

# THE DECREE

since 1960 “of, by, and for the Wesleyan community.”

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NORTH CAROLINA WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY, ROCKY MOUNT, NORTH CAROLINA 27804

## Erma Hedgepeth—Supporting Wesleyan Students for 33 Years

Erma Hedgepeth has witnessed considerable change during her 33 years at NC Wesleyan—from new construction on campus, to the dramatic increase of technology in the classroom, to a more diverse student body.

An academic advisor in the Student Success Center, Hedgepeth was raised in Zebulon, the youngest of six children. She graduated from Zebulon High School and earned a degree in business administration from Wesleyan, taking classes part-time for a total of 17 years, while she worked and raised a family.

Hedgepeth is the mother of two children, Whitney and Jarrett, a Wesleyan graduate. She and her husband, Larry, a retired auto mechanic, have been married for nearly 44 years.

Hedgepeth was interviewed for this profile during spring semester.

**Q.** Tell us about your family.

**A.** I grew up in the country and will always be a country girl. I was the youngest of six siblings, four sisters, and one brother. My mother was a stay-at-home mom until I started elementary school. She did housework, worked on the farm and in her garden. When I began school, she got her first public job, working in the textile industry and stayed there until she was made to retire at age 83. She was the hardest working woman that I've ever known. My dad only received a third-grade education, because he had to help his family on the farm as a means of survival. When my mom and dad married, he starting working in construction. A brick mason, he would wake early in the morning, often before dawn, and return home at dusk.

There was a large age gap between me and my siblings, the closest being seven years older, and the farthest being 14 years. Due to the age difference, there were a lot of things that they could do that I wasn't allowed to do. As the baby of the bunch and much younger than my other five siblings, I got spoiled a lot by them. They all eventually moved out of North Carolina, but I was too attached to my mom to leave her. Today, there are only four of us remaining, my brother, two sisters, and myself. My dad died of lung cancer at the age of 74 and my mom lived to be 100 years old. She was the last surviving sibling out of 14. Our family still gathers on the first weekend in August, every year, to remember our past and celebrate each other at our family reunion.

**Q.** Describe a favorite childhood memory.

**A.** Growing up in the 1960s, I think that one of the greatest joys of my childhood was spent running barefoot in the summertime.

**Q.** What were your favorite subjects and extracurricular activities in high school?

**A.** Science and business were my favorite subjects, and tennis was my favorite extra-curricular activity.

**Q.** Tell us about your husband. How did you meet?

**A.** Larry is a retired painter/auto mechanic. Not to sound boastful, but he has a talent for fixing just about anything and won't give up until he has figured it out. Handyman is an understatement. He grew up in Spring Hope, the oldest of 10 siblings, helping his father who was also a painter, as well as a pastor. He's a gifted guitarist and would often assist his dad and family in the weeknight and Sunday services at the family church. It was our love for church and music that brought us together. Larry and my brother were members of the same gospel quartet. And that's how we met. I was always tagging along



One of Erma Hedgepeth's favorite roles has been advising Wesleyan's VOT choir. Photo courtesy of E. Hedgepeth.

with my brother to different singing events and during one of those events Larry approached me, and the rest is history. I think he had been eyeing me for a while. This September we'll celebrate 44 years of marriage.

**Q.** What did you do for work after high school?

**A.** It had always been my dream to further my education. I excelled in high school and got inducted into the National Beta Club and other organizations. But my family wasn't financially able to send me to college. I had already been working part-time while I was a high school student. After graduation I began working full-time at a textile plant. I was operating a machine that required a variety of yarn to weave different patterns of cloth. Once the process was done, I had to cut the 50-pound roll and start all over again.

From there I began a new job at a computer manufacturing company as a PC board assembler. I was on an assembly line that required me to solder components to the printed circuit board before they could be inserted in the computer. These were not your flat-screen computers of today; these were more like the box-style televisions from the sixties. I eventually was promoted to the purchasing department, as a purchasing expeditor, where I contacted vendors, from all over the world, to secure parts for the company. After 12 years of service, the company went through a hostile buyout and I was laid off. My next employment opportunity took me to a hotel reservation call center where I made reservations for customers all over the United States. There were perks that involved winning free trips to any location, even Hawaii. I won a trip to Towson, Maryland. After the reservation center, that's when my journey with NCWU began.

**Q.** What attracted you to Wesleyan in the first place?

**A.** It was divine intervention that brought me here. I had never heard of Wesleyan, but one day, due to an unfortunate life situation, I had to make some changes. I was working in Raleigh at the time, and my mother-in-law, who was taking care of my children, passed. Since I didn't have another provider, I needed to be closer to them. I was looking through job postings and happened to see an opening in the Student Success Center, and a lightbulb went off.

**Q.** Tell us your title and duties when you began at the SSC?

**A.** I was the secretary/receptionist for the SSC. I was the front desk person that students and faculty encountered on entering the center. I was responsible for updating calendars and making advising appointments for the other SSC staff. During that time we had an office supply department on campus, and I ordered supplies and kept the office organized.

**Q.** What was the SSC like in your first few years there?

**A.** The SSC consisted of seven staff members whose primary focus was advising first-year students. In addition to advising, we coordinated and provided tutoring services, career services, experiential education, and first-year experiences. I've always been fortunate to work with a cohesive group of colleagues who share the same outlook and goal, and that is, to make sure the student is the number-one priority.

I would often have students stopping by my desk just to chat or to get advice. One of my highlights, to this day, is still having those students reach out to me, and knowing I made an impact in their lives.

**Q.** Describe other jobs you've held at the SSC.

**A.** I was secretary/receptionist for about three years. Then I transitioned to administrative assistant. In this role I supervised the new receptionist and hired and trained the student desk workers that assisted us in the office. I also managed the office operations budget. Each staff member had their own budget line and I tracked and recorded those expenditures. Also, the admissions office would send student files for accepted students to the SSC for advisor assignments. I was responsible for calculating their placement in English and math and putting them in the correct course. The calculations were based on a formula that was provided by the English and math departments. It would determine if they had to take a non-credit course.

In 2010 I was promoted to an academic advisor. I currently advise between 40-60 first-year students and help them choose courses that will apply to their selected major. Like other advisors, I teach a Wesleyan Transitions course. I also coordinate the accessibility testing and proctor tests for students who have accommodations for this service.

**Q.** What do you like most about your current job?

**A.** I like helping a student see the value in themselves.

**Q.** What's the biggest challenge you face in helping Wesleyan students succeed?

**A.** I would say it's their "want" to succeed. They must want it for themselves and map out a plan that will help them be successful. In my Wesleyan Transition course, I often hear students express concern about time management.

**Q.** What are some of the most notable changes you've seen in the last 33 years, both in the Wesleyan student body and the campus at large?

**A.** Most notable would be the students' use of technology as well as the culture and diversity that exists on

campus today. Thirty years ago, email and the internet were just starting to be utilized, and today it's all this generation knows. It's hard to compete with a cell phone in the classroom. I'm old school, and not very tech savvy, and still prefer paper and pencil. And the student body ratio has changed.

We have more African American and international students compared to what we had 30 years ago. There has been a lot of construction on campus as well—The Dunn Center, Gateway Technology Center, the Indoor Sports and Education Facility, new residence halls, and a new football stadium.

**Q.** You began working on your own degree soon after joining the staff. Why did you select business administration as your major?

**A.** I chose business because that was a lot of my focus in high school, although I would have chosen nursing if that major was offered at the time. I've always had a passion for the medical field. I began taking courses at Wesleyan through the traditional program but transitioned to the APS because it was more convenient. I was working and raising a family with two small children. They were 4 and 6 years old when I started at NCWC.

**Q.** What were your primary challenges in working toward your degree?

**A.** It took me 17 years. But I'm a firm believer that I did not obtain this position by happenstance. I didn't want my family to suffer because of me. I paced myself as I worked on my degree, so I could be there for them as they were transitioning through school and all their activities. ("The race isn't given to the swift nor the battle to the strong, but to those who endure to the end"—Ecclesiastes 9:11).

**Q.** Talk more about your children.

**A.** My son, Jarrett, 37, is a 2011 Wesleyan alum, with a BS in computer information systems. He's a business and information technology instructor at Nash Community College where he has been for 14 years. My daughter, Whitney, 39, is a prep operator 3 at Pfizer Pharmaceuticals. She has been employed for 14 years.

**Q.** Let's turn to one of your favorite subjects—music. Tell us about your role with Voices of Triumph, the student choir.

**A.** The Voices of Triumph encompasses a big piece of my heart. I became the advisor for this organization early on in my career at NCWC. I'm passionate about gospel

music and love to sing. The VOT choir was able to share their joy through gospel music, on campus and in the Rocky Mount community and beyond. For me, a highlight was the time the choir competed in a singing competition with much larger colleges, like Duke and NC State, and VOT brought home the trophy. Unfortunately, since the Covid pandemic, VOT has been inactive. My desire is to bring it back to life, so they can continue to spread the good news again.

**Q.** Let's turn to your life outside of work: What are your hobbies and other activities?

**A.** I'm a lifelong member of Stokes Chapel Missionary Baptist Church in Zebulon. I love singing in the choir and I serve as the chairperson of our women's ministry, planning and organizing activities for our ladies. I just love hanging out with my family and friends. I have a group of lady friends, and we refer to our intimate group as "Sisterchicks." This is a group where we can share, cry, laugh and be comfortable as ourselves. My two granddaughters, Zahria and Makenzie, are the apples of my eyes. They keep grandma busy, and I'm loving every minute of it. We love gathering as a family during the holidays and celebrating birthdays, and my husband and I love to steal away to the mountains or the coast, depending on the mood.

