Charlie, is ten years her junior and set to graduate from high school this year (2022). He’ll play college basketball, and her pride in his achievement is evident. “Charlie still calls our place at FSH the ‘Yellow Door Apartment,’” she says, “because that’s what he remembers.”

“My mom and I drove by every day while our campus was
being built, just to watch the progress,” she says, adding, “we were so excited!”

She is forthright in naming her struggles at school as a teenager, and she credits the staff at FSH with helping her find a way through. “I mean, my mom was working so hard, the least I could do was step up and lean in and realize someone cared.”

She takes that same approach now, talking with current FSH kids who visit her office; she wants them to be as comfortable as she was, to know that they are genuinely cared about and supported.

Erica’s pride in her mother’s accomplishments, including earning a doctorate in nursing practice, rises to the surface easily as she talks, and she names watching her mother’s transformation as her most powerful memory of FSH. “Her outlook and energy and attitude all just changed and improved.” Erica says her mom has always worked hard to hide stress from Erica and Charlie, “but seeing my mom really step into her passion and work toward a degree—it was so great. Her confidence rose, and it was such a positive change.”

“My mom is a beautiful person, inside and out.”

Erica started college at the University of Louisville, but—after having attended a small high school—she found the shift to a large urban campus a real challenge. She transferred to Indiana University Southeast, and there she found her stride. “I was able to buckle down and get everything right there. I finally took off,” she says. She plans to return to school for a graduate degree in the near future and would love to continue her work with FSH when she does.

Erica finds great joy and purpose in her work, especially when it comes to FSH teenagers, and encourages them to make the most of their time on campus. “Lean into the support,” she stresses, “build those strong bonds and friendships, and watch
your parent. It will be a huge part of your life.”

“Family Scholar House never left us,” she says, her gratitude at this reality evident in the energy behind her words, naming how important it is that her strongest relationships and connections in life can still be traced back to FSH—circles, all around, pulling together what has been and what will be in ways that have changed both Erica’s life and the lives of those she works with.

“It’s a really special feeling,” she says, “to be a part of it all.”
Erica in Her Own Words

What was the color of your door when you lived at FSH?

Yellow.

Do you have something you want to say to mom/dad?

Mama, thank you for being the person you are. Thank you for all you’ve done and continue to do for Charlie and me. We love you! I am forever grateful and proud to be your daughter!

What advice would you give to a child who will be living at FSH in the future?

Enjoy this time of your life! Learn from mom/dad, make moments, and cherish the friendships.

What’s a place you’d love to visit one day but haven’t yet?

Hawaii!

What’s something you think we need more of in the world?

Empathy.

To learn more about Erica’s mother’s journey, read Stories That Define Us, Volume Two, Chapter 4: Purpose, Laurel’s Story.
Reflection

How does Erica’s story inform my understanding of the experiences of the children from Family Scholar House?

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Where do I see myself in Erica’s story?

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What does Erica’s story mean to me personally?

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What does it mean for the future of our communities and our world?

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How will I carry it forward?

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Charlene and Mekhi are siblings—close ones at that. He’s playing college football in California at San Bernardino Valley College.

She’s at Jefferson Community and Technical College earning an associate degree in preparation for a career in physical therapy.

A mutual love of sports led them both to where they are—along with a few years as residents of Family Scholar House with their mom and their sister, Kennedy.

Mekhi was in elementary school when they moved to Louisville Scholar House, in the first group of families to call Louisville Scholar House home.

“The first time we saw our new apartment, it was just my mom and me, and we walked in, and she just started crying. I could see it then, what she was doing, how much it mattered to her,” he says.

Mekhi loved life as the child of a participant at FSH. He credits FSH with not only helping him learn what he loved, but also helping him learn to practice and get better at what
he loved. For Mekhi, that meant many, many hours playing football.

“We played everything at that campus—basketball, football, whatever,” Mekhi remembers, then adds that something about football just really grabbed his attention, and he wanted to be better, to practice regularly, to put in the work. And it paid off. He played defensive line at DeSales High School in Louisville before heading to San Bernardino. And his sights are set on playing as well and as long as he can.

Both Charlene and Mekhi remember loving having so many other people around, being connected, and being part of something. And Charlene remembers how great it was to have her mom around more, noting how her mom was less stressed after their move to LSH. “It made a huge difference,” Charlene says, “because she was able to focus on school and not be so worried all the time.”

Mekhi echoes her thoughts, adding that at FSH, he could just enjoy being a kid. “We’re always looking for the next thing … but at FSH, you get to be a kid, and you know your mom has someone taking care of her, too … I really appreciated that. We had help and support.”

Charlene’s favorite memory of FSH is a humble one, but one that highlights her driven nature and her focus on building a life and career for herself: she loved getting her monthly TARC ticket. “It meant I could go places.” For her, this included Central High School, where Charlene played basketball. Ultimately, she would love to be a physical therapist for a professional sports team, and if you ask her where she wants to work after she gets her physical therapy degree, she does not hesitate to say, with deep conviction, “Nevada.”

The annual salary for physical therapists is higher in Nevada than it is here in Kentucky, and Charlene knows Mekhi has
fallen in love with the West Coast. “The sun shines all the time here!” he says, and he loves that. Charlene wants to be close to her brother, and Nevada makes sense in that way, too.

These siblings are determined. They are full of talent and love and energy. And they are grateful—for one another, and for the extended family, the other “siblings,” they have known and cared for at FSH.

“We can still lean on Family Scholar House,” says Mekhi. Yes, Mekhi. That’s what family does.
Charlene in Her Own Words

*What was the color of your door when you lived at FSH?*

Purple.

*Do you have something you want to say to mom/dad?*

I thank you for making me the resilient person I am today. Because of you, I know that I don’t need approval from anyone in order to do what makes me happy.

*What advice would you give to a child who will be living at FSH in the future?*

Take advantage of all the programs FSH has to offer; get involved. It’s worth it and tons of fun!

*What’s a place you’d love to visit one day but haven’t yet? Paris, France.*

What’s something you think we need more of in the world? Compassion and empathy.
Mekhi in His Own Words

What was the color of your door when you lived at FSH?

