

“I found this book to be a real Point of Light as Dolphus shows us that things can change in this America. His inspirational and provocative story shows love over hate, reconciliation over opposition.” —**Allen A. Belton**, Senior Partner, Reconciliation Ministries, Breakthrough Partners

“We hear much these days about the wisdom of staying put and serving in one place. This book shows how God gave Dolphus Weary a deep love for rural Mississippians and an abiding call to work for their redemption [through] some remarkable, gospel-driven community ministries [that] are deeply rooted in Mississippi but provide a model for ministry in impoverished communities nationwide. Along the way, Dolphus shares much wisdom on racial reconciliation, Christians’ public witness in America, and interracial partnerships in ministry. This is a wonderful book, by a great storyteller and wise leader. Do read it, and better yet, take it to heart.”

—**Joel Carpenter**, Director, Nagel Institute, Calvin College, and author of *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism*

“Dolphus Weary shares the God-given wisdom he has received as he journeyed out of physical, emotional, and spiritual poverty. This book is a must-read for all followers of Jesus Christ who want to know God’s heart for our broken world.”

—**Dr. Peter Menconi**, author of *The Intergenerational Church*

“From The Mendenhall Ministries, to Mission Mississippi, and now through the R.E.A.L. Foundation, Dolphus and Rosie Weary have lived their lives to bring God’s love to some of ‘the least of these.’ *Crossing the Tracks* is a personal story of commitment, as well as a practical guide to involvement, for those concerned about racial reconciliation and a calling to serve the poor. Buy it; read it; pass it on.”

—**Phil Reed**, President/CEO, Voice of Calvary Ministries, Jackson, Mississippi

“I count Dolphus as a close adviser on many subjects, including race relations. You need to invest some time in reading this book; your life will be richer for it.”

—**Scott Dawson**, Scott Dawson Evangelistic Association

“After reading this book you will feel . . . a need to reach out to the disadvantaged and share God’s love with those who may not look like you.”

—**Cheryl Sanford-Givens**, former board member of Mission Mississippi

“Dolphus Weary tackles the tough issues of racial reconciliation with a winsome, easy way that makes you think you are having a friendly, honest conversation on your front porch.”

—**Rick Langeloh**, Executive Pastor, Menlo Park Presbyterian Church

“Dolphus Weary, out of a lifetime of personal experience, speaks on race relations in clear, insightful, and thought-provoking terms, which will challenge your sensitivity to racial issues.”

—**Ken Nielsen**, former chair, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

“A pertinent page-turner. . . . The honesty, life experience, information, and insights presented in this book will encourage those who are trying to hear and follow the Lord. It will make us more aware of and sensitive to the contemporary issues of poverty and racial discrimination. BRAVO Dolphus!”

—**Lynn Kolowsky**, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship board member

“This is the story of life transformation that takes Dolphus and Rosie Weary from the emphatic determination to never go back to Mississippi, to the new affirmation ‘I Can’t Never Leave’ the place he once yearned to flee. . . . This is a great read!”

—**Dr. John Huffman**, former Head of Staff, Pastor, St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, Newport Beach, California

“As Dolphus Weary’s life reflects a stubborn faith and tenacious love, so his writing inspires you in the gospel to face great trials. . . . This book is a must-read for all caring Christians and especially those in the Christian community-development family.”

—**Scott Roley**, pastor, Christ Community Church, Franklin, Tennessee, and author of *God’s Neighborhood* and *Hard Bargain*

“I just put down Dolphus Weary’s new book, *Crossing the Tracks*, and once again—as with “*I Ain’t Coming Back*”—my friend has left me in an emotional tumult. I feel alternately comforted and confronted, encouraged and agitated, exhilarated and exhausted. . . . This book is not for the faint of heart, the racially sensitive, or willfully ignorant; but for those who love truth, who do not shrink from thinking differently, who value true transformation both personally and culturally, it is a must-read.”

—**Dan Hall**, President, On Course Solutions LLC

“Few men have impacted a state as Dolphus Weary has Mississippi. . . . This book and his life embody one of service, sacrifice, and successful work in the ripe fields of racial reconciliation in Mississippi. May these pages serve as a testimony to what one man can do in his generation and a living testimony for generations to come.”