**Q.** List your favorites in the following categories:

**MOVIES:** "Michael" (recent) and "Imitation of Life" (an all-time favorite).

**TV SHOWS:** "Chicago Med" and "Grey's Anatomy" (I like any medical or legal drama).

**MUSIC:** Gospel music is my first love. Favorites: CeCe Winans and Tasha Cobbs Leonard.

**SPORTS TEAMS:** Washington Commanders and Duke basketball.

**MEAL:** I'm a seafood lover.

**SOCIAL MEDIA:** I use Facebook to keep abreast of family and friends.



With this photo, Wyatt Dobson earned second place in the inaugural Wesleyan Photography Club competition. See inside for more contest winners. Courtesy of Photography Club.

## Trey Alligood Elected SGA President, Promises Transparency

Donald "Trey" Alligood is the new Student Government Association president after he defeated the incumbent in a vote of Wesleyan traditional-day students.

Alligood, a rising senior, received 77 of 115 total votes cast, while Luis Portillo got 38. Alligood's running mate, Deon Bailey, ran unopposed, as did the new treasurer, Ksenia Goncharuk, and the secretary, Val Disano.



New SGA President Donald "Trey" Alligood and Vice-President Deon Bailey. Photo courtesy of D. Alligood.

According to Elliott Smith, director of student engagement and an election monitor, the voting took place on the software platform Suitable. He described the vote total as about average for the Wesleyan campus.

The past SGA treasurer, Alligood is a business and accounting double major who hopes to work for an accounting firm after he earns his CPA credential. A Washington, North Carolina native, he's been active in many campus organizations/clubs. He listed several examples: He's a regular participant in Fellowship of Christian Athletes meetings. He's a founding member/president of the Bishops' Billiards Club. Last fall he was on the NCWU Honor Board and he's a member of Nu Gamma Phi fraternity, having served as vice president. "I've been active in many clubs and organizations," he said. "I've enjoyed them all, and I've been able to witness what organizations can do for students."

In an April interview Alligood laid out his plans for SGA:

**Q.** Talk about the job your predecessor did as president and the campaign he ran against you?

**A.** Luis and I came to campus together in fall 2023, and we've been close friends as well as brothers in Nu Gamma Phi. Luis helped me get into SGA. I would say his campaign tried to build on what they did in the past. In 2024-25 Luis worked alongside Matthew Tiller and SGA President Seth Badders to pass the 24-hour visitation policy, and, as a resident advisor, he's been able to work well with the Residence Life department. Alongside him this year, VP Linda Nhwatiwa and the Dining Committee were able to add "specials" to the Food Lab, Burgers and Fries in the Hartness Center, and the Bistro. I believe that Luis was successful, yet I still find myself wishing more was done.

# STUDENT SUCCESS

## With Senior Project, Wesleyan's Honors Students Do Hard Stuff

Thirteen Wesleyan seniors delivered talks on their research as part of the Taylor-Crocker Honors Program requirements. Subjects ranged from a study of freshwater snails to production of an original short animated film, to creation of molecules used in commercial applications.

For the May issue, the Decree wanted to spotlight the students and their extensive work. It received the following responses to its interview requests:

### Linda Nhiwatiwa

**Q.** What other colleges did you consider and why did you select Wesleyan?

**A.** I'm from Australia, so when choosing where to study, I had a few options, at home and abroad. I chose to study in the U.S. as I wanted to pursue college tennis and keep playing at a high level while I got a degree. I initially went to Judson University in Elgin, Illinois (near Chicago). But after a few issues with the tennis program there, I decided to transfer to NCWU because of its great ISEF facility and tennis program and its high-level exercise science program.

**Q.** What's your major and what went into your decision?

**A.** I chose exercise science early on in high school when I realized that I'm both fascinated with the human body and I love sports. I always wanted to go down the physical therapy pathway to help people and really understand the human body. An exercise science major was on that path.

**Q.** Tell us about extra-curricular activities and jobs you had while enrolled here.

**A.** Where do I begin? I played two years of the women's tennis team here before I used all my eligibility. I've been a tutor the last two years, and I was a first-year mentor last semester. This semester I took on the role of marketing intern for NCWU Dining. As for unpaid and extracurriculars, I've been involved with the Student Government Association (served as vice president this year), Black Student Association, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and Health and Movement Science Club. I founded and led the new Photography Club. I'm a very busy person with a very full schedule, but I love all the activities.

**Q.** What did you like most about your time at Wesleyan?

**A.** I loved the community and the experiences. I poured myself into this community. I was very involved, and it was extremely rewarding. That would be my advice to other students: be involved because your university experience is what you make it. Join a club and if you don't find a club that fits you, start one!

**Q.** What's one change you would make to either the honors program or school overall?

**A.** I would change how the school distributes funds. This past semester, clubs received budget cuts and they were barred from making and distributing merch. In general, the university needs to be more transparent to students and parents about its finances. It should give us more choice about how some of that money is spent,

because we're the ones paying.

**Q.** Describe your honors project in layman's terms.

**A.** In a nutshell, my honors project is looking at how sleep, menstrual cycle, and hydration status affect athletic testing performance. I sought the help of graduate interns and my honors project director, Dr. Dormemann, to test five sports teams here at Wesleyan. They all filled out a questionnaire about their sleep, menstrual cycle, and hydration. Bottom line is, yes, they affect athletic performance to some extent and there needs to be further study on this topic.

**Q.** What did you learn about yourself as a result of undertaking this project?

**A.** I learnt that I am a lot more capable in my writing and academic research skill than I thought. I did a lot of hard work reading, collecting data, and analyzing it on my own and this was a huge confidence builder. I realized I'm good at research and great at presenting research. In March, I had the chance to present at the Southeast American College of Sports Medicine conference in Greenville, South Carolina. It was a great experience that I would recommend to future exercise science upperclassmen.

**Q.** What are your plans for next year, starting with summer?

**A.** Over the summer, I'll be traveling with my parents and then going home to celebrate graduating! Next year I will be undertaking the MBA here at Wesleyan and hopefully serving as a graduate assistant. I plan to then go on to study physical therapy while playing tennis in the United Kingdom in 2027.

### Anya Sule

**Q.** What other colleges did you consider and why did you select Wesleyan?

**A.** Hanover College (Indiana) was another college that interested me. I selected Wesleyan because, during the campus tour and orientation, it felt like home.

**Q.** What's your major and what went into your decision?

**A.** My major is criminal justice with a minor in English. I decided on my major when I was a freshman. I always wanted to be a point of guidance. I want to be a voice for those who don't have one.

**Q.** Tell us about extra-curricular activities and jobs you had while enrolled here.

**A.** On campus I've been a desk worker for three years as well as a freshman mentor. I was on the women's lacrosse team for three years as well. Off campus I've been working at Zaxby's over the last two years of college.

**Q.** What did you like most about your time at Wesleyan?

**A.** I would say it was meeting new people that ended up becoming my family. I met my best friends and even my life partner. I established lifelong friendships with professors and staff members on campus. They continue to impact me and motivate me to become even better. I'll never forget my time at Wesleyan. I enjoyed my experience in the honors program and even got the chance to do a project that I liked very much.

**Q.** What's one change you would make to either the honors program or school overall?

**A.** I would make changes to the cafeteria. I've gotten sick multiple times due to my sensitive stomach. In a way, it just feels like some of the food isn't well prepared for consumption.

**Q.** Describe your honors project in layman's terms.

**A.** My project is about the censorship of African American literature, specifically banned books in K-12 curriculum.

**Q.** What did you learn about yourself as a result of undertaking this project?

**A.** Undertaking this year-long project, I learned not to doubt myself. There were times when I wanted to give up and break down, as I felt like I couldn't do it. The project motivated me to want to add more information and do more research because this is a real issue in America.

**Q.** What are your plans for next year, starting with summer?

**A.** Next year I'll be starting my master's degree in criminal justice at NCWU.

### Ben Sellers

**Q.** What other colleges did you consider and why did you select Wesleyan?

**A.** During my senior year of high school, I considered Barton, Chowan,

and East Carolina. I decided on Wesleyan due to the exceptional financial aid package, its distance from my house, the way that it felt personal during my tour, and the support that the admissions team provided during my decision process.

**Q.** What's your major and what went into your decision?

**A.** My major is biomedical science with minors in chemistry and environmental science. Originally I wanted to be a chiropractor, so I picked biomedical science for my major. But during my sophomore year, I took a field research-based class and became interested in working in research instead of a healthcare setting. From this decision to pursue research, I began to become more interested in the area of ecotoxicology after taking classes with Dr. Elias and added environmental science as a minor.

**Q.** Tell us about extra-curricular activities and jobs you had while enrolled here.

**A.** I was a member of the Taylor-Crocker Honors Program and in my junior year became the president of its internal student organization, the Student League of Academic Prestige (SLAP).

**Q.** What did you like most about your time at Wesleyan?

**A.** I really enjoyed the lab components of my science courses. I found it fascinating to do research and run experiments. The honors lounge was another plus. As a commuter student, I was able to hang out with friends, study, and play games there.