Purple.

Do you have something you want to say to mom/dad?

To my mother, in short words, I’m so thankful for you. You’ve worked and always found a way to make sure my siblings and I never needed anything. I could have ended up so many ways or my circumstances could have affected me more, but I had a mother whose shelter grows with need. She will protect her children from any and everything she can. She’s given me exactly the life my father would have wanted for me.

What advice would you give to a child who will be living at FSH in the future?

I just want you to enjoy your time there. Appreciate the ability to enjoy being a kid. FSH gave me the ability to be carefree in a safe space where there were lots of kids like me.

What’s a place you’d love to visit one day but haven’t yet?

Some place that I’d love to go that I haven’t been yet is the NFL. It’s a dream I’ve been not only thinking about but actively working on my whole life. Aside from how making
it will help my family, I’ll also be in the position to help tons of people.

What’s something you think we need more of in the world?

We need more therapy in the world. Everyone starts good; it’s life and terrible circumstances, as well as troubled history, that invade the minds of so many people.
Reflection

How does Charlene and Mekhi’s story inform my understanding of the experiences of the children from Family Scholar House?

Where do I see myself in Charlene and Mekhi’s story?

What does Charlene and Mekhi’s story mean to me personally?

What does it mean for the future of our communities and our world?

How will I carry it forward?
Trevon was in fifth grade when his mom, Tamika, and his older brother and sister moved to Louisville Scholar House. “It was different at first,” he says, and you can sense the uncertainty his ten-year-old self felt about those first days. “We came from a house, into an apartment, and it was different, but then, I saw all the other kids, and I thought, ‘Let’s do this!’”

And indeed he did.

Trevon is close to embodiment of FSH—welcoming, caring, eager to make friends, and, as one staff member says, “He is always showing up for others.”

“Yea,” he says with a big grin when you ask him about that, “I don’t care if you’re white or blue or whatever, I’m here for you.”

Talking to Trevon through a Zoom screen makes you feel as if you’re right there with him, so big is his personality, so happy he is to talk about a place that he credits with so much of who he is. “My FSH experience, it’s hard to put into words,” he says, “because it’s almost like a movie, a good movie ... I’ve done so much there, and I was given so many opportunities.” He shakes his head and smiles again, his love for FSH and the
people he knew there plain as day.

Trevon’s time at FSH included meeting Louisville Metro Council President (and former member of the Louisville Metro Police Department) David James. Of his time with Mr. James, Trevon notes that Mr. James took the time to demonstrate what he does in the community, and Trevon recalls thinking, “I’d like to do that kind of thing one day.”

At a special event to celebrate Mother’s Day, his family’s first at FSH, Trevon first met Andy Beshear, now governor of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. The Beshear family—including Mr. and Mrs. Beshear, Will, and Lila—are longtime volunteers for FSH and frequent visitors. Through those interactions, Trevon got to know the whole family and has become especially close to the first lady. Of Mrs. Beshear, he smiles and says, “I love her so much. She’s just so fun, and I was so nervous meeting her and her husband the first time, but they just are so nice.”

It’s clear he doesn’t see these notable friendships as something to gloat about, but as something to cherish, to honor, and to be thankful for. And, really, this is how Trevon sees his whole experience at FSH.

“FSH helped me stay out of a lot of things—the things I see in the world that you don’t want to be part of, because you might end up in the wrong situation. FSH kept me focused, helped me have a good heart, and taught me to just be thankful.”

Trevon emanates joy when speaking of every aspect of FSH. Whether he’s recounting afternoons spent on the playground or speaking of being able to talk to “Kate or Kristie or Ms. Cathe” about whatever was on his mind that day, he just revels in the joy of it.

And he’s quick to point out the things that have prepared him for life beyond high school, too. He credits FSH with
helping him learn better communication, how to network, and how to talk to people who are different from him.

Sports mean a lot to Trevon, and he obviously would love to play as long as he can. When asked what he sees for himself in five years, he does not bat an eye when he says he’d love to have a successful college career, maybe make the draft, and then play some more. But he’s pragmatic, too, and knows that a Plan B is necessary. “I’d like to have my own trucking company,” he says, but then in almost the same breath adds that he’s thought about counseling. He knows there aren’t many Black, male therapists—and if he could help another young man like him ... well, he’d be up for that.

Trevon’s family moved away from Louisville Scholar House his freshman year of high school. It was the right thing and the right time, but he notes a bit of sadness at moving away from his home there. However, not surprisingly, he did not stay gone for long. Trevon has returned the last several summers as a SummerWorks employee. SummerWorks is run by the Louisville mayor’s office, and it connects high school students with local businesses and organizations via paid summer jobs. Trevon is nothing short of gleeful when talking about it. “I mean, I get paid to be at Family Scholar House!” he exclaims.

Trevon’s joy is contagious, his deep love for all that has come his way a real inspiration. And when you ask him, “What would you say, now, to kids currently living at Family Scholar House?” he straightens up, smiles a thousand-watt smile again, and says, “Oh, I have good words.”

And those words? “Don’t take anything for granted. Work hard for all of it. Stay focused. Have good grades and finish school.” And then, getting very serious for a second, he adds, “And don’t compare yourself. Just because someone has a bigger house ... that’s okay. Keep pushing. You’ll be okay.”
Trevon graduated this year (2022) from Atherton High School and plans to play college football. At the time of the writing of this book, he had three solid school options, but his heart was leaning toward one in particular, one that he felt would help him excel as an athlete and a scholar. “I want to stay focused in college,” he says, the commitment to that evident in his voice, “and I think they could help me do that.”

Trevon’s joy, Trevon’s focus, Trevon’s deep care for others and the world around him—they leave little doubt that wherever he goes, whatever he does, those who know him will be better for it.
**Trevon in His Own Words**

*What was the color of your door when you lived at FSH?*

Red.

*Do you have something you want to say to mom/dad?*

I love her. Thank you for everything you have done in my life and for pushing me to greatness.