—**LeRoy H. Paris, II**, CEO, Meadowbrook Capital, Jackson, Mississippi

“Dolphus Weary is a true hero of the faith as he takes us on his amazing personal journey of racial reconciliation.”

—**Dr. Kevin Lake**, Clinical Professor, University Southern California School of Medicine

“In a world filled with racial divide, Dolphus Weary stands out as an effective proponent for bringing believers together, living out the unity that Christ desires. *Crossing the Tracks* is a powerful statement on building bridges of reconciliation with others.”

—**Dan Busby**, President, Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA)

“I have known Dolphus Weary as a friend and board colleague for twenty years. This book combines the compelling experiences of his life journey with his uncommon passion to follow God’s call to facilitate racial reconciliation. He is eminently qualified to address the delicate and oftentimes divisive racial issues that others avoid.”

—**Paul D. Nelson**, President Emeritus, ECFA

“Looking for a book which details a Mississippi sharecropper’s journey to a leader in rural African American education, restoration, and racial relations—all based upon a humble dependency on Jesus? Look no further than Dolphus Weary’s *Crossing the Tracks*.”

—**Dr. Earl Godwin MD**, Albuquerque, NM

Crossing the Tracks

Hope for the Hopeless and Help for the Poor
in Rural Mississippi and Your Community

Dolphus Weary

with Josh Dear and William D. Hendricks

Crossing the Tracks: Hope for the Hopeless and Help for the Poor in Rural Mississippi and Your Community

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*To my wife, Rosie Camper Weary,
my son, Ryan D. Weary,
my daughter, Dr. Danita R. Weary,
my grandson, Lil Reggie, and
the staff of R.E.A.L. Christian Foundation*

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Foreword

When I met Dolphus Weary more than two decades ago, little did I know the impact he would have on my life and the lives of so many others. As I reflect on my relationship with Dolphus, I am reminded of the biblical passage in Hebrews 12:1–3.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress. And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish. He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy he knew would be his afterward. Now he is seated in the place of highest honor beside God's throne in heaven. Think about all he endured when sinful people did such terrible things to him, so that you don't become weary and give up. (NLT)

I heard about Dolphus and his book *I Ain't Comin' Back* several years before I met him, with many people encouraging me to hear

him and read his book. Well, I heard Dolphus speak, purchased his book, and even had him speak at my church, though I did not immediately read the book. I was convinced that all black people growing up in Mississippi had this dream of leaving and never coming back. I didn't need to read his book or any other book to understand the pain of poverty, racism, and discrimination. I had experienced it all. But I finally did read the book, and it gave me a greater understanding of racism and discrimination. The book also reinforced for me and gave greater resolve to my commitment to racial reconciliation and healing, as well as my commitment to help eradicate poverty in Mississippi.

I began working very closely with Dolphus in the early 1990s through The Mendenhall Ministry (TMM) with the Pastors Development Program, providing training and support to rural bi-vocational pastors. In addition to that work, we have been working together with Mission Mississippi for the past thirteen years to encourage and demonstrate unity in the body of Christ across racial and denominational lines so communities throughout Mississippi can better understand the gospel message.

Reading and understanding what Dolphus has experienced and sacrificed and seeing his continued passion and dedication to eliminate poverty, racism, and discrimination made me say wow! What an enrichment and encouragement for me, thus Hebrews 12:1-3.

It doesn't end here. Dolphus has written a new book entitled *Crossing the Tracks: Hope for the Hopeless and Help for the Poor in Rural Mississippi and Your Community*. At least that's what he is calling it. I call it *The Rest of the Story!* The reason for telling the rest of the story is because of the continuing work that Dolphus returned to Mississippi to do and how it is impacting his life, his

family, and the greater community not only in Simpson County, Mississippi, but throughout the state, the nation, and the world.