**Q.** What's one change you would make to either the honors program or school overall?

**A.** I would like to see more opportunities and events for the honors students to meet and hang out with each other. As the president of SLAP, I organized some events, but more school-organized events would be great. As far as the school overall, I would improve the food quality in the cafeteria. I cancelled my meal plan my senior year. It was too expensive, the portions were always small and somewhat greasy and fatty, and it was humid in the cafeteria every time I went there.

**Q.** Describe your honors project in layman's terms.

**A.** I tested the effects of fluoxetine, an antidepressant, on freshwater snails. As fluoxetine is found everywhere in aquatic ecosystems, I wanted to evaluate its ecotoxicological impacts. To do this, over the course of seven days, I exposed snails to environmentally-relevant concentrations of fluoxetine and measured their movement, egestion (discharge of waste material), and reproduction. I found no significant difference between my control and treatment groups for movement and egestion, but determined that the amount of eggs laid by the snails in the treatment groups was significantly different than the control group. This finding has ecotoxicological significance, as in areas with fluoxetine contamination, the snail population may be lower, resulting in food web disruptions and excess algae growth as these snails are primarily algae grazers.

**Q.** What did you learn about yourself as a result of undertaking this project?

**A.** I learned that I was interested in research and that it was the right career to pursue. Before starting this project, I was unsure how I would feel about research, but after going through the experimental setup and then collecting data, I realized that I was really enjoying what I was doing.

**Q.** What are your plans for next year, starting with summer?

**A.** I'm participating in a summer research experience at ECU. Over the course of the summer, I will be using molecular biology techniques such as CRISPR to analyze the genetics of plants exposed to various toxins. This experience will prepare me for the master's in biology that I plan to pursue at ECU beginning in fall semester.

### Yuhi Sato

**Q.** What other colleges did you consider and why did you select Wesleyan?

**A.** I thought about attending Truman State University (Missouri) and Kanda University of International Studies (Japan). In the end I chose Wesleyan because it offered me more scholarships than other universities. I actually liked that there were few Japanese students here (I think I'm the only one). It can be good to have people from the same country, but if there were more Japanese, I bet I would not have

made so many American friends.

**Q.** What's your major and what went into your decision?

**A.** I have two majors—cinema and media arts and computer information systems. I chose cinema and media arts because I love American TV shows. I used to watch the Disney Channel every day and really love their storylines. When I was in a bad mood, watching the Disney Channel made my day better. Eventually my goal became to work for Disney Channel in the future. And I chose CIS because I wanted to try making games.

**Q.** Tell us about extra-curricular activities and jobs you had while enrolled here.

**A.** I worked at the bistro on campus. It was a great opportunity. I learned time management skills and how to deal with customers through this work.

**Q.** What did you like most about your time at Wesleyan?

**A.** Since it's a small college, I got to know a lot of people. I'm an introvert, so talking to me is hard. But everyone knows me and says hi. Thanks to that, I didn't feel like I was isolated.

**Q.** What's one change you would make to either the honors program or school overall?

**A.** I wish we had more film-making classes. I really wanted to study 3D modeling, but Wesleyan doesn't offer classes related to animation or effects.

**Q.** Describe your honors project in layman's terms.

**A.** I made an animated short film about a talented young witch discovering and developing her magical abilities. It follows her journey as she experiments with spells, overcomes challenges, and gains confidence in her powers. Through expressive animation and storytelling, the project explores themes of self-discovery, creativity, and perseverance, making magic feel both exciting and relatable to a general audience.

**Q.** What did you learn about yourself as a result of undertaking this project?

**A.** I discovered that I enjoy 3D modeling. This was my first experience using 3D modeling to create a background, and I found the process both engaging and rewarding. By working on this aspect of the project, I gained confidence in my creative abilities and it made me realize that I have an interest in developing my skills in this area.

**Q.** What are your plans for next year, starting with summer?

**A.** I will attend graduate school here at NCWU. Since we don't have a master's program for cinema and media arts, I'm planning to study CIS. During this program, I would like to develop a game. At the same time, I would like to learn more about 3D modeling on my own. Hopefully after graduating from the master's program, I will get my first job and earn money. Eventually I would like to attend graduate school for 3D modeling.

### Elizabeth Luna Lopez

**Q.** What other colleges did you consider and why did you select Wesleyan?

**A.** I considered NC State, North Carolina Central University, and Wake Technical Community College. I selected NCWU because it provided great scholarships and offered both programs—business administration and music production—that I wanted to study. Almost all schools offer business administration, but not many have music production, which is my passion (I play guitar). I liked Wesleyan's proximity to home, allowing me to commute. NCWU checked the most important boxes on my list.

**Q.** What's your major and what went into your decision?

**A.** When I arrived at Wesleyan, I only had business administration as my major and music production as a minor, but halfway through my career, I decided to turn music production into a major, while adding a minor in human resources. I wanted to study business administration since my dream is to run my own business (I'm working on a jewelry business now and plan to launch the website within a couple of weeks). Thanks to my professors, especially Dr. Ewell, I feel confident enough to chase my dreams as an entrepreneur. He gave me great advice about starting a business. Along with learning about business, I wanted to know how music is produced. At the moment, my classmates and I have recorded an EP in one of my classes. I'm very excited about



Linda Nhiwatiwa presents her research on athletic performance at the 21st annual NCWU Student Symposium at the Dunn Center in April. B. Grattan photo.

it. I'm thankful for my music professor, Mr. Sawyer, for all the help and patience.

**Q.** Tell us about extra-curricular activities and jobs you had while enrolled here.

**A.** For around a year and a half in college, I owned a small floral business; besides this, I would work the summers back home. My last year in college, I started to plan for the new business.

**Q.** What did you like most about your time at Wesleyan?

**A.** I liked the honors program since it made me feel as if I was a part of a community. I like the support that professors offer to students, whether it's about school assignments or personal projects. I also liked the attentiveness of my academic advisor, Dr. Bill (Yankosky). Any time I had a question or concern, he was always quick to respond. I enjoyed the experience that I had while studying music. It allowed me to get hands-on experience of what it's like to produce music.

**Q.** What's one change you would make to either the honors program or school overall?

**A.** I would like to see a music production club for students with that passion. That way, students could get to know each other and make connections. Along the same lines, a good addition would be an entrepreneurship club/mentorship program. That would allow us to learn more about starting a business and the resources available for young entrepreneurs.

**Q.** Describe your honors project in layman's terms.

**A.** It explores how music affects societies around the world. I looked at how different genres, like hip-hop in the United States, mariachi in Mexico, reggae in Jamaica, K-pop in South Korea, and reggaeton in Puerto Rico, shape culture, identity, and beliefs. I explain how music impacts our emotions, memory, and behavior. Overall my project shows that music is more than entertainment; it influences how people think, connect with others, and even how countries grow their economies and enhance their culture.

**Q.** What did you learn about yourself as a result of undertaking this project?

**A.** I learned that I could accomplish more than I believed was possible. I learned that my passion for music cannot only impact me but the people who listen to me. After seeing the impact that music can have on us, I realized that even if you just wanted to do music for fun, you can impact entire nations.

**Q.** What are your plans for next year, starting with summer?

**A.** My plan is to learn new skills that I can use to grow my business and make it successful. I want to make more time to go to mentorship and networking events, as I look for jobs or internships. At the same time I'll be writing songs with the goal of recording a few. Besides this, I want to keep working on my personal development to improve my discipline, time management, and creativity.

### Mary Bentley

**Q.** What other colleges did you consider and why did you select Wesleyan?

**A.** I didn't consider any other schools. I had a phenomenal full-ride scholarship offer here at Wesleyan, and I couldn't turn that down! In hindsight, it was a good decision as I was able to customize my curriculum pretty heavily compared to Research 1 students.

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## THE DECREE

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# CAMPUS LIFE

## Decree Survey: What's Your Favorite Place on Campus?

By Kaleb Mason  
& Decree Staff

Some like the bustle of the Hartness Center or Everett Gymnasium, while others enjoy places that allow them to get away from the noise and spend some time in reflection. Others favor picturesque spots amid nature. Asked to identify their favorite place on campus, most Bishops had a ready answer.

Decree staff writers interviewed members of the Wesleyan community and compiled this report on their choices.

**Kenny Snowden, Luis Portillo and  
Trey Alligood**

Three students all identified the Hartness Center as their favorite spot on campus. Kenny Snowden, a member of the Billiards Club, loves to shoot pool during breaks between classes. A commuter student, he noted that the Hartness has allowed him to more easily make friends and build connections. "It's just a very convenient place to hang out," he said. "And there aren't too many places like that on campus, so it helps me to appreciate this spot more." Now a Hartness employee, he spends even more time there, allowing him to watch connections grow among other students.

Like Snowden, newly elected SGA President Trey Alligood calls the Hartness his go-to place. And like Snowden he considers it a prime place for students to connect. "Pretty much everybody comes here," he explained, noting that players from various sports teams and other groups visit the Hartness. "I've been able to meet a lot of people through here." Pool is a favorite activity for Alligood, who's a founder of the Billiards Club. "I never played pool during my freshman year, but then I started and I eventually got decent at it. That's how I bond with people—playing pool and having fun."

Luis Portillo, Alligood's predecessor as SGA president, values the Hartness as a place that hosts special events and brings students together, naming talent shows, casino nights as well

as activities sponsored by Wesleyan's Greek organizations and clubs. In the Hartness, all students can find an activity that interests them, he said.

