

# TaylorFam365

"Connecting Family 365 Days a Year"

Volume 1 / Issue 1

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## WELCOME

We are excited to release the first edition of our family's newsletter, TaylorFam365. It's often said that you can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family. We hope the newsletter is a reminder that while you can't choose your family you can choose to stay connected. This publication is part of a larger initiative to help us stay in touch, get to know each other and share what makes us a family. TaylorFam365 is for everyone so we want you to submit ideas and contribute content. This will be a quarterly newsletter filled with articles, pictures and information provided by you.

The first two issues will focus on creativity and love of the arts. This edition gives us a glimpse into some of the talent that we have in the Taylor Family. Please share stories, photos and/or other information showing our artistic flair for the next newsletter.

We are family 365 days of the year so let's celebrate who we are and continue to spread the love for family shown by our ancestors. #taylorfam365

## BLACK HISTORY, AMERICAN HISTORY, OUR HISTORY

February is Black History Month, also known as African-American History Month, in the United States. While the contributions of black people should be recognized all year long, I see the annual observance as a reminder to all of us to embrace our culture, reflect on our past and consider our contribution to future generations. It is important to remember that our history is American history and it should be taught to our children. In that vein, I ask that you take some time this month to share our family's history with those who may not know the story of our ancestors, James Henry and Pennie Taylor. Information can be found on our website at [www.taylorfam365.com](http://www.taylorfam365.com).

## DID YOU KNOW?????? Family Facts

- James Henry and Pennie Taylor had 13 children.
- Dr. Velma Scantlebury was the first Black female transplant surgeon
- The Taylor Family has several published authors (more info to come in the next edition of TaylorFam365)



"I was born with music inside me." -Ray Charles



## **AN INTERVIEW WITH NIA THE SONGBIRD (by Candace Taylor Mukendi)**

It's so exciting to learn about all the amazing talent that we have in the Taylor family! I was able to chat with cousin Nia Simmons, a professional soul singer with a beautiful voice based in Maryland. Her speaking voice is very soft and graceful. Her singing voice is soulful and dynamic. Nia was gracious enough to share a bit about her life and talent, so that you can get to know her too!

**Candace:** Hi, Nia. Thank you for again, doing this interview. First, if you could just tell me what branch of the Taylor family you represent that'd be great.

**Nia:** I am the great-granddaughter of Samuel Taylor, granddaughter of his daughter Ernice, and my mother is her daughter, Camille.

**Candace:** Okay awesome. We definitely thought it was really cool and interesting that we had an actual professional R&B singer in the family. Could you tell me how you got started in the industry?

**Nia:** Well, music has been a part of my existence for many, many years. I guess I really took it to the next level when I attended Howard University as a music major, jazz studies and I minored in business. That's really when I took it to the next level and really got serious about my craft and being a vocalist. I also got a little bit into songwriting as well, and composition.

**Candace:** Awesome.

**Nia:** Also, I had some inspiration from my grandmother as well. She was a musician herself, a pianist for the church that I grew up in for many years.

**Candace:** Do you play any instruments as well?

**Nia:** I used to play piano and flute, but unfortunately, I made a bad decision in high school to quit both. I say it was a bad decision because I think of the money I could be making right now.

**Candace:** Ah, okay.

**Nia:** I could be accompanying myself at shows or playing for other people. That's just a lot of money that I'm leaving on the table.

Candace: I understand. Well, could you just tell me a little bit more about your inspiration? What inspires you to do what you do?

Nia: What inspires me really is just the love of music in general and just having that creative outlet to express myself. That's just always been something that's important to me, and just the rush of being on stage. There's just no feeling like it to me.

Candace: Do you feel like it's therapy sometimes to just sing?

Nia: It can be, yeah. In particular writing has also been a very therapeutic thing. Some of the best compositions I feel I've written have just been from living life. Things that I've gone through or that people close to me have gone through.