Dolphus moves us forward in the right direction as only Dolphus can do in his *passionate* and *compassionate* way while dealing with some of the most controversial topics, including racial reconciliation, affirmative action, the sin of silence, and leveling the playing field. He challenges us to become bridge builders, better parents and grandparents, and to give more and do more individually right where we are. He does a wonderful job of not only encouraging us to celebrate all the miracles and accomplishments that God has done to overcome poverty, racism, and discrimination; he also helps us with the *why* and *how* of celebrating.

Again, it doesn't stop here—Dolphus gives us some of the “how tos” of moving forward with strategies and practical applications that work.

Both of Dolphus's books have really inspired me, motivated me, and challenged me, as well as enhanced and enriched my life, my family's lives, and the lives of so many others.

But the greater blessing for me has been the opportunity of working with Dolphus, growing with him, and having him as a friend and mentor. By now you probably have figured out that Dolphus Weary is my hero! Now my challenge to you is to read the book, get the vision, and go do the rest of the work and become someone's hero today.

NEDDIE WINTERS
President, Mission Mississippi
Pastor, Voice of Calvary Fellowship Church

Acknowledgments

My mother, Lucille Granderson, was married three times—
one of which was to my father, Albert Weary—and out of
the marriages she mothered ten children. I owe a lot to her.

My siblings have inspired me as well. Elgia Weary Clayton was the first to go to college, and she taught school for forty years. Melvin Weary was the smartest in our family and gave so much to all of us. Kathy Weary Large was the first to receive a PhD. Patricia Weary Holloway got married out of high school, went on to college after having two children and got her master's degree, and has taught school for many years since. Virgie Craft Harris chose not to go to college but devoted her life to her five children. Billy Craft received his degree in accounting and became the finance director for our work in Mendenhall. All of my family have had a major impact on my journey.

Rosie, after forty years of marriage, is still a major encourager and driver for me. Then there's our children: Dr. Danita Weary, our daughter who constantly gives me reason to smile; Reggie, our oldest son who went home to be with the Lord in 2004; Ryan, our baby son who's the gifted one in our family and is working to determine

how God wants him to use his gifts; and last but not the least, our grandson, Reginald Malik, who keeps us young.

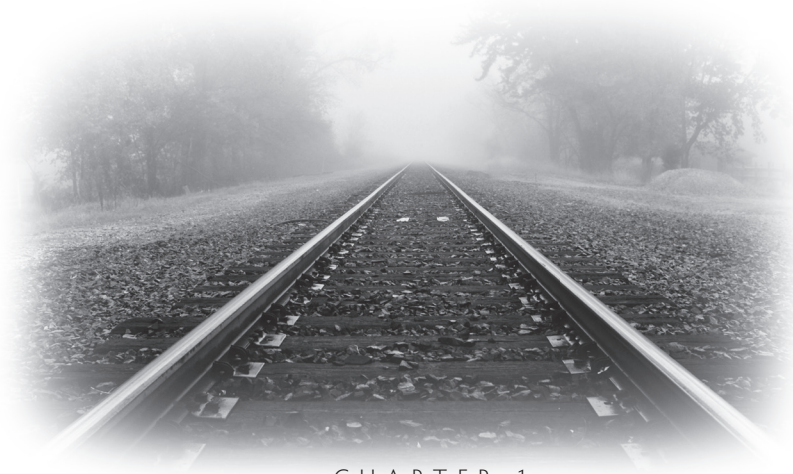
During the early days of this book's development, Tina McKinnis Womack gave countless hours to shape some of my original thoughts. Then Josh Dear became the one who worked with me in shaping the original manuscript. He interviewed a number of people, including Joseph Martin, Rick Cannada, Jarvis Ward, Charlotte Graham, Henry Joseph, Ron Potter, Thomas Jenkins, Gary Maze, Luder Whitlock, Roger Parrott, Elizabeth Perkins, Phil Reed, and Leslie Gipson.

Lee Paris has been a consistent friend and encourager, and Jasper Bacon, one who has followed my example, has been a friend as well. Bishop Ronnie Crudup is a growing leader in our state as a pastor and Christian leader. Victor Smith, John Perkins, and William Winter have been invaluable pioneers for me on my faith journey. Artis Fletcher and Neddie Winters have been my pastors who have engaged my life.