**Katie Beeman**

When asked about her favorite place on campus, English professor Katie Beeman is quick to mention her office. As the new director of the university's Writing Center, her office is located at the northern end of the library. She said she likes the big windows and the natural sunlight that they bring. Meeting with students, grading essays, holding tutoring sessions and eating lunch at her desk, Dr. Beeman figures she spends "a lot of time" in her office.

The Wesleyan graduate said that she enjoyed decorating her new digs. "I have all of my nerdy trinkets and some artwork that makes me happy," she said. "And there's not really a place in my house for most of this stuff, so it usually ends up in my office." The decorations include artwork from family, Pokémon plushies, and "One Piece" keychains. She explained that the trinkets make for good talking points and allow her to connect with others more easily.

**John Pettigrew**

Asked to name his favorite spot on campus, student John Pettigrew quickly answered that it's the library. Noting that he goes to the library every other day, he said that it's the atmosphere that he most enjoys. "It's cool, seeing as almost everyone respects the rules of the library," he said. "So they're all really quiet and respectful. The seats are pretty comfy, so it's a nice place to just chill and relax."

**Wayne Sears**

Before his recent retirement, Director of Campus Safety Wayne Sears liked to visit the three eating spots on campus. Of the three, he said the Food Lab was his favorite. "I've been going there since before it was the Food Lab, back when it was still the Wild World of Wings," he noted.

Sears said that all three locations have provided him with good memories of his time at Wesleyan. He

about proper scientific communication. There's not many chemistry majors here, so if I'm interested in a particular topic (i.e., UF/Raman spectroscopy), I'm able to ask questions in class about it. My honors thesis was phenomenal, as I received funding to support my off-campus research. Without Taylor-Crocker Honors Program support, I likely never would've done my work at ECU.

**Q.** What's one change you would make to either the honors program or school overall?

**A.** I'd suggest better funding for the sciences. I did most of my research off campus, partially due to the lack of equipment available here. For example, some analytical balances haven't been calibrated for several years; imagine the science we could do with slightly better funding!

**Q.** Describe your honors project in layman's terms.

**A.** I designed and made new molecules that take invisible UV light and give it back as a visible glow. Molecules like mine are used everywhere, from highlighters to biophysics.

**Q.** What did you learn about yourself as a result of undertaking this project?

**A.** I learned that research is not necessarily linear and that you have to always be adaptable. My work was initially centered around biophysical applications, and I planned on synthesizing peptides mechanically with a solid phase peptide synthesis machine and doing photophysical studies with an instrument called a fluorometer. But when both of these devices broke, I had to pivot to organic synthesis as my deadlines were approaching. If you do a "wet" (lab-based) research project, be prepared to re-adapt research.

**Q.** What are your plans for next year, starting with summer?

**A.** I'm headed off to Los Alamos to complete my national lab internship and do more work with mass spectrometers. After that, I'll complete my final semester here at NCWU and graduate next December. Then I hope to enter graduate school and earn my Ph.D. in bioanalytical chemistry, specializing in novel spectrometric systems for complex matrices.



David Fryar established a garden, located near the Welcome Center, after he toured the Elizabethan Gardens in Manteo. B. Grattan photo.

said he's loved watching students enjoy themselves. "It's nice seeing the students have time to relax, socialize, hang out with friends, and get away from the stressors of college life," he said.

**Adefisayo Adebimpe**

Along with his dorm room, Fisayo Adebimpe prefers Everett Gymnasium. "Everett is another place that feels like home," he said.

A member of the men's basketball team, Adebimpe likes the camaraderie that comes with his almost daily trips to the gym, whether for a workout or just to visit. He said he finds the gym locker room to be peaceful. "I know that I may run into my coaches or teammates," he said. "Having 24-hour access to the gym is just another positive."

The junior became attached to Everett even before he committed to Wesleyan. "I watched the team play games in there," he said. "I got the chance to watch them win the conference championship in 2023 and by the time I committed, I was playing pickup with the guys."

**Monet Somerville**

Monet Somerville is an area coordinator in Residence Life and as such, she has an office in Roberson Hall, the all-female residence hall located between the health center and Pettewave, the freshman male dorm. She noted that she's in her favorite place Monday through Friday.

Like Dr. Beeman, Somerville enjoys spending time amid mementos and other possessions that bring her joy—family pictures, psychology and non-psychology books, and reminders of her faith. "It's filled with things I love," she remarked. "It can go from a meeting spot where I conduct business, to a soothing relaxing room where I can still be productive but also meet my sensory needs. I simply love the versatility of my office."

What's more, Somerville said her location provides a scenic view of campus, whether it's the open spaces, oak trees and bushes, or Wesleyan's serpentine wall. "It's the perfect spot to watch the life of campus each day," she said.

**Tammy Robinson**

The director of donor engagement, Tammy Robinson has a Braswell office that faces her favorite place on campus—the Southern Bank Green. "I love the constant activity there," she said. "Students coming and going, squirrels chasing each other, Coach Simpson sitting with a book on a beautiful day, and groups of students hanging out at the tables."

Robinson pointed out that the green is the site many events that bring the campus community together. She listed "Rock the Mount," International Day, the Lighting of Wesleyan, Greek Life events, and the end-of-year picnic. "I get to experience it every day as I arrive and leave campus, which is a bonus in itself," she said. "And the best part is I can see it right outside my window even while I'm working. The green is my happy space because it captures the spirit, energy, and the shared life of campus all in one place."

**David Fryar**

If anyone knows Wesleyan's campus inside and out, it's Wesleyan Facilities Director David Fryar. Asked to name his favorite place, he picked a spot that he helped develop—the garden area located between the Southern Bank Green and the Welcome Center.

"I took a trip to see the Elizabethan Gardens in Manteo and wanted to build a smaller version that the

students and staff could enjoy," he said. "I just like spending time there weeding, pruning and planning on future expansion. As it matures, it's becoming a more private place to sit and read or just enjoy nature."

Fryar added that he tries to change up the plantings according to the season. For example, he noted that azaleas and some camelias bloom in the spring. In summer, he said, the Wesleyan community can expect to see crepe myrtles and day lilies, while hosta plants will add beauty to the area in the fall.

"I'm thinking about adding to the garden and expanding it to the other side of the walkway," Fryar noted.

**Desiree Driver**

While lamenting the disappearance of an old haunt, Desiree Driver said that she's gravitated to a new place on campus. A 2011 Wesleyan graduate and now associate coach of the women's basketball team, Coach Dez used to be drawn to a small room located in what's now the flex lab in Pearsall Library. "It had a record player and a large collection of vinyl records," she recalled. "It was a quiet, tucked-away space where you could go on your own, listen to music, and step away from everything else for a bit."

Her new favorite spot is nearby—the library's Hardee-Rives Room. Used for meetings and seminar classes, it's a room with a long table, wood-paneled, old books and interesting items such as antique spoons. "It has a really calm, almost historic feel," Driver said. "Even as a student, I went there whenever I needed a quiet place to think, meet with

a small group, or just have a moment to myself. It's not a loud or high traffic space, which makes it feel more personal and intentional. More than anything, it's serene. It gives you a chance to slow down in the middle of a busy day, which is hard to find on campus."

**Margaret Bentley**

Margaret Bentley described her favorite place on campus as "a little magical and simultaneously grounding." She was referring to an oak tree near the library parking lot. "You'd pass it if you were walking toward the chapel," she said.

Bentley, a Wesleyan graduate, works in Braswell as the university's payroll processor. She said that she tries to stop by her favorite spot once a week. "The tree is so perfectly symmetrical and makes me wish I were younger so I could climb right up it," she said. "As silly as it sounds, it's a grand reminder for me that despite all the storms, life goes on and better seasons arrive."

Bentley said that the tree evokes memories of her childhood. "I realize that that seems to wax a little emotional, given that it's only an oak tree, but for me nature harkens back to a simpler time when I lived in my beloved mountains and ran free through the woods as a child."

**Amy Faircloth**

Amy Faircloth favors the fountain at the entrance of campus. A senior student accounts representative in the business office, Faircloth said the area is relaxing, a place to relieve stress. "I like the fountain because it's peaceful and it's very pretty," she said. "I find the sound of the running water very soothing."

## ALLIGOOD from pg 1

**Q.** How will your experience as SGA treasurer help in your new role?

**A.** It's helped me understand how to navigate hurdles, particularly with the campus administration. I was able to meet with Dr. Duff, Dr. Lane, and Dr. Modlin, who have been helpful throughout my time as treasurer. I plan on maintaining the professional relationships with them and will use the experience to help push for what students want.

**Q.** What personal qualities do you and Vice President Bailey possess that will allow you both to be effective in your jobs?

**A.** Our greatest quality is our presence on the ground. I've been deeply active on campus for the past two years, and I've made it a priority to know my fellow students by name. That's why I chose to run, to represent people I actually interact with daily. I don't need to "go meet" students where they are. I'm already there. Deon shares this commitment; as someone involved in multiple clubs, he understands the student experience firsthand. We're driven by a shared desire to build a campus culture that truly feels like home.

**Q.** What are your primary goals for next year?

**A.** My first and main goal is to be transparent. When running, I stated that I want to record all SGA meetings and publish them for the students who were unable to attend. If the students can hear and see that we're working for them, then maybe they'll put some trust in us.