*What advice would you give to a child who will be living at FSH in the future?*

Just keep believing in yourself, keep pushing, and don’t give up.

*What’s a place you’d love to visit one day but haven’t yet?*

I want to go to Bora Bora. I like tropical areas.

*What’s something you think we need more of in the world?*

Love, peace, happiness, joy, and truth!
Reflection

How does Trevon’s story inform my understanding of the experiences of the children from Family Scholar House?

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Where do I see myself in Trevon’s story?

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What does Trevon’s story mean to me personally?

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Keonna is reserved. Still. Happy to have her story included, although her memories are fuzzy, as she was so young when she came to live at Louisville Scholar House. Just five years old. Still, the experience had an effect on her life, and she is more than willing to step beyond her quiet exterior to tell about it.

Keonna and her two younger brothers, along with their mom, Faye, had been living in Elizabethtown for some time with Keonna’s grandparents. They’d moved around a lot before that, but they never stayed with anyone but family. Her mom and another friend both worked at a local medical center, and Keonna remembers spending lots of time in the break room there, before and after school.

“When we moved to Family Scholar House,” Keonna says, “I was excited!” There were kids her age, safe spaces to hang out with all those kids, and a playground! She talks about how encouraging it was to move to a new building, as they were one of the first families to move into Louisville Scholar House, the first FSH campus. “I remember making bonds, hanging out together, just talking to people.”
She says she felt like it was all luxury—“It was new and so cool coming into a freshly built space.”

But all that aside, if you ask Keonna what her favorite memory of FSH is, she will tell you without missing a beat, “Art classes! I loved those.” Her quiet nature blossoms as she recalls afternoons spent making, creating, just being with other kids and their art. She can’t tell you about any one art project—she was so young—but it’s obvious she remains grounded in memories of being part of a little artistic community.

She recalls, too, how much it meant that her mom had more time at home once they lived at FSH and could shed that long commute. If there’s one thing, she says, that she could tell parents, it would be, “Read that book at night.” For her, that meant snuggling in with her mom for Goodnight, Moon, Keonna’s favorite childhood book. Her face softens, her eyes smile, as she speaks of it.

“Read that book at night.”

Keonna is also very clear on the value of the community she and her family found at FSH, the strength born from being part of something bigger than themselves. “My mom finally had other moms her age to meet with, she got help from them; and for me, just having so many other kids around my age was so important.”

There is no doubt Keonna has, at least in part, been made who she is out of the community found at FSH. It has, perhaps, even led her to a real vocation. She is currently a junior at the University of Louisville, majoring in sociology. She has her sights set on a doctorate degree and then wants to be a counselor, but, eventually, she’d like to get a city planning degree. The mix sounds odd until you hear her speak about it, her voice growing in both volume and excitement as she talks about how she’d love to work with kids from challenging
backgrounds—“kids like I was,” she says. But even more? Keonna would love to put her desire for and appreciation of real community at work in cities everywhere: “I want to figure out how to improve neighborhoods without making the price of living increase so much that it isn’t affordable to the people who have lived there, sometimes for generations.”

Her approach to helping young people “like I was,” is holistic, community-oriented, unequivocally born out of the ways she and her family experienced community at FSH.

And what would she say to current FSH kids? “Get involved in the community.”

*Community.*

Of course, Keonna.
Keonna in Her Own Words

What was the color of your door when you lived at FSH?

Yellow.

Do you have something you want to say to mom/dad?

I’m proud of you and I appreciate all the hard work you put into becoming an RN. I remember all the sleepless nights you put in studying, and I remember thinking to myself how smart and strong you were. I love you.

What advice would you give to a child who will be living at FSH in the future?

Take advantage of all the perks of living at FSH. There were many different programs and activities that I took part of when I was a kid. Through those, I met new friends and had so much fun.

What’s a place you’d love to visit one day but haven’t yet?

I would love to go to Paris, France, one day. I love art, and what better place to visit than the city of art? Particularly I’d like to visit the Louvre and Musée d’Orsay.
What's something you think we need more of in the world?

I think we need more compassion in the world today. There is so much conflict in many aspects of life, and I feel like it could be avoided by simply caring about people.
Reflection

How does Keonna’s story inform my understanding of the experiences of the children from Family Scholar House?

Where do I see myself in Keonna’s story?

What does Keonna’s story mean to me personally?

What does it mean for the future of our communities and our world?

How will I carry it forward?
CHAPTER SIX

Dreams

Khilah’s Story

If there were ever a young woman presenting as a typical teenager with the world at her feet, it is Khilah. She is energetic and chatty, full of things she wants to do and memories she cherishes, with a heart wide open to a future that is truly hers to claim. She’s a sophomore theater major at Youth Performing Arts School at duPont Manual High School—ranked the top school in Kentucky and the sixteenth best magnet school in the whole country by *U.S. News and World Report* in 2022.

There aren’t many men, single dads, who come to Family Scholar House, but Khilah is the daughter of one who did. And Khilah knows it must have been hard for him; she knows men don’t like to ask for help. But her dad did, for himself and his three daughters, and of this brave decision Khilah has two things to say: “It was a setting aside of ego,” and “I don’t know what my life would be like [if he had not done that].” She’s both proud and grateful, and these things are obvious.

Khilah was about seven when her dad moved them to Family Scholar House—they were among the first to move into Parkland Scholar House, the fourth Louisville-based FSH campus. “There was a ribbon-cutting,” she recalls, and laughs,
admitting she thought it was all kind of “uppity” at first. She and her family had been living in a small apartment building downtown, near a Habitat for Humanity office, and the move to Parkland was a big shift. But Khilah would be the first to tell you that what she soon found there was chosen family.

She rattles off memories like any teenager remembering a childhood full of goodness—“I remember Chef Nancy (a local chef who led cooking classes for FSH families), I remember my dad and some other people learning a dance together, and I remember me and my sisters and other kids having pretend weddings. We had a lot of those!”

She remembers a hula hoop competition at Stoddard Johnston Scholar House, too. “I’d never hula-hooped before, and I won second place. I felt like a queen that day!”