Candace: I know you're performing all over the place. Actually, I saw you just came back from South Carolina. I saw a post that you actually have a performance coming up soon in the DMV.

Nia: Yeah.

Candace: I'm waiting for those details when you post them, but how do you usually prepare for a performance?

Nia: Aside from the obvious, just practicing and learning the actual songs. Of course, you have the visual aspect as far as physical presentation, wardrobe, makeup, hair, all that stuff. Another important piece that I definitely have to get more in the mindset for now, is the business part as far as promoting the show. Getting the word out to everybody so we have people in the seats because without the audience there really is no show. That's become a huge part of the show preparation process.

Candace: Okay. Is there anything that you do to mentally prepare? Do you have any type of process that you go through?

Nia: No, not really. Sometimes I like to have a little bit of quiet time to prepare myself, but that's not always possible especially if you have lively, loud band members. Everybody's process is different but, yeah, the more prepared I am, the less nervous I have to be and the easier it is to go ahead out on the stage and do what I do.



Nia's grandmother, the late Ernice Fraiser Wimms, and her three children. L to R: Nia's mother Camille Fraiser Simmons, uncle Andre' Fraiser and aunt Donise Stevens.

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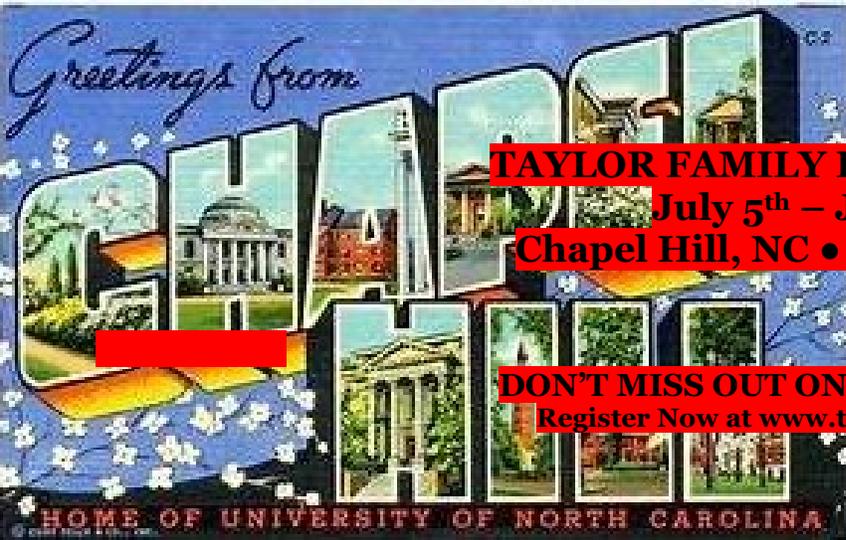
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*In every conceivable manner, the family is a link to our past, bridge to our future.*  
- Alex Haley

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## The Father by Charles Lee Taylor

Today we honor throughout the land,  
The one who took us by the hand,  
To teach us things we'd need to know,  
Like we should reap just what we sow,  
A FATHER.  
When problems came he always knew,  
Just what we should or should not do,  
No sacrifice was ever too great,  
He'd give you food right off his plate,  
A FATHER.  
Although his love runs true and deep,  
He must take care in order to keep,  
From sparing the rod and spoiling the child,  
Even though parenting may be out of style,  
A FATHER.  
He gladly worked from sun to sun,  
And hurried home when his day was done,  
Helping with homework, drying a tear,  
Solving our problems year after year,  
A FATHER.  
He helped each day to do the chores,  
He kept the peace between the doors  
Of our home where he taught respect,  
Walking upright and holding our heads erect,  
A FATHER.