To go off the first goal, we want to

be known around campus; we want students to know who we are, and what we do. That means going to student events, tabling, and holding town hall sessions in dormitories. If we're able to be more visible to the students, then the students will be more aware of us and what we're doing.

The SGA Board is now reviewing the SGA Constitution, which not many students have seen. We'll be drafting amendments for students to consider in fall semester; we want to make the constitution more accessible, so students can hold us accountable.

**Q.** Are there specific aspects of the constitution you plan to review?

**A.** There is not one particular aspect of the constitution; it's really just trying to update it. Last year, several new positions were created—graduate/APS representative and commuter representative—but no one put them into the constitution. I also want my SGA Board to know what is expected of them.

**Q.** What can your administration do to increase the level of student involvement in SGA?

**A.** At the moment, registered student organizations (RSOs) are required to have one representative at each SGA meeting. But our goal is to have more non-club-affiliated students at our meetings. To increase attendance, we intend to bring SGA to freshmen orientation. We would do this through the use of workshops with the new students. This would allow us to introduce ourselves and, hopefully, get them interested in our cause.



Elliott Smith, director of student engagement, and Wayne Sears, director of campus safety, prepare the grill for an end-of-semester barbecue on the Southern Bank Green. Sears, a long-time law enforcement professional, is retiring after serving nearly 11 years at Wesleyan. B. Grattan photo.

# CREATIVE WRITING

## Personal Narrative: Return to Motherland, Reminders of My Father

By **Fisayo Adebimpe**  
Decree Staff Writer

The first time I landed in Nigeria, I was too young to remember it. The second time, I arrived 21 years later carrying memories only through stories, photographs, and phone calls that stretched across an ocean.

I hadn't been back to Africa since I was a newborn, and stepping off the plane in Lagos didn't feel like a return so much as an introduction to something I was expected to already know.

This trip wasn't simply travel; it was reunion, grief, and discovery, all happening at the same time. My

father had died from cancer the previous July, and this would be the first time my family in Nigeria would see me after his death. Many of them had been unable to attend the funeral in the United States, so this visit carried a weight that had been delayed but not diminished.

I have always lived in Raleigh, North Carolina, while most of my family is based in Lagos. For years, our relationship existed through phone calls and short conversations across time zones. This trip would finally make those voices physical.

The journey itself blurred together,

a short flight, a layover, then hours in the air. What stayed with me was not the travel, but the moment it ended.

Lagos met me all at once.

The airport was crowded and loud, voices overlapping, movement constant, instructions coming from every direction at once. Getting through it felt less like a process and more like navigating a current. When we finally stepped outside, the air hit differently—thick, warm, and immediate.

The city did not ease into view, it rushed in. Cars leaned on their horns without hesitation, sharp bursts of sound cutting through traffic that never fully stopped moving. Engines idled, surged forward, then slowed again in an endless pattern. Along the roadside, people moved between cars, weaving through narrow gaps with practiced ease. Some balanced goods on their heads, baskets, trays of bread, and packages stacked carefully. They moved steadily through traffic in a way that felt both natural and precise, a traditional method of carrying that I had only ever seen from a distance. Others came right up to the windows, selling everything imaginable: bread, meat, sunglasses, bottled water, snacks, all held up for drivers to see in passing moments.

It reminded me of New York City in its density and motion, but Lagos brought a different inten-

sity, louder, closer, and constant.

The heat settled in just as quickly. No matter the time of day, it stayed between 80 and 90 degrees, pressing into everything, into the air, into your clothes, into your movement. There was no real break from it, only adjustment.

Our first stop was at my uncle's house.

I had never met him before, but when he opened the door, something about the moment felt familiar before I could explain why.

"Ah, you've finally come," he said, smiling as he pulled me into a hug.

When he stepped back, I saw it clearly. He looked like my father.

Not just in appearance, but in everything. The way he spoke, the rhythm of his voice, the way he smiled before finishing a sentence. Even the way he sat down, leaning slightly forward, felt like something I had seen my whole life.

"You look just like him," he said, studying my face for a second longer than expected.

That moment stayed with me.

My father's absence weighed heavily throughout the trip. I thought about how I never got to experience Nigeria with him, never saw him in the places that shaped him. But being surrounded by family shifted that feeling. The more people I met, the more pieces of him I seemed to recog-

nize in them. A laugh, a gesture, a way of speaking, all of it felt familiar.

With each conversation, the weight didn't disappear, but it changed. It became something shared instead of something I was bearing alone.

The next few days unfolded more slowly. We stayed in Victoria Island, where the city felt polished in a different way. The hotel was formal; the staff dressed sharply, doors opened before you reached them, everything precise and intentional.

Outside, the contrast stood out. Walking through the area, I saw places I recognized immediately: Subway, KFC, Burger King, Krispy Kreme, Domino's, Cold Stone. It was unexpected at first, then strangely normal. Lagos wasn't unfamiliar; it was layered, where global brands and local culture existed side by side.

We spent time walking through malls and along the beach, taking in everything without a set plan. There was no rush to move on to the next thing.

The weddings were different. They felt like stepping into something fully alive.

Color filled the space, not just bright, but specific, deep purples, saffron oranges; royal blues woven into traditional attire that moved with the music. The room produced sound in layers, conversation, laughter, music rising and falling as people danced. Light reflected off decorations and fabric, giving everything a sense of movement even when people stood still.

At one point, my aunt leaned over and said, "This is how we celebrate."

It wasn't just a statement; it felt like an explanation.

I attended my cousin's wedding, meeting her for the first time while celebrating one of the most important days of her life. It didn't feel distant or unfamiliar. It felt like I was already part of this world.

By the end of the trip, Nigeria no longer felt like a place I had only heard about. It felt lived in. In many ways, I arrived carrying absence, my father's absence, years of distance, and a version of home I had never fully experienced. But I left with something different.

The first time I landed in Nigeria, I was too young to remember it. This time, I arrived as someone aware of what had been missing.

Leaving Lagos, I thought again about my father, about how much of him I had seen without him being there. In his brothers, in the way my family spoke, in the spaces that shaped him long before I was born.

This trip did not replace that absence, but it gave it context.

It also gave me something to return to.

I know I will be back. Before I turn 28, my passport expires, so I plan to come again. I have even begun to think about dual citizenship, about building something more permanent, a home that connects both where I am and where I come from.

For the first time, Nigeria does not feel like a distant origin.

It feels like part of my future.



Wesleyan junior Fisayo Adebimpe took a memorable trip to Lagos, Nigeria in April. It was the family's first visit to his mother and father's native country, since his father's death last summer. Shown here (l-r) is Fisayo's cousin Segun Adebiji; Fisayo; his mother, Iyabo Adebimpe, and his older brother, Damola.

Photo courtesy of F. Adebimpe.

## Biography: Why My Grandfather Has Dentures

By **Kalel Mason**  
Decree Staff Writer

This is the story of how my grandfather came to need dentures and why the incident means so much to him. During the summer of 1969 in Harlem, New York, a young Anthony Bell was walking down one of Harlem's busy streets as he happily sang "Everybody's Somebody's Fool" by Connie Francis. This was during a time shortly after the Civil Rights Act, which would greatly affect how Anthony would look back on this memory.

Anthony was never the biggest fan of baseball, but seeing as all of his friends played daily, he felt obligated to engage in the sport. He and his friends would meet in Jackie Robinson Park every Wednesday to play a couple of games. Once Anthony arrived at the park, he was greeted by his three friends, Jackson, Frederick, and Rio. Rio was the oldest of the three and was the main provider of the sports equipment—bases, bats, and gloves. Frederick was the youngest and never brought anything related to the game. But Anthony stated that Fredrick was always the most eager to play, and so was the main provider when it came to joy and whimsy. Anthony was in charge of bringing the ball as it was the one thing Rio never had on hand, and he had no interest in buying one with his limited amount of money.

Before the boys could play, they first had to wait for the white boys to finish playing. Anthony vividly remembered the feeling of the judgmental stares the white boys would give as they finished their game. Rio would claim that the white boys would always slow their game down when my grandfather and his friends arrived, as a way to taunt them. As angry as this thought made Anthony, his biggest concern was always the parents of the white children who had come to watch their kids. The parents would continuously stare down the black boys. Anthony was well aware of the damage white parents would cause, as his

older brother was once beaten by a white boy's father for playing on a swing his son wanted to use.

Once the group of white boys had finished playing, Anthony and his friends finally had the opportunity to begin to set up their game. As Anthony was putting down the bases, Rio came up to him and pointed towards the white boys, watching them on one of the park benches. This was unusual, as usually the white kids would leave the park once their game was up, but this time, both they and their parents decided to stay.

Anthony and his friends had begun to play like normal. Of the four boys, Rio was by far the best at baseball. Anthony claims that he was second to Rio and that if they were the same age, he might've been better.

After some time, one of the white boy's parents came up to Rio and asked if they would mind letting their children join them. Anthony remembers the uncertain look on Rio's face, before realizing he didn't really have a choice in the matter.

There were four white boys who would end up joining the game. The oldest introduced himself as Harry. Harry was the only one of the white kids to introduce himself, as the others quickly got into position. Harry became the first to bat in this new game, and he hit a home run on his first swing. After circling the bases, Harry ran to Rio, smiling.

"You might wanna tighten up, negro," said Harry.

