

A Mississippi icon's family traditions

By Meredith C. McGee
Jackson Advocate Contributing Writer

James Howard and Judy Alsobrooks Meredith are retired and active grandparents, who live in the Fondren Community where scenes from *The Help* were filmed.

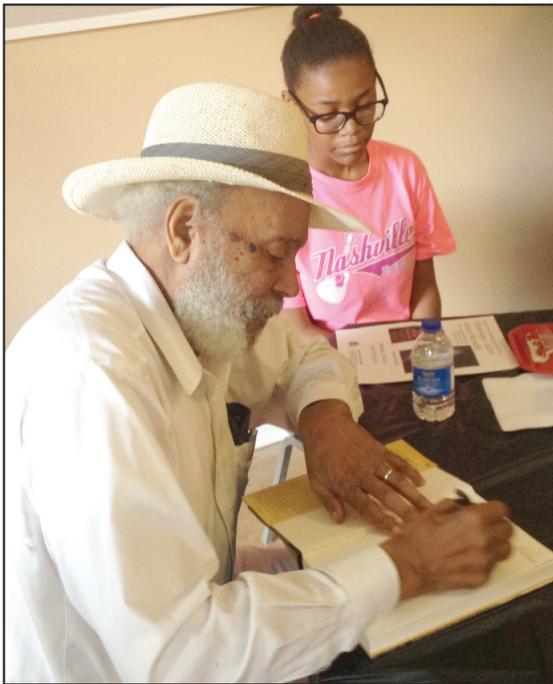
Relaxing in his recliner in the middle of the family room wearing a white cotton shirt, and white pants with his Ole Miss baseball cap tossed to the side, James watched the world news.

Judy sat in the corner of the couch with her 6 year old grandson James Howard, known as Baby James, who was demonstrating the features of a professional camera; the family dog Charlie, a Havanese, paced the floor going about his merry way; their granddaughter Janae was sitting on a loveseat entering data on a tablet, and their granddaughter Jameria was tucked away in her mother's (Jessica) old bedroom.

Janae recently graduated from the 9th grade at Jackson Academy. Their grandfather completed the 9th grade, 67 years ago, in 1948. No one on earth has helped Janae and her siblings with homework more than he has. James is a true "grandpa' dad," who has been on call transporting his grandchildren to and from daycare, special events, and school all of their lives.

Baby James graduated in May from pre-school. He will be in the first grade at St. Andrews Episcopal School soon. James is world famous. He integrated Ole Miss in 1962, and started the Meredith Walk Against Fear with a few friends in 1966. He has been to five continents, and has been an invited guest to a long list of countries around the world.

Judy said being a grandparent is different from parenting. "Our grandchildren consider us their playmates," she said



James and Janae at book signing

knew he met the woman of his dreams after becoming briefly acquainted with her.

They have a lot in common. "We both grew up in the Methodist church," Judy noted. They are both free thinkers who believe education is one of the key contributors of achieving the American Dream. He was the middle child of 10, and she was the only child. He has four surviving siblings, Miriam, Everett, Hazel (author of *My Brother J-Boy*), and Arthur.

Judy earned a PhD in Public Policy and Administration from Mississippi State University, a master's degree in English/Mass Communications from Jackson State University, and a bachelor's in Music Education from Lincoln University of Missouri. She is a Fulbright Scholar in Communications who traveled the globe participating as a journalist, panelist, and U.S. State Department speaker.

lect. Both James and Judy are published authors. His first work – a memoir, *Three Years in Mississippi* was published 49 years ago by Indiana University Press. He has since purchased the rights back. It was translated into several languages, and remains a popular book on his life. He is a tree farmer and a self-made businessman, who authored a volume of books and many works. His last memoir, *A Mission from God: A Memoir and Challenge to America*, was published by Simon & Schuster in 2012.

Judy worked 21 years at JSU, and just entered retirement in May of this year. She was formerly an assistant professor of Mass Communication, and the manager and principal developer of W23BC (TV23) known now as JSU TV. Her first book *The Glass Ceiling: An Analysis of Women in Administrative Capacities in Public Universities in the Deep South* was published in 2010. She has one manuscript completed, and is organizing the initial outline for her memoir. James will be honored with the first Mississippi Writers Guild Lifetime Achievement Award, August 1, 2015.

Judy taught music in the Indiana, Illinois and Iowa public school system. She is a classical pianist and organist. She charted a new career path, and became a TV news reporter, anchor, producer and assignment editor for WAPT in Jackson, WLWT in Cincinnati, Ohio, and for Mississippi News Tonight WDBD-TV, a state-wide program.