Those who have worked with me at R.E.A.L. Christian Foundation and Mission Mississippi have been great encouragers: Jon Elder, Virginia Chase, Linda Jackson, Otilia Sebuktekin, Cindy Cheeks, Richard Riley, Jennifer Lyles, Crystal Cline Jackson, Renata Scott, the late Charles Dunn, Grace Murrey, David Arnold, and Janet Thomas. And Dan Hall has taught me to see things from the perspective of a white Christian.

Thanks also to the family of my supporters, Vera Perkins, Hazel Hall, Gregg Chase, Marcia Reed, Jacqueline Crudup, Lisa Paris, and Tommie Winters.

And special thanks to Bill Hendricks, who shaped our final manuscript, and the Board of R.E.A.L. Christian Foundation, who allow Rosie and me to keep dreaming.



CHAPTER 1

"Thank You, Mr. President!"

One of the greatest honors any citizen of the United States can ever receive is an invitation to meet the president at the White House in Washington, DC. That level of recognition is exclusively reserved for historic heroes and world-class champions.

But in December 1991, it was not I going to Washington to meet the president. It was the president of the United States coming to Mississippi to meet me.

Me! What an amazing thought: “The president wants to meet *me!* Wow!” But it was also a stunning thought: “Me? Why me? What have I done to merit this? How could this possibly be happening to me?”

And so, as my wife, Rosie, and I stood on the tarmac at Naval Air Station (NAS) Meridian, waiting for *Air Force One*, my mind kept pondering over and over: “What in the world am I doing here?”

The simple answer was that The Mendenhall Ministries (TMM)—the organization I had been a part of building for more

than twenty years to address the needs of the poor in rural Mendonhall, Mississippi—was being honored with a Point of Light Award by President George H. W. Bush.

When President Bush came into office in 1988, he wanted to move people away from the idea that the government should be the answer to every problem. He believed that all too often Americans respond to their needs by saying, “The government should take care of that.” Instead, he wanted people to start taking responsibility themselves for what was going on (or not going on) in their local communities. He especially wanted them to get behind any efforts—whether Christian or not—that were already making a significant difference in the social sector, and yet doing so without the assistance of government funding.

To give leadership to that initiative, Mr. Bush established the Thousand Points of Light campaign. The idea was to single out worthy individuals and organizations for presidential recognition as a Daily Point of Light.

To that end the White House solicited representatives from every state to recommend local groups that deserved to be considered for the Points of Light list. Then members of the president’s administrative team fanned out across the country to follow up on those recommendations and narrow down the candidates to people and groups who were doing truly noteworthy things to improve their communities—again, with no government funding. The president would then look over the finalists and decide who should be named as a Point of Light.

As the president’s program was getting underway, I was serving on the board of the Voice of Hope Ministries (VOH) in Dallas, Texas. Kathy and Sayers Dudley had founded VOH in 1981, based on the model we had developed at TMM. While their work differed

from ours in that they were focused on the urban poor, the core needs were the same: education, leadership development, health care, legal services, overcoming racial and ethnic prejudices, opportunities for employment, and economic development.

The Dudleys and their team had worked tirelessly and innovatively to address those kinds of needs in a bold, intentional effort to break the cycle of poverty in the West Dallas community. All in the name of Christ and the gospel. All without a dime of government assistance.

Needless to say, VOH was exactly the kind of organization President Bush had in mind when he launched his campaign. So in 1991, VOH was designated as the 321st Point of Light.

The same thing had already happened for Lawndale Community Church in Lawndale, Illinois. Way back in 1982, Wayne Gordon, a young white pastor from the all-black Lawndale neighborhood of Chicago, had come down to Mendenhall and asked us a thousand questions about how he and his church might launch a holistic ministry to meet the needs of the poor.

Wayne's concern was whether a white person could be effective ministering to blacks. My concern was whether he and his team would stay the course long enough to see their effectiveness.

So I spoke to both of our concerns by telling him, "If you're willing to commit yourself to a long-term ministry and to live in the neighborhood, I don't think you'll have any problem."