**TAYLOR FAMILY REUNION 2019**

**July 5<sup>th</sup> – July 7<sup>th</sup>**

**Chapel Hill, NC • Pittsboro, NC**

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**Website: To book direct guests can also visit [https://www.hyatt.com/en-US/hotel/north-carolina/hyatt-place-chapel-hill-southern-village/rduzc?corp\\_id=G-TASC](https://www.hyatt.com/en-US/hotel/north-carolina/hyatt-place-chapel-hill-southern-village/rduzc?corp_id=G-TASC). The Corporate/Group Code is: G-TASC.**





**An Interview with Aisha White:  
Humanitarian, Businesswoman  
and Art Lover**  
By Candace Taylor Mukendi

I love having conversations with successful, intelligent women. When those women are in your family, it's even more special! Family, we don't have to look far to find beauty, success, and talent. We have it all right here in our bloodline. Cousin Aisha White proves it and I'd love for you to get to know her better. Continue reading for my interview with Aisha about her career in the arts!

Candace: Thank you so much Aisha, for participating in this interview for our inaugural Taylor Family Newsletter. Can you first let everyone know who you are? What branch of the Taylor Family do you represent?

Aisha: I represent the David Taylor branch. My grandmother is Mamie White and I am Harvey White's daughter.

Candace: Great! Can you explain to us the type of work that you do?

Aisha: I am a residency coordinator for a social enterprise and creative incubator. Social enterprise is a type of business or creative that focuses on social issues. These are social justice, or environmental, or global policy, or it could be human rights violations. They're businesses and artists that use their creativity for some sort of common social good.

My organization takes those artists, and entrepreneurs for either five to eight months and gives them space, time, and access to help them grow their businesses, or create the artistic practices or specific projects and grow them as individual leaders. And I coordinate the residency for the artists.

Candace: Wow. That is amazing. I had an idea of what you did but I didn't know it was that intricate. That's really amazing. Tell me how you got started.

Aisha: Well, I've always worked and volunteered at the intersection of business and humanitarian work and the arts. I went to undergrad in business and marketing. While in school I ran a nonprofit organization. I raised money for global poverty and then I've always been either an artist or a musician my whole life. Then working in the arts after graduating from undergrad, I decided to combine all three of them and go to grad school for my master's degree in Arts and Enterprise and Development, which is like an interdisciplinary cultural policy degree. It looks at the intersection of all three of those areas which is perfect for me. Then not expecting to find a job doing all three of those, I magically did after graduation when I finished the program in August 2018, where I started this job.

Candace: Wow. I heard you mention that you also are a musician and an artist as well?

**Aisha:** Yes. I haven't touched it in probably a year. I played the flute for about 15 years and piccolo for about ten years. I have a bass guitar, but I can't really say that I play that yet. I also do digital art as well. Mostly with like, rendering objects and building things in a 3D capacity if that makes any sense.

**Candace:** So, I'm so interested in everything you're doing because I also have a guitar and I pick it up-but I don't play it at all. One day I will get some proper lessons and learn how to play a song but until then it's just decoration.

**Aisha:** My dad and I are the same way. We both got bass guitars and we're like, "we're going to learn to play this together" and both of us have sort of done lessons on and off and taught ourselves things and then it's just sat in the corner forever.

**Candace:** I understand. So, tell me what inspires you to do the work that you're doing.

**Aisha:** I really love social-engaged art. It's obviously a great intersection of all of my interests but also I just love people who are passionate about doing good for other people-that's how I was raised, and both my parents obviously used their gifts to do something great for society and it's amazing to watch other people and help other people be great at doing that as well. I have never been like, an "on-stage" person, I've always been a behind the scenes individual. I've done stage management and theater, things like that, but I've never really enjoyed being in the limelight. I just really enjoy helping other people create things. I have a lot of passion to help other people succeed, which is why I've really enjoyed being in residency with this job. It's project coordinating without being on stage.

**Candace:** I want to get to know some of your personal interests-who's your favorite artist?

**Aisha:** Always going to love Kehinde Wiley. I just really deeply love his work. I went to the first retrospective of his work. It was in Ohio and it was my first time seeing his work in person.