Some local citizens wonder how they missed Judy's reporting years; well for one, she used her maiden name, Alsobrooks, on air. She was known affectionately as "Ms. A" at TV23.

Judy recently introduced her husband, an awardee, at the Annual April 4th Awards Banquet in Memphis, where Black Panther Party for Self-Defense Co-Founder Bobby Seale was the guest speaker. Her sister-in-law Mary Meredith said,

"Judy you represented the family well."

James and Judy formed a blended family with four boys 34 years ago. Judy brought the youngest son Kip to the family when he was seven years old. He and John are products of JPS, who earned college degrees. The twins, Joseph and James attended private schools starting with St. Andrews and graduated from Ivy League colleges.

Today Judy says, "John is a lobbyist; James Henry is an executive in Corporate America; and Kip is a public school educator." Joseph Meredith (James Henry's twin) passed away February 8, 2008. He was an Assistant Professor of Finance in the College of Business Administration, Division of International Banking and Finance Studies at Texas A&M International University in Laredo, TX. The only girl, Jessica is the general manager

overcoming the chains of yesterday, and the vision of becoming participants of our capitalist society. No ball or dance hall took precedent over academic excellence. An "A" was the norm. This dedicated dad was as proud as any when his son Joseph obtained the "Outstanding Doctoral Student Achievement Award" from the Finance Department at Ole Miss in 2002.

Mr. and Mrs. Meredith hope a new generation will reach their full intellectual and professional capacities. Their oldest grandchild, Jasmine, the only child of Joseph, is a freshman at the University of North Texas. She is proud of her school. But, she doesn't mind standing with her grandfather cheering for Ole Miss either.

The Meredith's 11 grandchildren live in California, Mississippi, Missouri, and Texas. The family attends holiday and other events with James Meredith



James, Judy, and Theodore

Jessica's children get to smother their grandparents more than the others who live out-of-state. They rarely miss any event centered on their grandparents whether it's a birthday celebration or watching their grandfather throw the first pitch for the Mississippi Braves.

Holiday meals are usually served in the south in a family dining room. Nana is not big on cooking. Teaching

smiling. Like his wife, James relishes his time with his grandchildren. But he demands respect, and even added a little bass to his voice when he issued commands.

On September 30, 1962, Judy became acquainted with her future husband through the evening news. She had not even become a teenager when Pres. John F. Kennedy announced through the only black and white television set



James, Jasmine, and Judy at Ole Miss game

of Jackson Taxi which her father founded with several local businessmen a decade ago.

Like his predecessor, W.E.B. Du Bois, James advocates for black males to become elite in society. Du Bois called for "the

and his family when possible. He is the famous elder in the family.

Being proud of each other's accomplishments is as much a family tradition as fine dining, fried chicken, baked sweet po-



Kalia, Janae, Kip, Jylah, Callou, and Jameira in Missouri

the grandkids how to make a pound cake from scratch is not a part of the deal. But, Judy takes pride in her homemade pizza dish. On her iPhone 6 Plus, she texts, tweets, takes selfies, edits videos, and rocks very well in the modern tech world. Her husband owns a flip phone, and never enters data on any devise.

her family owned that James Meredith, a Negro, was in residence at the University of Mississippi, an all-white college.

As fate often defines destiny, one evening in 1980, James met Judy Alsobrooks at the home of their mutual friends Tommy Williams and his late wife Carrie in Gary, Indiana. As the story goes, James

James Meredith possesses a juris doctorate degree from Columbia University, a master's degree in Economics from the University of Nigeria, and a bachelor's degree in Political Science from Ole Miss.

W.E.B Du Bois felt being an author was one of the greatest contributions of a man's intel-



James and Lil James at the Dallas airport

talented tenth" which he described as one in 10 black men becoming leaders in the world. James called for the creation of intellectual giants. He raised intellectual giants.

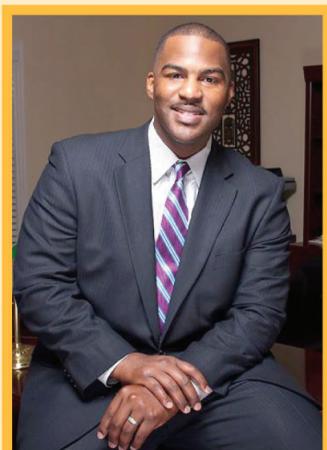
The twins didn't waste a penny of their private education investment. They understood the necessity of

tatoes, sandwiches, travelling, good grades, and Ole Miss football.

Meredith McGee is a niece of James Meredith, and the author of his biography James Meredith: Warrior and the America that Created Him, which is classified as a textbook. www.meredithetc.com.

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