And on her smartphone, Khilah carries a picture that perhaps sums up her love for FSH—it’s her and her sisters, following a Christmas bike giveaway at the Stoddard Johnston campus sponsored by O’Shea’s Irish Pub, longtime FSH supporters. The three girls are sitting on their bikes, pajama-clad, in their dad’s room at their Parkland Scholar House residence. They are beaming, each of them, their new bicycles clearly a source of tremendous joy. “I still have that bike in our shed,” Khilah says, “I loved it.”

Khilah has big dreams—she is set on graduating high school with no less than a 3.8 GPA. She may well start her own business along the way—she does hair, and it’s no wonder. She laughs at remembering how her dad was not so great at fixing the hair of his three girls. “He can’t braid,” she grins, and so she partly learned out of necessity, but it turns out she’s pretty good at it. She allows that being able to do hair and nails means setting your own schedule business-wise.

She doesn’t stop there, though. While she loves theater
and, at the time of the writing of this book, is in rehearsal for a mainstage production at her school, she doesn’t see herself doing it long-term. “There are no guarantees,” she says, and adds that she’d like to end up in the medical field someday.

She talks about her future as any teenager would—so many possibilities, but her core values are evident in how she expresses her dreams: “I want to do a lot for people who did a lot for me. If I could wave a magic wand, I’d be wealthy and happy.”

Khilah doesn’t need a magic wand—she has all she needs to turn those big dreams into reality for her life. She is driven, energetic, proud of where she’s been, and open to what lies ahead.

Isn’t this just what we want for all our children?
Khilah in Her Own Words

What was the color of your door when you lived at FSH?

Red.

Do you have something you want to say to mom/dad?

Thank you for all you’ve done in the open and behind the scenes.

What advice would you give to a child who will be living at FSH in the future?

Make friends! Family Scholar House bonds literally last, like, forever!

What’s a place you’d love to visit one day but haven’t yet?

Disney World, Africa, Spain (mostly Barcelona), and Paris! Paris is my dream!

What’s something you think we need more of in the world?

Common sense, understanding, love, unity, and peace.

To learn more about Khilah’s father’s journey, read Stories That Define Us, Volume One, Chapter 8: Love, Channing’s Story.
Reflection

How does Khilah’s story inform my understanding of the experiences of the children from Family Scholar House?

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Galadriel was in kindergarten when she and her mom, Nedira, and her brother, Zane, moved to Louisville Scholar House.

They’d been living with her grandmother for a couple of years following their return from Japan, where Nedira had been stationed with the United States Air Force. Galadriel doesn’t really remember those early years, but she knows that the move to Louisville and Family Scholar House was a good thing—“My mom was trying to put herself through nursing school, and the commute was a big problem.” Galadriel’s grandmother lived almost an hour from Louisville, and the time Nedira spent on the road made managing children and school that much more difficult.

Galadriel admits the move was a little “off-putting.” Her grandmother had lived out in the country, in a house, and suddenly they were moving into an apartment building in a big city with so many other people around. “I was a little intimidated!” she says, laughing, and you wonder how this graceful, confident college student could have ever been a scared little girl. But she’s quick to add that having schoolmates and playmates both made it all work.
“I remember the Halloween party very vividly, and I also have a memory of Christmas presents being handed out,” she says, and you can almost see her mind working as she thinks back to those elementary years. “But the playground was my favorite place!” She adores it, she says, and adds a funny story about her mom getting after her for drawing with chalk on the sidewalk outside the playground. “She wasn’t sure I was allowed to do that at Family Scholar House, and I’d always done it at my grandmother’s!” Her eyes twinkle when she tells the story—of course no one at FSH cares about chalk on the sidewalk, and there was something about the freedom of that, the encouragement to just play and be a kid, that really mattered to Galadriel. “I became much more open,” she says, as she met more and more friends. “Mom couldn’t keep me inside!”

Galadriel is a freshman at the University of Louisville, and even though she is technically undecided, she’s thinking about a computer science degree with the goal of being a cyber security specialist. Her voice changes a bit and she gets serious when speaking to her “why” of cyber security, “I don’t feel United States law has caught up with the evolution of crimes on the web, especially the victimization of women and children, so that’s where my passion is driving me.”

She speaks with passion, too, about her relationship with her mom. “It’s been an adjustment, living on my own,” she says, and recalls her mom’s college experience, exclaiming, “I can barely take care of myself some days; I have no idea how she did with two children!”

And perhaps she can’t, but Galadriel clearly has her mother’s strength, even if she hasn’t quite realized it yet. She values how close she and her mother are, and perhaps that’s where the strength is most obvious. “All my life, my mom has
been the only parental figure, so we’re just very comfortable with each other. There’s no shame, no guilt. I’d never hesitate to tell her anything.”

“I’ve always wanted to have the opportunity to properly thank you guys,” she says during her interview. “My mom is a very strong woman, but I don’t think she could have done so much without the right help, and you guys were a major pillar in that.”

“Well, she did the work,” the interviewer responds, “We just made sure she had the resources to do it. Your mom is very strong, for sure.”

Galadriel smiles, nods her head with such love, and says, “Yes. Yes she did. And yes, she is.”
Galadriel in Her Own Words

What was the color of your door when you lived at FSH?

Yellow.

Do you have something you want to say to mom/dad?

Your dedication and hard work to me and my brother will never go unrecognized.

What advice would you give to a child who will be living at FSH in the future?

Enjoy your days as a child. As an adult and college student, I frequently miss those days.

What’s a place you’d love to visit one day but haven’t yet?

Italy.

What’s something you think we need more of in the world?

Empathy and compassion.
Reflection

How does Galadriel’s story inform my understanding of the experiences of the children from Family Scholar House?

Where do I see myself in Galadriel’s story?

What does Galadriel’s story mean to me personally?

What does it mean for the future of our communities and our world?

How will I carry it forward?
Move-in day is crystal clear for Niara.