**Aisha:** He does these amazing paintings of typically African-American males...but then he did the body of work on African-American females and not just African, just like black people in general. He takes historical Renaissance painting styles and does them with people of color and it's such a simple concept but he does it so well. Just seeing the work in person is so impactful and something about it just made me want to cry. He had these beautiful portraits of black women in these amazing queen-like positions and clothing, with like flowers in their hair, flowing gowns. He also did Obama's portrait, that's probably where you've seen him before.

**Aisha:** His entire body of work is amazing, I highly recommend looking at his older stuff.

**Candace:** I am definitely am going to check out more of his work, you have sparked my interest for sure.

**Candace:** You said that your favorite artist is Kehinde Wiley, but what's your favorite piece or pieces of art?

## CONTACT US

Candace: Nice. Let's get into some of the details. What are some of your favorite songs to perform?

Nia: I really don't have a favorite, it really just depends on my mood. I guess these days, of course I love to perform my own music that I've put out and recorded and written. Those are very personal to me, so it's always nice to be able to present those and hopefully get positive feedback from the audience.

Candace: Awesome, awesome. What was your most memorable performance? If you have more than one, definitely tell me about them.

Nia: Two actually come to mind staying on the subject of my own music. Performing my original material overseas for the first time was definitely incredible. In particular the show at the Jazz Café in London was really great. Full house, full of soul music lovers and also a bunch of DJ's were there that had been playing my music on their radio shows, so it was awesome to perform my music for all these people live and also to meet some of the people and actually shake their hand, give them a hug and tell them, "Thank you," personally, for supporting what I do. That was just a really awesome experience, something that I will definitely never forget.

Nia: The second most memorable experience would be when I was a background vocalist for R&B legend Regina Belle. I did that for a little over a year.

Nia: In 2016, she took us on tour with her to South Africa.

Candace: Nice.

Nia: We went to Johannesburg and to Cape Town. That was my very first time going to South Africa, or to the continent of Africa period. It was just awesome to see the appreciation that they have for R&B music, soul music over there. It's nothing like the US. I can say the same thing for the United Kingdom as well. They have a different appreciation and, in a way, a deeper love for our music overseas to me from what I've personally witnessed. If I have to pick two moments those would have to be it.

Candace: Wow, that's really nice. You're not only national, but international, so that's really nice to hear! Now, we talked about the memorable performances and your overseas performances. What about any awards or accomplishments that you've achieved that you'd like to highlight?

Nia: Let's see, 2015 I applied for a grant with the Maryland State Arts Council and ended up winning it. They called it the Individual Artist Award.

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**Nia:** The category that I applied for was “Non-Classical Music: Solo Performance”, so I ended up winning a little bit of money that I was able to apply towards completion of my album that I released that same year. The name of the album is, "A Songbird's Journey."

**Candace:** Where can we buy that album?

**Nia:** It is available digitally pretty much everywhere, iTunes, Amazon, Google Play, Spotify, it's there for streaming as well. You used to be able to get the CD on my website, but I recently sold out of all them. Which is good and bad news. It's only bad news because it sold out at a show and there were still people there wanting to buy them. I'm like, "Oh, I'm sorry guys." But, that just means I have to get more.

**Candace:** Yes, yes.

**Nia:** Those will be soon coming.

**Candace:** Well I'll definitely be buying the album after our chat. I didn't know where to get it from so, I'll get it tonight.

**Nia:** I appreciate the support, thank you. The other thing I was going to mention about my accomplishments is that two years ago I actually joined the Recording Academy, which produces the Grammy Awards. The same album I mentioned, "A Songbird's Journey," ended up getting on the first round of voting ballots for Best R&B Album.