That's exactly what Wayne did. He and his family became vital members of the Lawndale community, and everyone began to identify which needs to address first. In their case, a health clinic became a priority, and in time they opened one. Later came a thrift store and a recreation center.

To support their efforts, I began making regular visits to

Lawndale, and eventually joined their board. As with our own work in Mendenhall and the Dudleys' work in West Dallas, I saw firsthand what can happen when people's commitment to the gospel results in a commitment to community transformation. It was no surprise at all, then, that Lawndale had been named a Point of Light winner in 1989.

With VOH and Lawndale having received Point of Light Awards, I suppose it was only a matter of time before a couple of people decided to nominate TMM for recognition as well. Mississippi governor Ray Mabus signed the recommendation letter, which was itself a profound honor. Then in October 1991, I received a letter, followed by a phone call from the president's office, designating TMM as the 541st Point of Light. An official certificate to that effect, signed by the president, arrived shortly thereafter.

And so on the appointed day in 1991, Rosie and I drove from Mendenhall, which is south of Jackson, to NAS Meridian about two hours northeast to wait for the president to arrive for the Points of Light ceremony. Altogether, six organizations were being honored that day from the state of Mississippi.

When *Air Force One* landed, we had the great privilege of meeting the president and hearing his public commendation of our efforts. It was immensely gratifying, yet humbling, to know that out of all of the countless things that churches, nonprofits, community organizations, and dedicated individuals were doing to better our world, TMM had been tapped as one of those "thousand points of light."

So that's what happened. But that story alone does not fully answer the question, why was a sitting president coming to visit me? You see, I was about the last person on earth you would have ever predicted to end up being honored by a president.

The fact is, I grew up as a nobody in rural Mississippi. Or maybe I just wished I'd been a nobody, because then I might have been better off. The reality was, I was a black kid growing up in Mississippi in the late 1940s, '50s, and early '60s. If you know anything about the Deep South at that time, you know that growing up as a black kid in Mississippi was nothing short of a life-and-death matter. If poverty, hunger, and disease didn't kill you, racism, bigotry, or the Klan just might. I know, because it had already happened that way for my family: when my grandmother was a young lady, a man who was courting her was grabbed one night when he got off the train and was lynched. That was just one of more than five hundred documented lynchings in Mississippi before 1954.

You can read more about my childhood in my first book, *I Ain't Comin' Back*. You'll learn that I was one of eight children. That my father left the family when I was four. That my mother was a strong woman with strong character and was the bedrock of our family. That for a while we lived in a three-room "shotgun" house in D'Lo, Mississippi, that had no running water, plumbing, or electricity. That I began picking cotton almost from the time I could walk. That Mama treated our childhood aches and pains with home remedies like corn-shuck tea, spider webs, and turpentine. That Mama insisted we do our best at what little schooling we got. That we worked hard, and although we weren't expected to become much of anything, we would at least become the best we could be.

Mama kept us alive despite some very long odds. But not even the determination of a loving mother could overcome a system that was fundamentally stacked against us. By the time I was an adolescent, my mind-set had become firmly fixed: *No matter what I do, no matter how hard I work, I'll always be second-class here. The system is rigged against me, and I'll always make just enough to get*

by but never enough to get ahead. That's the way it is here, and it's never going to change!

Of that I was quite certain: *it's never going to change!* So certain was I that I hatched a plan, a strategy, a dream. I was going to escape! I was going to get away from Mississippi! I talked about it with my brothers and sisters while we'd be chopping cotton. I lay awake at night thinking about it. I held onto that vision in my heart as a flickering source of hope in what seemed like a hopeless situation. Someday I would find a way to leave Mississippi. I didn't know exactly how I would get out. But I swore, "Someday I will! And when I do—I ain't never comin' back!"

That's not exactly the outlook you'd encourage a young man to have if he aspires to win a Point of Light Award. But I wasn't thinking about winning any awards when I was a boy. I was just looking for a way to survive. My ticket across the state line proved to be basketball. Not that I had NBA talent. But I didn't need to. All it took was a basketball scholarship to a small college in Los Angeles, and I was free. Free at last!