She and her mom had been living with Niara’s grandparents in a basement area, sharing a king-sized bed. The day she walked into their new apartment at Parkland Scholar House, Niara remembers a giant empty space. No furniture yet. Nothing on the walls yet. But in the middle of that empty space was a laptop computer, sitting on the empty living room floor, waiting.

Niara recalls immediate joy, and running straight to that laptop, where she happily fired it up and began seeing what she could do. “I was so happy ... I didn’t really see the big picture of what Family Scholar House was really doing for me and my mom, but even just playing on the computer, I was happy, and that sums up how I feel about it all.”

Niara loved being part of a larger community, “All the neighbors and friends; there was never a moment without kids playing outside, always people to be with.” She speaks especially fondly of Cafe Nights, when residents would gather together for a common meal and conversation—“That was always a really beneficial thing.” She recalls watching the
University of Louisville women play basketball, too, and being blown away—“I mean, they are local celebrities!” she exclaims, effusive about how “cool” it was to be at those games and see it all unfold.

She approaches most things the same way she did that laptop computer, or those basketball games—ready to experience them, get into them, soak them all in and see what happens as a result. And this is exactly her message to current children living at a FSH facility: “Make connections, and keep them. Really take in the community aspect of it. Living there really showed me the type of community I want to live in, no matter where that is, and that’s important.”

Niara envisions such a community with bright eyes and words that make it evident she has given this a great deal of thought. “Our apartment flooded once while we were living there. And I remember all of our neighbors, all of the people we knew, rushing over to help us. Another mom took me to school that day. Everyone helped.” She goes on to say that this is exactly what she wants for her own life, “That kind of relationship [in community] where you do something for someone, no questions asked. I want that for myself when I grow up, where I’m helping people and they help me.”

Relationship is everything to Niara, so much so that even as she is telling the story of the flooded apartment, she is pulling into her lap her toddler sister, murmuring a few words of welcome to the little one, making her comfortable, and then seamlessly continuing her story, remembering how sad she was when she and her mom moved out of FSH, even though the move itself was a celebration. She quickly adds all the ways her FSH family has continued to be part of her life—she attends alumni family events whenever she can and still calls her fellow residents close friends.
Perhaps what’s most extraordinary about Niara is her commitment to carrying her appreciation for relationship, and her keen intelligence, into a future that makes the world a better place. As this book was being written, Niara, graduating a year early from Louisville’s J. Graham Brown High School, was named valedictorian of her class. In addition, she has earned a full scholarship to the University of Louisville. She thinks she’d like to be an engineer, and maybe pick up a minor in music. She’s wide open to possibility as long as it is rooted in helping others, in being part of something bigger than herself.

“I want to help people,” she repeats, “no matter what I do ... I’ve always known I want to help people in some way, because I’ve been the one who needed help, and I’ve received so much, even the little things. I want to give back.”

Niara’s gratitude for all that she has received all but pours out of her, especially as she offers, regarding her mother, “I just want to say thank you. I know that my mom is a critical thinker, in all she does, and I want to tell her thank you for taking that step, for her and for me, for giving me that kind of place to live ... I feel like it was probably nerve-wracking for her, but I loved it.”

“I wouldn’t be the person I am today without Family Scholar House. My mom wouldn’t be who she is,” Niara says, her heart fairly jumping out of her with the depth of feeling in her words.

“I want to solve problems,” Niara declares as she talks about her future, about what life might hold for her, adding, again, “I want to help.”

It’s not hard to imagine, at all, that she will, in fact, do so. And we’ll all be better for it.
Niara in Her Own Words

What was the color of your door when you lived at Family Scholar House?

Blue.

Do you have something you want to say to mom/dad?

I’d like to let my mom know how much I appreciate every sacrifice she has ever made for me. I can only hope that one day I’ll be as strong of a person as she is.

What advice would you give to a child who will be living at FSH in the future?

I would tell them to cherish every moment. Make friends and keep them. FSH is a very special place, so enjoy it.

What’s a place you’d love to visit one day but haven’t yet?

I would love to go to Jamaica. Some of my family immigrated from there, so I’d love to see it for myself.
What's something you think we need more of in the world?

I think we need more communication. Simply talking to each other could solve so many issues in the world.

To learn more about Niara’s mother’s journey, read Stories That Define Us, Volume One, Chapter 6: Resilience, D. Hunt’s Story.
Reflection

How does Niara’s story inform my understanding of the experiences of the children from Family Scholar House?

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Where do I see myself in Niara’s story?

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What does Niara’s story mean to me personally?

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Deveric is excited to be talking about Family Scholar House, and it’s obvious across the miles and through a Zoom portal. He leans in, his eyes bright and his whole demeanor pumped to be engaging in conversation about his years as a resident at Louisville Scholar House.

“I was 10, maybe 11, when we moved in,” Deveric says, and mentions his little brother, Bryson, and his mom, Maria. He allows that he had no idea what to expect, but he already knew a few folks on campus. He remembers coming with Maria to put in her application for the FSH program and housing. “I wasn’t really sure what was happening,” he says, and quickly adds, “It wasn’t until later I realized what a blessing it was.”

Naturally outgoing and people-oriented, Deveric found getting involved in day-to-day life at LSH easy. “I have many memories of just coming down to the office to hang out,” he says, and talks about working to get to know the staff, eventually helping them out with tasks like dusting off computers and tidying up playrooms and book areas.

“I even led an acting class,” he says, laughing out loud at the memory. He designed the class, made a brochure for it,
and led five fellow kid residents through the class. He relishes
the memory, and it leads him to talk about how he always was
a little different.

Deveric wasn’t into sports like many of his peers. He loves
the arts—acting and creating—and really enjoys welcoming
others into that with him.

“I asked to do a video,” he says, “and I called it ‘If I Can See
It, I Can Be It,’ [and] I’d go around to various kids on campus
asking what they could see themselves being.” Not only was
this a fun and inventive campus activity, but it became a sort
of foundation for Deveric, his mom, and his little brother to
model their own life journey after. “We took it on and made it
our premise,” Deveric says. “We believe that.”