**Candace:** Awesome!

**Nia:** I consider that an accomplishment as well even though, of course, I didn't end up winning the award but still.

**Candace:** No, that's a great accomplishment.

**Nia:** Just to get on the ballot at all. It's really an honor.

**Candace:** Yes, that is amazing. You sound like you have a breadth of experience in this area. I didn't ask you how long you've been performing.

**Nia:** Pretty much all my life. But, I didn't take it seriously to the level that I'm doing it now as an independent artist, releasing original music. That started in 2012.

**Candace:** Any advice for family members that want to get started in the industry? If they want to sing or perform, what would you tell them?

**Nia:** I would tell them, first and foremost, continue to hone your craft and to practice. You also have to decide, what capacity you want to sing in because there's various directions you can go. If you want to be a recording artist, like what I'm doing, or just a background vocalist, session singer, sing jingles, or even go the theater route, there's many different ways that you can go. But, just ensure that you take the proper training and do the proper research to go in whatever direction that you want to do and, network, network, network. That's really how I was able to get a lot of these opportunities that I've gotten. A lot of them, believe it or not, I wasn't really actively looking for. I just happened to be in the right place at the right

time singing. It could have been a church, it could have been at an open mic in the area. Somebody heard me, liked what they heard, approached me either for singing for their own show or recommending me to other people. And the other part, you just really have to make sure you have a strong work ethic and are doing the things that you should be doing so you can be recommended for work time and time again, over and over again. You have to build a good reputation.

Candace: Great advice. Lastly, could you just tell us about any of your upcoming shows or engagements that you have?

Nia: All right, well, the next actual confirmed show isn't really until April. April 6th, I will be in New York City performing with Big New York and the Smooth Jazz All Stars at the Triad Theater. It's going to be my first time in a while actually, performing in New York and be my first time at the Triad Theater as well so that's exciting. Then I have an upcoming gig, it's still in the works, on April 28<sup>th</sup> in Alexandria, Virginia.

Nia: More to come on that. Of course, as new engagements come up, people can always check out my website NiaSimmons.com and look under Events. They can also check out my posts on social media. I always post where I'm going to be on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. My handle is @niathesongbird on all of those.

Candace: Okay. Nia the songbird.

Nia: Yep.

Nia: When I'm not performing, then I'm primarily just writing and recording for the next upcoming project, my sophomore album.

Candace: We'll be seeing that come out soon?

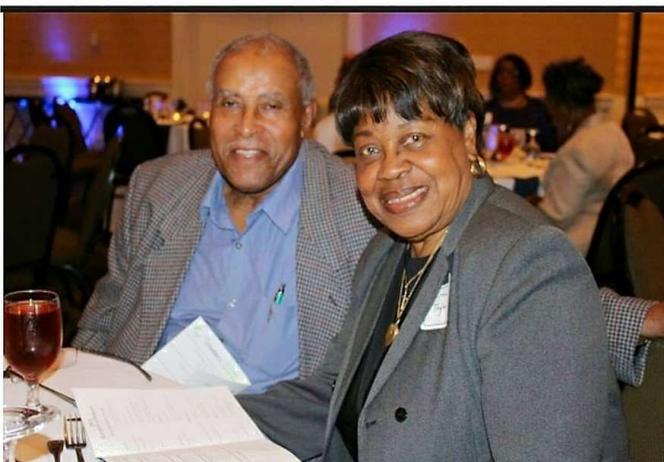
Nia: I hope so, budget permitting and time permitting. 2020 is the goal to have the whole album completed, but I actually plan to have a single out probably around the summer time, that's the goal.

Candace: Okay, awesome. We'll be definitely looking out for that. I'm excited to get this interview in the newsletter! Thanks so much for your time. It was great getting to know you.