Anthony saw the interaction first-hand, as Rio curled his hand into a fist, before quickly calling a timeout. Rio walked up to Anthony, clearly still upset.

"Yo, Anthony," said Rio. "You hear that?"

Anthony looked Rio up and down, trying to gauge just how angry he was; he didn't want to accidentally anger him any further. Anthony didn't care about Harry's comment; at this point in his life, he couldn't care less about white people or their opinions.

"Yeah, real annoying, huh?" said Anthony. "You pissed?"

Rio looked back at the white boys, as they stood around waiting for the timeout to end. Rio took a deep breath, before unclenching his fist.

"Anthony, the next time a couple of white folks ask to play with us, act like you about to throw up or sum shit so we can leave," said Rio.

"I could still do that now," said Anthony.

Rio smiled, before speaking. "Naw, at this point I'd like to send these white boys home knowing they lost to some negros, so make sure you're trying out there."

"Aight," Anthony responded.

Rio ran to the middle of the field, before calling for the game to begin. The boys continued like normal for the rest of the match, ending with Anthony's team winning 12-10. Anthony and his friends began to celebrate, as the white boys watched from the other side of the field. Rio caught wind of the boys staring, before pulling Anthony aside.

"I thinks those boys is planning something, Tony," said Rio. "They got that 'I hate anything darker than me' look in their eyes."

Confused, Anthony glanced at Rio.

"So what?" said Anthony.

"They probably do feel that way. That ain't nothing new."

"I know that," said Rio. "The thing is, I think these boys might act on it. I bet they feel oddly safe with their parents being here."

As Rio finished his sentence, Harry began to walk toward the boys. Rio met Harry in the middle of the field. Harry put on a smug smile and then said, "Nice win out there, fellas. Not surprising you won, seeing as you guys are built like monkeys."

Rio clenched his fist. "Oh really?" asked Rio as he returned Harry's soft smile. "I'm sure you say that to all the negros."

Harry's smile faded as he began to walk closer to Rio. Anthony, watching this all play out, picked up his own bat, feeling

that something was off.

"Look here, blacky. I wouldn't come back here to play anymore if I were you. I wouldn't want anything bad to happen to the little guy over there," Harry said while pointing at Frederick.

Without hesitation, Rio punched Harry in the face using his right hand. Harry quickly retaliated with a right hook of his own, before the two began brawling in the middle of the field. Anthony ran to join the fracas, as the parents of the white kids took notice of the fight. One of the white kids also joined the fight, bat in hand. Anthony dropped his bat and instead tried to pull the two boys apart. The white boy ran in behind Harry and swung the bat, trying to hit Rio. Rio saw the attack coming and dodged, leading to the bat smashing into Anthony's mouth, shattering most of his teeth. Anthony felt the cold sensation of his blood running down his mouth, and then the burning of his missing teeth was felt throughout his body. Before passing out, the last thing Anthony remembered from that day was the sound of the white boys' parents yelling at Rio.

By the time Anthony regained consciousness, he was in a hospital bed with his mother sitting in the chair next to him. Anthony attempted to talk, but he couldn't due to the injury to his mouth.

Anthony's mother noticed he was awake and looked at him straight-faced.

"You got most of your teeth shattered," she said. "Gonna have to buy you some dentures."

Anthony's mom got up and began to walk out of the room.

"We're not gonna press charges or anything," she said. "No use trying to fight against them white folk in court. Next time, just try to pick a fight with one of our own."

To this day, Anthony can't say what affected him more, the pain in his mouth, or the lasting effect of his mother's words on his soul.



Evan Ervin won third place in the Photography Club competition.

# CREATIVE WRITING

## Fiction: Letters Of A Man Who Wants His Ex-Girlfriend Back

By Deon Wylie

"I'm going to get her back," I said as I paced around my room. I started thinking of anything I could do to get her back, but the problem was I-I honestly didn't know what to do. I tried everything that came to mind.

The thing about her is she likes a lot of things, like a lot. "She always loved when I wrote her letters," I remembered. She always loved w-w-when I wrote her letters, when I was afraid to speak because of my s-stuttering problem.

In that moment, something in my brain clicked, and I knew exactly what I was going to do.

I closed the door to my room. I sat at my desk, turned on my lamp, and grabbed a piece of paper from my notebook, as well as a pen. It took me a while, but once I had something in my head, I started writing:

Dear Nikki,  
It's been a while since I've done this. I don't know where or how to begin this letter, so I suppose I'll start at the beginning. I remember being in college at the library, looking through Nicholas Sparks books, including "The Notebook," "The Wedding," "A Walk to Remember," "Dear John," and "Message In A Bottle." I looked up from my exploration to the right and saw you. You looked so beautiful just standing there, wearing a black Nike athletic-wear jumpsuit with white headphones on your head that complemented your dark skin very well. I said to myself that I had to talk to you; scared shitless, that's exactly what I did.

"E-Excuse me, I couldn't help but b-b-bother you and to tell you that y-you're very beautiful," I said while my heart was literally beating out of my chest.

"Thank you," you said in the most beautiful voice I've ever heard in my life. It sounded like angels talking to me.

"I'm sorry if I r-r-repeat some words. I have a s-stuttering problem, had it since I was born."

"That's perfectly fine, I think it's beautiful that you do that," you said, smiling at me.

I must have been frozen for a second because the next thing you said to me was, "Are you okay?" I snapped out of it and said, "Yes, ma'am."

I remember you asking me how old I was. I said 20, and you said, "We're the same age, so there's no need for you to call me ma'am."

"I know, I was giving you the r-r-respect that you deserve."

"I never gave you a reason, though."

"You being beautiful is reason enough."

You smiled at me, and in the second, I could feel the earth stop; it was just you and me. In that moment, looking into your beautiful brown eyes, I knew for the first time that I loved you. You told me you had to get to class, and I didn't know if I'd see you again, so I had to ask.

"W-Will I see you again?"

"I don't know, will you? Do you want to?"

"Yes, if you w-w-wouldn't mind. Would you want to go on a date with me t-tomorrow?"

"Yes, I'd love to. What time?"

"Six. Before you go, you wouldn't mind if I could get your number?"

"No, where's your phone?" you said as I reached into my pocket, pulled out my phone, and gave it to you. Then you put your phone number in, handed my phone back to me, and I looked at it.

"N-Nikki?"

"Yes, that's my name."

"That's a beautiful name."

"Thank you."

I was so fascinated with your beauty that I forgot to ask you for your name.

"What's yours?"

"D-Damien"

"Well, Damien, it was nice to meet you. I gotta get to class so I won't be late, but I'll see you tomorrow at 6."

"Yes, ma'am."

You started walking towards the library doors on your way out, when suddenly you turned around mighty quickly.

"Wait."

"Yes?"

"Where will I meet you tomorrow?"

"I'll text you where to m-m-meet me."

"I can't get any details?"

"Nope."

"What if you're taking me somewhere to kill me?"

"I guess you'll just have to meet me at the place to see then." I smiled as I said that.

With that, you smiled back at me and walked through the library doors on your way to class. I don't want you to forget the feelings we both had in our first interaction. I don't want you to let go of that feeling. I hope the address that I put on here is the right one and that it's not getting sent to the wrong place. I love you, and I want you to come back to me, please.

I started to sign it "My Love," but that was too obsessive... "The guy who still loves you"--too long... "Your ex"... definitely no. Screw it, why am I thinking so much? I'll just close it the old-fashioned way.

~Sincerely, Damien."

I folded the letter, put it in an envelope, turned off my lamp, went downstairs, opened my front door, walked towards the end of my driveway to my mailbox, put the envelope in the mailbox, and raised the red flag.

"I hope she gets it and responds," I said.

With that, I had a good feeling about everything and went back inside my house to enjoy the rest of my day.

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All I could think of was how she would react to seeing my letter in her mailbox.

Dear Nikki,

It's been a week since I sent that last letter. It's been almost a year since we graduated from college, and six months since we broke up. Since then, I've been walking more frequently around my neighborhood. Yesterday I was walking around my neighborhood, and I couldn't help but think about the walk we had on campus after dinner on our first date. I was remembering it like it was yesterday. You were wearing the cutest ripped jeans that fit every curve on your body, a simple red hoodie, and some black Nike shoes. "How was dinner?" I asked while walking. You said it was good, but it could have been better. Then you asked me a couple of questions.

"So Damien, what's your major?"

"English."

"What career are you going to take up in the major?"

"Honestly, I want t-t-to be an author."

"Oh ok, what picked that path for you?"

"A-As I told you yesterday, I had a-a-a stuttering problem growing up, so when I was embarrassed to talk because of it, I wrote down on a piece of paper to sometimes communicate with my parents, and I guess in doing that I grew a love for writing and w-w-wanted to make a career out of it."

"I really love that."

"Thank you."

"One last question for now, what kind of stories would you want to be writing about?"

"I never really told anybody this, not even my parents...but r-r-romance."

"That's great. Why haven't you told anyone this?"

"As a man, saying you're writing about romance is looked down upon because you're seen as soft, so every time someone asks what s-stories I want to write, I say crime and suspense."

"You shouldn't care about what other people think. I personally think it's beautiful that you love writing about romance."

We saw a bench in front of the library and decided to sit down.

"Thank you," I said.

"For what?"

"Being understanding."

"You're welcome, I wanna say thanks to you also."

"For what?"