He names FSH as the inspiration for that foundation: “I see
learning generosity at FSH as the biggest thing; before [moving
there] I didn’t even really understand caring for others, but
after, I knew I wanted to help others.” As so many of his FSH
peers do, he smiles as he calls up memories. “I’ve always been
a little different, and I found [at FSH] people to do life with.”

*I found people to do life with.*

Deveric has carried this sentiment into his adult life. He is
currently living in Tulsa, Oklahoma, interning at a local church.
His business is brand management, and he’s worked with a
number of companies and organizations in multiple locations
to help them define their mission and perfect their message.
Both his deep faith and his commitment to community, to
“doing life with others,” are evident in his words and his
work, that strong foundation paying off tenfold.

Deveric talks about FSH as golden years in his life,
encouraging current FSH kids to really soak it up, because
there is “nothing like it”—but he also notes that he was able
to enjoy all of it and benefit from it because his mom “was a
great steward of the program.” He speaks with such honor about his gratitude for her patience and her determination in holding on to the process.

Deveric’s interviewer asked, “If you won the lottery, what would you do with the money?”

Deveric does not miss a beat before saying, “I’d give back,” but then he focuses in and talks about what that might mean. “I’d love to build out programs for youth who are creative. I felt a little isolated growing up because I’m not the most masculine of men, and society can put us in a box. There are so many people who are creative, doing different things. [I’d love to create] space to just be creative and do what you want in those [creative] moments.”

A strong foundation. A clear idea of who he is. A passion for building upon what he has experienced and learned so that others benefit. This is the generosity of spirit Deveric speaks of—and lives out with such grace.
Deveric in His Own Words

**What was the color of your door when you lived at FSH?**

Purple.

**Do you have something you want to say to mom/dad?**

Dear Mom, I am proud of all that you have accomplished and will continue to accomplish. Thank you for always being so strong in the face of uncertainty. You are an example to me and a wonderful role model. Thank you for never forgetting the promises God has given you in prayer. I love you very much, Mom.

**What advice would you give to a child who will be living at FSH in the future?**

I recommend that you take advantage of the resources available to you in this community. Jump into the community with your friends; everyone is eager to help. This is a place where you can make all your dreams come true.

**What’s a place you’d love to visit one day but haven’t yet?**

I would love to visit Hawaii, as I have heard the scenery is very beautiful and I am growing to appreciate nature.
What's something you think we need more of in the world?

I think the world would benefit from a greater emphasis on unconditional love, peace, and the continued promotion of mental health education. With these things in place, we would be able to build a stronger foundation for community and growth.

To learn more about Deveric’s mother’s journey, read Stories That Define Us, Volume One, Chapter 3: Commitment, Maria’s Story.
Reflection

How does Deveric’s story inform my understanding of the experiences of the children from Family Scholar House?

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Where do I see myself in Deveric’s story?

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What does Deveric’s story mean to me personally?

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What does it mean for the future of our communities and our world?

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How will I carry it forward?

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It was most certainly a change for Kennedi, her mom, and her sister when they moved into Family Scholar House, to the apartment with the red door. Kennedi’s mother, Keneysha, had been in the pre-residential program at FSH for a while, doing all the work necessary to keep her and her girls connected to the staff and programs at FSH. Their commute to and from Louisville was a burden, but, like so many other FSH single parents, Keneysha was determined to see past any hardship and create a better future for herself and her girls.

Kennedi recalls being eight or nine when they moved in, somewhere in the middle of elementary school. “I was eager to move into a new home,” she says, “but also afraid to go to a new school.”

It didn’t take long for Kennedi and her family to find both rhythm and community in their new apartment and as part of FSH. Kennedi remembers making “brain food” with Chef Nancy and going to see the Louisville Ballet’s annual production of *The Brown-Forman Nutcracker*. As do so many of her FSH peers, she gives thanks for supporters who “adopted” her
family so that they could have a special Christmas in the midst of a difficult time.

She also remembers a hail storm one winter. “It was the first time I saw chunks of ice falling out of the sky,” she says, and smiles, telling how her mom made hot chocolate and snacks and put on a movie while the storm raged outside.

“My mom was always engaged with schoolwork,” Kennedi says, “and church, but she still made time to make sure my sister and I had fun.”

Kennedi remembers being nervous when they left FSH, even as she was excited to move to a house in Louisville. She worried she’d lose some of the connection to FSH, that more change would lessen the community there.

It did not, of course, even as a great deal more has changed for Kennedi in the last several years. After FSH, Kennedi graduated from Harnett County Early College, where she learned to love mathematics. She lives on the other side of the world now, in Humphreys, South Korea, where she is stationed with the United States Army as an Information Technology Specialist. Her plans are to earn her BA while serving and to retire from the Army.

But change—not so much for herself, but for the world around her—is still on her mind.

“If I could make a difference in the world, I would change the cost of education, making college more affordable so people can get a higher education. There are a lot of people in debt from college, and struggling, and some people have so much potential, but they can’t make it through school because they can’t even afford a semester.”

Kennedi has known change—over and over—and somehow, it seems, that has given her the strength to be an agent of change herself, as she serves her country with intelligence and commitment.
Kennedi in Her Own Words

What was the color of your door when you lived at FSH?

Red.

Do you have something you want to say to mom/dad?

I want to thank my mom for raising me as a wonderful person. When I was younger, I had nothing but admiration for my mother. She did so much for me and my sister, while doing college and work. My father also helped me become what I am today. I learned a lot of life lessons from both my parents that I use today.

What advice would you give to a child who will be living at FSH in the future?

My advice to future kids living in FSH would be to have a good time. Enjoy being a kid, because time does fly by. Also they should do their best to make lots of good memories! Go to every event FSH has, because they are incredible. There were many family connections at FSH that I will never forget.

What’s a place you’d love to visit one day but haven’t yet?

I would love to go to Bora Bora. It has always been my dream to go since I was little. I want to plan a weeklong vacation
there so I can really enjoy myself. I’ve seen photos of the bright blue waters that are incredible. I wish I could swim with the fish there.