**Since the interview the New York show has been canceled. However, the April 28th show in Alexandria, VA is finalized and will occur at the Carlyle Club at 6:30pm. Visit [www.thecarlyleclub.com](http://www.thecarlyleclub.com) for details and tickets.**

\*Note: I did buy her album "A Songbird's Journey" on Amazon after the interview. I love it. So, check out her music and support

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## Aisha Cont'd from Page 6

Aisha: That's a hard one. An artist that I currently like is Bisa Butler. I recently discovered her work and the reason I really like it is she takes the style of African-American cultures which is like a traditional thing for us. I was scrolling through Instagram and I saw her work. I thought they were paintings for a long time, but they were actually quilts.

Aisha: These really beautiful, colored, detailed textured pieces entirely made of fabrics and quilting stuff. A modern-contemporary take on historical art ancestry. I love it. I would highly recommend checking it out. But one of her pieces in particular, let me see if I can find the name of it, that she just finished. I don't even know if she has a name for it, actually.

Aisha: Yeah, but I can send you a picture if that's helpful.

Candace: Sure. Definitely.

Candace: So some more about you. Can you tell me about any awards or accomplishments that you've received?

Aisha: So I technically graduated last week.

Candace: Oh!

Aisha: I've been working for five months but my actual graduation ceremony was last week, which I didn't go to because I have a full-time job and can't take off for a Wednesday to go to another country.

Aisha: But, I got Best Dissertation for my master's degree.

Candace: Yes!

Aisha: And I also got "Best Student In the Entire Center" of Cultural Policy.

Candace: Wow.

Aisha: Tied for "Best Student" actually.

Candace: Congratulations. That is so awesome. So you got the award, and they announced it at your graduation last week?

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## Past Taylor Family Reunions

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Aisha: Yeah. They have yet to actually tell me this.

Aisha: So they announced it at graduation and all my friends were there and they were all texting me that I got this award for "Best Student". I think it's so weird but okay. It's England, I guess.

Candace: Yeah, I guess they do things a little bit different there but that's awesome, congratulations.

Aisha: Thank you!

Candace: So, any advice for any family members that would like to pursue a career in the arts? Whether that's the visual arts or music?

Aisha: Yes. On the admin side, working in the arts is great because it allows you to never be bored because most nonprofits have you working multiple jobs at once. You get a lot of experience early on. Which means you're able to move up very quickly because you already know so much. There's never a shortage of positions for a really good arts administrator so if you're organized, I highly recommend that.

Aisha: For artists? Of any kind, either visual, performance or musicians I recommend beefing up your business skills and I see artists come through residency programs that I have run and that's probably something that they're always lacking. Communication and business skills, writing and presenting themselves and organizing themselves.

Candace: That's some great advice and I'm actually hearing a pattern. In speaking to other artists and creatives, I've heard them stress the importance of business skills as well. I wasn't expecting you all to emphasize "business skills" when giving advice about the industry, so this is really interesting.

Aisha: It's important, yes.

Candace: The last question that I have for you is this: Can you tell us about any upcoming events or engagements that you have?

Candace: Anything that your organization is having, or that you're in charge of, it doesn't matter. Whatever you're associated with. What's coming up?



Aisha: One that my mom has, a book signing coming up in February. I think it's February first. And then outside of that, my organization, the residency that I manage has applications open February 14th so, if you know any artists that are socially engaged and interested in nine months of training, monetary support and housing support then totally send them my way.

Candace: Oh, yes, thank you for that information. And just so you know, I just received the piece of art you sent me through messenger and I love it- I'm staring at it right now.

Aisha: That's the Bisa Butler piece, isn't it amazing?

Candace: It's beautiful.

Aisha: That's a quilt, doesn't that blow your mind?

Candace: That's a quilt?

Aisha: That's a quilt, that's the part that blows my mind.

Candace: Wow, it is really beautiful. Thank you so much for agreeing to do this interview Aisha. I'm excited to get this interview into the newsletter for the rest of the family to get to know you better. I'll be in touch, but I will see you at the reunion in July!

\*Note: Aisha is planning to attend the 2019 Taylor Reunion in NC, so make sure to say hi when you see her!