"For not killing me, of course," you said with a smile, and we both laughed.

We stopped laughing once we caught each other's eyes and just stared at each other. Personally, I couldn't stop looking into your beautiful eyes, and I don't know what came over me, but I said the forbidden words that you're definitely not supposed to say on a first date.

"I love you... I'm sorry, I-I didn't mean to say that. I mean, I meant to say it but not TO you, I mean, I mean I meant to say it to you, but not out loud... I'm sorry."

You looked at me, smiling, and started laughing. "You're okay. Sometimes people can't help what they feel."

You put your head on my shoulder, and we were silent, just enjoying each other's company on the bench outside the library.

I don't know what happened after that; all I could remember was you picking your head up, and we both started looking into each other's eyes.

With that, I went in for a kiss. My lips touched yours. I closed my eyes, and a feeling of warmth came all over my body, and it felt like I was at home. From that night, we were inseparable; taking more walks around campus, meeting each other at the library and helping each other out with work, going to sleep on the phone or together if I was able to sneak you into the dorm at night, just doing anything and everything that we could do together. Those are times that I hold close to my heart, and I hope you still do. Please don't forget the love we had. I love you still with all my heart.

~Sincerely, Damien

I thought of the first letter that I wrote to her; honestly, it wasn't a letter, it was a note, really a note. Nikki and I were in my dorm room, and for some reason, I was nervous, and I got so nervous that my stuttering problem got so out of hand, and I was embarrassed. We were having a regular conversation. One question she brought up was who I think would win in a fight, a lion or a tiger, and since lions are my favorite animals, I picked a lion, but I stuttered so much that I decided to write it. I grabbed a piece of paper, and I responded to her. "I think a Lion would win easily." She read it and laughed and told me that she loved my handwriting, and that made me love writing even more, to the point where I took it seriously. That was the best night for me because that was when she said for the first time, "I love you, Damien." Once she said those words, something in me felt safe and secure, and for the rest of the night,

we chilled in my dorm, enjoying each other's company.

A week went by, and there was still no reply.

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I was sitting on my couch in the living room watching a movie, I couldn't think of the name of it, but it was about this couple who broke up because the guy put his career in front of his girlfriend so much that she was nonexistent to him. It pulled at my heartstrings because I couldn't help notice that what was being dramatized was really what happened between her and me.

Dear Nikki,

This will probably be the hardest letter that I'll ever write to you. I can't talk about our story without talking about what cut our story short. Once again, I'm so sorry. Please understand. We've been together for a little over two years now, and every day has been like a fairy tale, now obviously, like any couple, we have had minor arguments here and there. We only had one major argument, and sadly, that was the downfall of all of it. I'll never forget it either. It was the day that I forgot our anniversary. The anniversary of us getting together. It was very bad because the year prior, I also forgot.

"Am I not important to you?" I remember you asking.

"You are the most important person in my life," I said. I wasn't lying; you still are the most important person in my life.

"It doesn't feel like it. I cut you some slack the first year, but two years in a row?"

"I'm sorry, I was busy. Do you know how much pressure it is for an up-and-coming author?"

"I'm sorry, I know how much you're trying to be an author, but that's not a valid reason, Damien."

"You don't understand."

"Understand what?"

"Understand how much time goes into being an author, Nikki."

"Not enough time to forget your second anniversary with your girlfriend."

"My bad, I was worried about more i-i-important things."

"There it is..."

"That's not what I meant."

"Then what did you mean?"

"I gotta put more time into my career than this relationship, and I can't see how I can do both respectively."

"You ever heard of balance?"

"Yes, but someone told me, 'To be great at something you have to let go of something of value'"

"What does that even mean?"

"I have to let go of something important."

"Does that mean you wanna break up?" You said that with tears coming down your face.

"I guess so."

With that, our story was over. You hugged me so tight afterwards, and that's a feeling that I'll never forget because it actually felt like a goodbye. Now looking back on it, I was dumb letting you go. I achieved success as a romance author (that's irony, isn't it?) by being on the New York Best Seller list for 10 weeks in a row, but at what cost? If I didn't have you by my side to celebrate. Leonardo da Vinci quoted, "Life without love is no life at all," and it's true because my life without you is no life worth living. I'm sorry again. I love you, and once again, please come back to me.

~Sincerely, Damien

Reading this letter back, I started to think about the one thing I did as a way to try to get her back. Over the course of three months, I remember trying to think of something I could do that would mean something to her. I knew that her favorite flower was tulips, but I didn't want to do something so simple. Going back and forth in my mind, I realized that sometimes simple gestures are the best. So with that, I went to her favorite flower shop and got her some white tulips. I knew that her lunch time was around 1 p.m., so around 12:30, I started my commute to her job at the gym where she worked as a physical therapist. I got to her job at 12:50, and I pulled up next to her car, got out, and put the bouquet of white tulips on her front windshield. In the bouquet, there was a small note that said, "I'm Sorry," so she knew it came from me. By this time, it was 12:55, and as soon as I drove, I looked out of my rearview mirror and saw her walking out. Before I turned the corner out of the parking lot, I saw a smile on her face, and that's all that I needed to see.

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A week went by, and I was chilling on my couch when I looked out my window and saw a mail truck pull off from my house. I walked out of my house to go to the mailbox. It was cloudy with the sun peeking out only a little bit. I opened the mailbox, grabbed the mail, and couldn't believe what I saw. As I was looking through the mail, I saw a blue envelope addressed to me, and I couldn't help but feel that it was from her. I didn't open the letter.

I was scared to open it because I didn't know what was in it. For minutes, the letter and I were having a staring contest.

I couldn't keep looking at it for what could turn into hours, so I grabbed the letter, opened it, pulled it out a little bit, and it was from her. My heart stopped for a second, and I could feel it pounding from then on. I looked at the letter and started reading it. As I was reading it, I was stone-faced, couldn't move anything but my eyes as I was reading the letter line by line. A sharp pain pierced my heart, and from then on, everything in my body just didn't feel right. I was done reading the letter, just looking at it. I noticed the sun wasn't shining anymore, and it was cloudy outside. I couldn't do anything; all I could do was look up at the ceiling, and tears started rolling down my face.

Dear Damien,

I understand that you want what we had back, but truly, you need to understand that our story is over. I loved your letters, but after everything that happened, you need to see that we are over. We were two people getting to know each other, and it just didn't work out. Go live your life, and try to approach things more maturely. Believe it or not, I only want the best for you. I feel like you deserve someone who loves you, appreciates you, and cherishes you for who you are. I know the person I am right now, that's not me. I'm sorry that's not what you wanted to hear. I can't give you what you want. I'll always love you. You will always have a special place in my heart, but our story is over, and you'll just have to accept that.

~Sincerely, Nikki



Linda Nihwatiwa won first prize in the Photography Club competition with the above photo. The contest was judged by a panel of staff and faculty.



Trey Alligood got the People's Choice Award for the photo at left.

# SPRING SPORTS

## Bishop Briefs: Softball Rallies to Clip Meredith, Loses in Finals

Stout pitching and clutch hitting led the Bishops to a win over a higher-seeded Meredith team in the second bracket of the USA South round-robin tournament April 30-May 3 in Raleigh.

With the victory the Bishops qualified for the tournament finals May 8-9 against the top-seeded Pfeiffer.

Wesleyan opened the playoff tournament with a 3-2 win over Peace, then pounded Meredith 12-2, as Ragan Holloman and Kyiah Simmons drove in three runs apiece. Freshman Ava Strickland, holding the Pacers to four hits and Avenging Angels to three, pitched complete games to earn the win in both.

After Saturday's rematch was postponed, Meredith took the early game on Sunday, winning 3-1 behind Lillie Davis's five-hitter. Strickland took the loss.

Even though she pitched all six innings of the first game, Coach John Brackett sent Strickland back to the mound in the decisive third game. "I was a little surprised that I was starting the second game," Strickland said while acknowledging she had had success mixing her curve and screwball in earlier tournament outings.

In the third matchup Strickland gave up one run on three hits and a walk in two innings. To begin the third, Coach Brackett summoned a second freshman, Kendall Wallace, who shut out Meredith over the final six innings on four hits. "Kendall did a great job in relief," Strickland said. "I was very proud of the way she kept her composure in a tight game."

Meredith maintained its 1-0 lead and then the Bishops began their comeback in the top of the seventh. After Holloman flied out, Brooke Markiewicz singled to left field and Kayla Simmons ripped a round-scoring double to left to send the game into extra innings.

In the top of the eighth, Wesleyan played small ball. Freshman Caleigh Warf reached first on an infield single and then went to second on a sacrifice bunt by Savannah Bain. Warf then proceeded to swipe third, setting up Lexi Howerton's heroics.

When she stepped to the plate, the freshman tried not to put too much pressure on herself. "I felt I was good enough to be in this spot," she remembered thinking. "My plan was to see the ball deep and rely on my mechanics."

Hitting with a full count, Howerton got a curve ball on the outer half of the plate and served a pop-fly single to right, scoring Warf with the decisive run. "Caleigh's steal was critical," Howerton said. "If she was still at second, she wouldn't have scored."

In the bottom of the eighth, Strickland watched as Wallace preserved the victory but not without some drama. Meredith had a runner on third with one out, but Wallace struck out the next batter and then induced a flyout to end the game.

"We could have been negative after losing the first game," Strickland said. "Instead we rallied together to play a tough second game. We battled hard and won."