_What’s something you think we need more of in the world?_

I believe we need to be more patient in this world. People like to rush into things; too often they never have the time to simply live life normally. Being patient will provide you with greater clarity in your work to improve your end goal.

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_To learn more about Kennedi’s mother’s story, read Stories That Define Us, Volume Two, Chapter 2: Faith, Keneysha’s Story._
Reflection

How does Kennedi’s story inform my understanding of the experiences of the children from Family Scholar House?

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Where do I see myself in Kennedi’s story?

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What does Kennedi’s story mean to me personally?

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What does it mean for the future of our communities and our world?

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How will I carry it forward?

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Janae is a scholar of the highest order. She is humble. She is keenly intelligent. She knows who she is and what she wants in this life. She is a recent graduate of the University of Louisville with a degree in civil engineering, poised for career success that will put her education, skills, and care for others to good use, and she is, without a doubt, ready. She is eager to learn as much as she can, even as she’s already had an incredible education: “There’s so much out there we don’t know about or understand, and it’s fun to take the time to at least try to learn about it all.”

Janae knows music. She knows art. She knows how to design a drone and then 3D-print it. She truly loves to learn, and then do things with that learning.

Janae was in seventh grade when she and her mom and younger sister became part of Family Scholar House. And Janae speaks with great conviction about what a crucial move it turned out to be. Middle school is never easy, but at this critical time in her life, Janae was asked to be part of a youth leadership program through the YMCA. FSH sponsored her participation, and it is not an overstatement to say it changed her life.
“I learned so much about myself [at that conference],” Janae says. She’d always understood herself to be a follower in terms of how she learned and lived, but at the conference, she began to understand leadership differently; she began to see it as a selfless thing, as something one does to serve others for the betterment of communities. She began to see herself as a leader, and she recalls what a powerful thing it was to understand herself through that lens at 13 years old.

Janae came from a large family, so being surrounded by people at FSH was not new to her, but she thrived in the midst of so many people in the same sort of situation as her family. “It was a wonderful feeling to walk out of my apartment and walk across the parking lot to see a friend.”

Janae knows, too, what a difference it made for her mother: “I saw my mom studying, going after her degree [in computer science]. I remember seeing her reading JavaScript or something like that and thinking it was so weird!” She says her mom is a hard worker who still awes her with all she has accomplished. “To me,” Janae says, “my mom is super woman!”

Janae believed, after watching all the single parents at FSH in all sorts of difficult circumstances, that if they could do it—and, specifically, if her mom could—then there was nothing standing in her way as she charted a course for her own life.

She attended Jeffersontown High School and, there, found a place where her longtime interest in mathematics and architecture could be fostered. She’d dreamt for years of what it would be like to build a family home, a place they could all call their own for generations; at Jeffersontown, there was a design and engineering magnet program. She learned hands-on so much of what she’d wondered about—design, tools, and the technology necessary to make it all happen. She excelled in that environment, catching the attention of a teacher who saw her
natural aptitude for the work. He encouraged her to consider a degree in engineering—specifically civil engineering. And so, after graduating as co-valedictorian that year, she did just that.

Janae is wise beyond her years; she holds herself as a young woman who has known pain but believes in herself and those around her. She is humble—you have to fairly drag her accomplishments out of her—and in her humility is a graceful strength. She knows she is gifted, but her desire is to do such good with that giftedness.

She’s learned not just math and making—she’s learned community.

She’s learned confidence.

She’s learned *family*.
Janae in Her Own Words

What was the color of your door when you lived at FSH?

Purple.

Do you have something you want to say to mom/dad?

Thank you for teaching me the value of education. The value of working hard. And the value of enjoying life while doing so. Thank you for being my mom.

What advice would you give to a child who will be living at FSH in the future?

Connect with your new community. Go to the events. Go to the summer camps. Meet the other kids. Interact with FSH staff. Build lifelong friendships and memories.

What’s a place you’d love to visit one day but haven’t yet?

As one of the many places I want to visit, Bora Bora is definitely on my vacation list.

What’s something you think we need more of in the world?

Reflection

How does Janae’s story inform my understanding of the experiences of the children from Family Scholar House?


Where do I see myself in Janae’s story?


What does Janae’s story mean to me personally?


What does it mean for the future of our communities and our world?


How will I carry it forward?


“My door was yellow.”

Sean leans back in his chair and smiles as he says this. “I remember. It was yellow.”

Sean, his younger brother, and their mother, Starr, started out as residents at The Cloister. They’d stayed at the Salvation Army in Southern Indiana for a while and had been in Tennessee before that. The Cloister was the first place that felt settled in some time, but Sean has more vivid memories of moving into Louisville Scholar House—the first Family Scholar House campus, and the home that gave him the yellow door.

“I remember being so excited, so happy. It was a fresh start, with a brand new home, and I had never been in anything new. I was so happy—we’d bounced around so much, and so having this level of stability and being able to invite my friends over, that was all so important.” He grins big running through a movie in his mind of memories—Halloween parties, playing basketball and soccer in the parking lot (“we probably weren’t supposed to do that!”), and how so many of the kids went to the same school, so they spent most of their days together and became real friends.
Sean is a devoted husband and father of two girls now—little ones who have so clearly brought out all that’s best in him. “I’m so thankful,” he says when asked about his children. And it leads him to talk about his own mother, Starr. “I’ve told her this,” he says, “but you never understand the sacrifices your parents make, you don’t have a point of reference; and now that I better understand, I realize she took such a risk to let everything go and go to college and move to Project Women [now Family Scholar House].”

He says that step she took was everything, and it laid a foundation for him to one day raise his own family on. “I’m just so thankful,” he repeats.

Sean and his wife are high school sweethearts. They met at Beth Haven Christian Academy, Sean having transferred there partway through high school. “She was the prettiest girl in school,” he says. He played basketball at Beth Haven and then went on to play four years at Union College, where he studied sports management and accounting. Right after college, Sean landed in sales and works for Premier Packaging as a supply chain specialist, managing a team that spans Kentucky, Tennessee, and Ohio. His wife owns Not Delilah, a women’s clothing brand, and loves to partner with community organizations, including FSH, in her work. These two are focused, driven, and committed to giving back to their community.

That idea of giving back, especially out of gratitude, is something Sean traces back to FSH.

“My most powerful memory is one of generosity. The feeling of gratitude I would have—I think about Christmas, and how other families would adopt us, and as an adult I know now the sacrifice it takes to bless others. You don’t realize as a kid that what you’re facing is not normal, but as I’m older and can reflect, I just have such immense gratitude—without
people like that, I don’t know how the world would operate.” Sean and his family now adopt an FSH family each Christmas, and he says he can’t imagine not doing so—it just feels like the right way to “complete a circle of grace and gratitude.”

Sean is clear that the difference Family Scholar House made in his life started with his mom’s decision to seek help, but it didn’t end there. “FSH … it aligned me with people who ended up lifelong friends. One of my business partners is someone I met there. It placed people in my life I’d have otherwise never met.”

He speaks passionately about the power of education, how it can set a person up differently, expose them to new things and new people. He names education as what taught him to “communicate with people who don’t think like you, look like you, or agree with you—I’d have never otherwise learned to place value on that.”

Sean speaks with such a humble heart about the welcome he and his family received at FSH as well. In particular, he recalls what a game-changer it was to have regular access to computers once they arrived at the organization. “I’d never had that,” he says so simply that one can’t help but reflect on how so many of us take so much for granted.

Sean is a self-proclaimed observer. He sits back and he watches, learning from what he sees around him. And one person he watched was Cathe Dykstra. “Seeing her persistence was so important. The world wants to tell you so many reasons you can’t do something—it’s too big, it’s too small, whatever. But Cathe had a vision, and now it’s this big thing. It takes a strong leader to make that happen, and it’s inspiring.”

But Sean watched Starr most of all, even if she didn’t know it then. He readily admits that he and his brother were not always the easiest kids to raise. “She’d come home exhausted,
nothing left, and my brother and I were knuckleheads and did not make things easier.” But those years were important, even still, and left their mark, and what Sean remembers now is his mom’s perseverance, her refusal to throw in the towel. Sean says, “She was granted an opportunity, and she worked hard and pulled herself together; I learned a lot watching that, and it followed me through college and into my career.”

And in his quiet, observer fashion, Sean adds, “There are two key factors that help people get out of poverty: education and resources. Each of these things lessens chances of poverty. You can never know for sure what will happen, but my family will be set up differently, because I understand education and resources. I don’t know how we would have ever escaped without Family Scholar House.”

A cycle broken.
A circle of grace.
A commitment to living a life of gratitude.
And again, one last time as he’s interviewed, Sean smiles, shakes his head, and says, “I’m just so thankful.”
Sean in His Own Words

What was the color of your door when you lived at FSH?

Yellow.

Do you have something you want to say to mom/dad?

You are an inspiration to me. As I’ve grown into adulthood, I realize that there are many times when you have to make difficult decisions and place your own desires on the back burner in order to do what was best for your family. I watched you stay awake for countless hours, studying for exams and working hard to try to put us in a better situation. Thank you for that.

What advice would you give to a child who will be living at FSH in the future?

Take advantage of all of the resources at your disposal. There are so many people at FSH who are investing in you. Get to know the families around you; you never know if you’ll meet a lifelong friend. Participate in activities that give you the opportunity to volunteer and help others.

What’s a place you’d love to visit one day but haven’t yet?

I’d love to visit the village in the Philippines where my grandmother grew up.
What’s something you think we need more of in the world?

Empathy and willingness to listen to other points of view.

To learn more about Sean’s mother’s story, read Stories That Define Us, Volume Two, Chapter 9: Perseverance, Starr’s Story.
Reflection

How does Sean’s story inform my understanding of the experiences of the children from Family Scholar House?

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Where do I see myself in Sean’s story?

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What does Sean’s story mean to me personally?

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What does it mean for the future of our communities and our world?

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How will I carry it forward?

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About the Author

Julie E. Richardson is a writer, a fundraising professional, and an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). She currently serves as Vice President of Development at Pension Fund of the Christian Church, and she considers it an honor to be a donor, volunteer, and former employee at Family Scholar House. All of these things ride second to her most important role—mother to Madeleine, a theater major at Youth Performing Arts School. Julie and Madeleine call Louisville home.
HOW TO HELP

Stories like these from the young adults who, as children, lived at Family Scholar House, show the lasting impact of education on the second generation and on the generations to follow. None of this happens without the support and advocacy of many people.

It takes a village or, in our case, a family.

If the stories shared here inspire you to get involved, we welcome you to learn more about our programs, initiatives, and the needs of our families at www.FamilyScholarHouse.org or contact us.

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Family Scholar House: Stories That Define Us is a book series that celebrates the successes of the participants served by Family Scholar House over the years.

Additional books in the series:


To obtain copies of Family Scholar House: Stories That Define Us, Volumes One and Two, please contact Family Scholar House.
“Family Scholar House is a place of revitalization, hope, and acceptance, and the families impacted by this organization each have a name and a story that matters. The dedicated and compassionate team at Family Scholar House are truly changing the world one family at a time by offering educational and life support that empowers these families to move on toward a brighter future.”

—GOVERNOR ANDY BESHEAR and FIRST LADY BRITAINY BESHEAR

“Just when you think there is nothing more moving than the stories of those who have graduated from Family Scholar House, along come the beautiful stories from their children. To see their success is a true testament to the powerful two-generation model at Family Scholar House. The program, with education at its center, has the power to positively change the trajectories of families and communities for generations to come.”

—SALLY McCRADY
The PNC Foundation Chair and President

“As a volunteer at Family Scholar House, I saw the impact of the wraparound services they provide, not only for the student parents they serve, but especially for the children in the families. Because of Family Scholar House, these children have more opportunities in education and career and a brighter future.”

—ANGEL McCOUGHTRY
two-time Olympic Gold Medalist

For more stories, follow Family Scholar House’s blog at https://fshstories.com