Bishop pitcher Ava Strickland. SI photos

### Softball Season Ends In Misenheimer

Playing in the conference finals, Wesleyan saw its season come to an end with a double-header sweep at the hands of Pfeiffer on the road May 8.

In the first game the "mercy" rule was invoked, as the Falcons exploded for 10 runs in the second inning and built a 14-0 lead through five. Wallace took the loss, while Falcons starter Reese Caranna held the Bishops to one hit.

Wesleyan found its offense in the second game with three Bishops—Markiewicz, Ramzie Bryant and Kyiah Simmons—all slugging homers. But it was not enough to earn a split, as Pfeiffer banged out 12 hits enroute to a 6-4 title-clinching win. Strickland took the loss, yielding 12 hits and six runs (four earned) in seven innings.

Pfeiffer had finished the regular season with a 17-1 conference record, 38-9 overall.

### Tennis Teams Sweep USA-S Titles

The men's and women's tennis teams won the USA South tournament titles with both squads vanquishing rival Methodist on home court.

For the women, it was the third consecutive conference championship and qualified them for the NCAA regional playoffs.

In the first round, the women won five matches and held decisive leads in the other four to beat Southern Virginia. Ivanna Torres, Rennata Torres and BreAnn Ferguson all won two singles sets by decisive 6-0 or 6-1 scores.

Facing Methodist in the finals, the Bishops took two of three double matches and then Ferguson, Ajla Selimovic and Adrea Elaez Miranda won their singles matches to clinch the title.

On the men's side it was business not quite as usual. Wesleyan won its 17th straight conference title, but it had to battle back from an early deficit to do so.

Finding themselves in an unfamiliar place, the Bishops lost two of the three double matches to the second-seeded Monarchs, beginning with NCWU's first pair, Adam Singleton and Pattrawala Farhaan (3-6).

"Methodist came out quick and fired up and there were definitely some nerves around our team," said Albert Sitwell, who lost one of the doubles matches, 5-7, with his partner Julian Valverde. "It seemed like we started off playing to not lose rather than to win. As our number-1 doubles team went down a break early, you could feel the tension on the other two courts."

But the Wesleyan athletes kept their poise. Sitwell noted that the momentum soon shifted back to the Bishops, who won the

first set in each of the six singles matches "No one panicked," he said. "We knew singles was what would separate the teams. We were back in our comfortable place. The doubles was just a wakeup call for singles."

Sitwell, a senior and a team leader the past four years, called Wesleyan freshman Indrek Raudkivi the MVP for his play in the tournament. The Estonian won a critical match in the sixth singles slot, 6-1, 6-0.

### Guevara Leads Golfers to 5th

The NC Wesleyan golf team finished fifth in the USA South Conference tournament played at Carolina Trace Golf Club in Sanford April 20-22.

The Bishops finished 68 total strokes behind first-place Methodist, a past national champ, after three days of play.

Wesleyan's Rylan Gay said the Monarchs always bring a strong squad to the conference championship. All five Methodist golfers placed within the top nine. "Methodist is just very consistent," Gay said. "They never seem to have a really bad day like other teams can have. Any of their guys can go out there and win it."

Gay shot a three-round total of 235, 19 over par, to come in 13th. He said Carolina Trace was a challenging course, from tee to green. "Some fairways were very tight and you had to land your tee shots in certain spots," he explained. "The greens were very fast and firm and it was difficult to get spin on the ball for little pitch and chip shots."

Gay's low score was a 74 on day three following rounds of 79 and 82. "I think I played very well in the tournament," he said. "The first two scores may not be the best representation of that. But I think my ball striking was very good. I just didn't score very well the first two days."

He began the third round with a double-bogey and bogeyed two of the next three holes before playing the last 14 in two under par. "I started off the round very rocky," he said. "I could have gotten down, but I stayed in it and kept fighting."

Gay, a sophomore, believes the future is bright for the Bishops, noting that only two seniors, Alvaro Blanco and Guido Guevara, were among the spring graduates. "We have a very strong group coming back next year," Gay said. "We all have high expectations for what we can accomplish. We have a very young team, so this was a good year for all of us to get experience. That will only help us going forward."

Guevara, a native of Buenos Aires, led the way for Wesleyan in the USA South tourney, shooting rounds of 76-78-79 to finish 10th. He served as a team captain this year. "He really found a groove in the last three tournaments and helped us finish strong," Gay said, adding that "he's a great teammate and person, and he'll be missed next year."

### NCWU Sprinters Dominate Meet

Wesleyan freshmen made an auspicious debut in sprint events at the USA South Outdoor Track and Field Championships April 25 in Concord.

Three NCWU sprinters fin-

ished in the top six of the men's 100-meter dash. Second place went to Ja'Mario Young with a time of 10.61. He was followed by teammate Nahjiir Seagraves in fifth place (10.74) and Jamel Corey in sixth (10.76).

In 200 meters, Young took first with a time of 21.29. He was joined in the top seven by Corey (21.37), Seagraves (21.87) and a fourth freshman, Jaliel Timmons (22.29).

Bishops finished second and third in the 400-meter event with Timmons (48.64) running just ahead of freshman teammate Chance Bass (49.19). Freshman Ian Smith was 10th at 800 meters (2:11.29) and ninth in 1500 meters (4:29.96).

In the women's events, junior Kamiyah Wooten racked up three impressive wins and earned recognition for her performance earlier this spring at nationals.

The Wesleyan women's team finished 1-2-3 in the 100-meter dash, as Wooten led the way with a time of 12.04, followed by fellow junior Ti'Asia Bryant (12.14) and freshman Nya Galbreath (12.25).

Wooten then took first place in the 200-meter (24.58) race, with freshman NaQuayla Stanford (24.89) in second, and Bryant (25.24) in third. Wooten capped her perfect day by claiming the 400-meter event with a time of 56.97.

Earlier in the year Wooten finished third at 200 meters in the NCAA Division III Indoor Track and Field Championships in Birmingham. Her time was 24.14, or .36 behind first-place finisher Isabel Peterson of Wisconsin-Platteville.



Sprinter Kamiyah Wooten finished third in the nation.

### Simpson Seeks Program Growth

First-year Coach Robert Simpson hopes to grow the lacrosse program at Wesleyan. He knows that the team needs more athletes in order to compete in the USA South Conference.

Playing most of the season with only one substitute, the Bishops finished 2-10 overall, 1-8 in USA South, with their sole conference win coming March 7 in a 14-4 victory over William Peace at home.

"Lacrosse involves a lot of running," Simpson explained. "You need to be well conditioned to play this game. With only one substitute to switch in and out of the lineup, it becomes really difficult. Often our athletes would run the entire 60 minutes without much rest. But the girls played most of their games with determination and resilience."

Simpson was upbeat about three recruits who will join the program in 2026-27. "Brooklyn Goodwin is a utility player who

will add a much-needed boost to our offense," the coach said. "Mackenzie Truitt should add speed to our defense, and Jenna Kalstek will add new variety to our defensive-midfield."

The coach noted that two key players have graduated—starting midfielder Bri Garcia and attack/midfielder Maxima Iglesias, who, despite missing five matches due to injury, led the Bishops in goals (45) and assists (15). While leading the USA South in goals-per-game (6.43), the Buenos Aires native impressed Simpson with her tenacity and resilience.

"Max is an awesome player with a lot of heart," Simpson said. "When she sprained her foot one day in practice, I thought she was finished for the season. But she came back stronger than ever, continuing to score goals at an amazing rate."

Asked to pick a highlight from the 2026 season, Simpson named two moments. One involved a 10-9 loss to the Greensboro Pride on Senior Day, April 11. "After we had lost five games in the middle of our season, the team came back and took Greensboro to overtime," he said. "Even though we lost the match, they fought to the end and played together all season."

The other highlight was a 12-8 win over Randolph on February 22. Simpson noted that it was the program's first victory in three seasons. "We had a lead with 29 seconds to play," Simpson recalled. "Chased by two defenders, Max ran the ball around the back of the goal until time expired. The horn sounded, and we had won the first game in three years. That was a highlight: Watching the players become overwhelmed by emotion, celebrating this long-awaited victory."

### Baseball Team Ousted In First Round

Wesleyan's baseball team qualified for the USA South playoffs by finishing fourth in the regular season, but lost its first two games in a double-elimination tournament.

Playing in Greensboro on a Friday afternoon, the Bishops and 5th-seeded Peace were tied 3-3 in the seventh inning, when the Pacers scratched out a run on an infield grounder by Leland Barrow. Gavin Turner then slugged a homerun in the top of the ninth to provide the final margin of victory. Maison Nance, Brady Williams and Drew Krause each drove in a run for the Bishops.

Early that evening, Wesleyan faced the top-seeded team, Greensboro. The Bishops clung to 3-2 lead midway through the fifth, but GC scored four in the bottom of the inning and then five in the sixth to secure the win. The Pride had six extra-base hits and took advantage of three Wesleyan errors.

### NCWU Statistical Leaders:

Banks Hartman batted .379 to pace Wesleyan and finish 14th in the conference. Schumata Brown had a team-leading 18 doubles and 40 RBIs, while Nance had 11 homers and 36 RBIs. Pitcher Colby Lewis (3-8) was second in the conference with a 3.07 earned run average, while the Wesleyan squad ranked first in the conference with an overall team ERA of 5.98.