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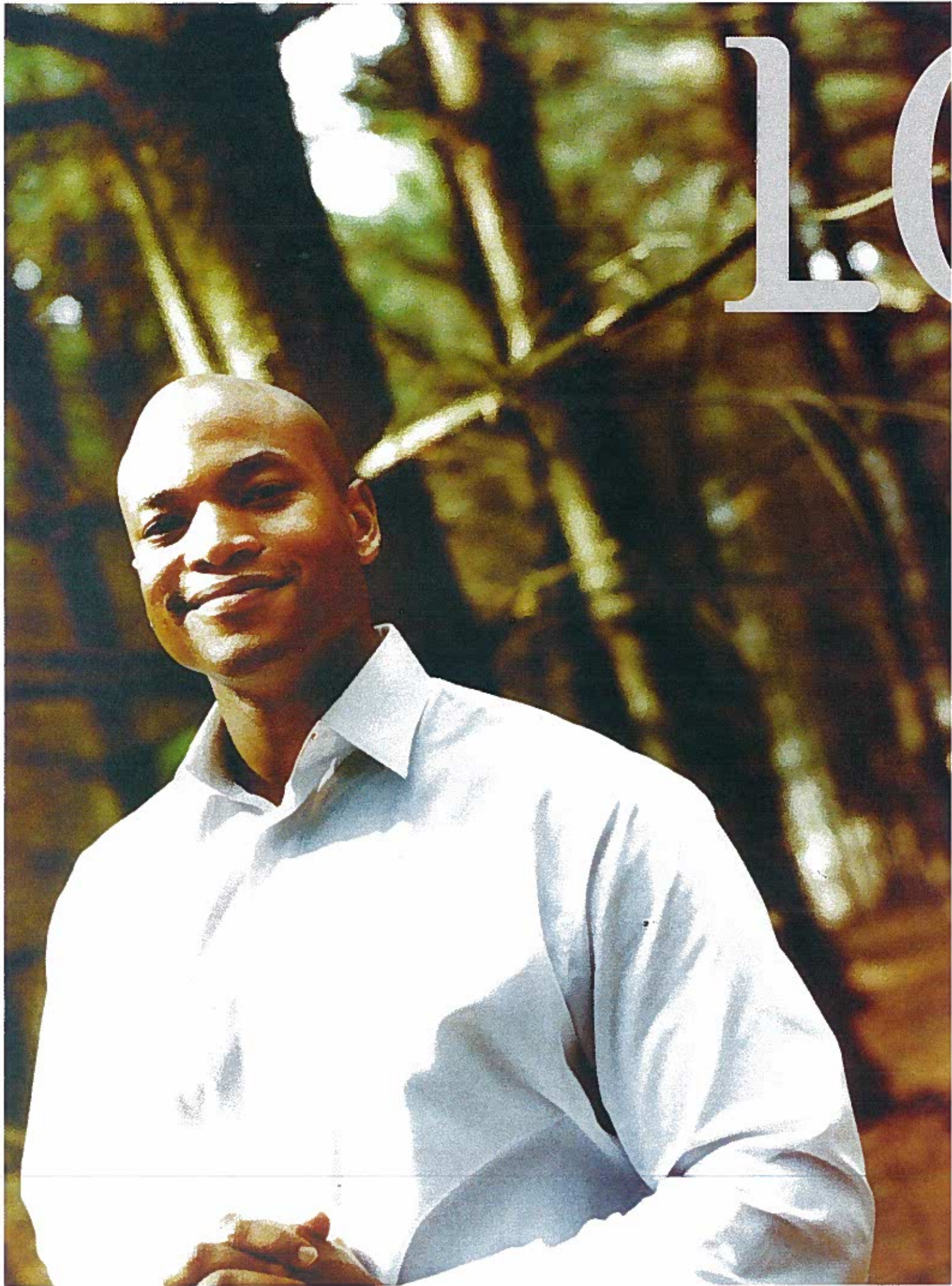
The Johns Hopkins University, Zanvyl Krieger Building for Arts and Sciences m a g a z i n e

The Path to Promise

How a lost little boy
found his way out
of the woods ... and
into the White House

Also: Suite Livin' | A Mathematician's "Aha" Moments

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White House Fellow Westley Moore '01 “walks with faith, not fear” with the help of family, friends, and teachers who say he’s sure to change the world. His path of promise wasn’t always so certain.

Westley Watende Moore had never really seen stars. Some kids growing up in places like the Bronx can get all the way to age 11 without ever noticing the night sky. Not until Moore got himself exiled to the Valley Forge Military Academy out in the Pennsylvania countryside did he finally see all the bright lights shimmering over the horizon.

By Jim Duffy

...and
FOUNDED

"Before that, stars were like unicorns in my mind," Moore says. "No, I'm serious. I thought they were imaginary things, that people just made them up and put them in picture books."

That's kind of how he regarded military school, too, as a game of make-believe his mother liked to play. He saw the brochures she'd break out after reviewing his barely mediocre report cards. He heard the threats she'd make when he caused too much trouble. But he never believed a word of it until she went and did it one day in 1990.

Moore tried to run away four times during his first week at Valley Forge. His rebellion peaked the day his squad leader pulled him aside and told him what an annoyance he'd become and how the school would be better off without him. Then the squad leader handed Moore a top-secret map showing a path that led through the woods outside campus to a train station in Philadelphia.

Moore hugged that young man in gratitude. Come midnight, he said goodbye to his roommate and headed into the woods. But no matter how many times he checked the map, no train station appeared through the trees. After awhile, he started catching glimpses in his mind's eye of lions and tigers prowling in the shadows. Finally, he collapsed to the ground in tears.

That's when laughter rang out in the night. It came from that squad leader and a few other cadets who'd been invited in on the gag. They marched Moore back to campus, where someone made him call his mother.

Don't get the wrong impression. When Moore tells this tale over a cup of tea in a coffee shop near his home in South Baltimore, it's as comedy, not tragedy, and his voice crackles throughout with glee and delight. That

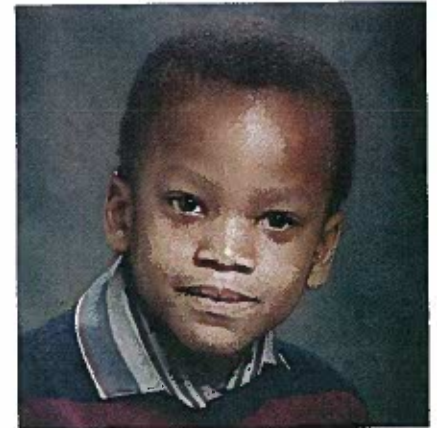
escape may have been a nightmare in its moment, but in hindsight it marks the start of Moore's journey out of the metaphorical woods of his childhood.

The path he landed on led to the top ranks of the corps of cadets at Valley Forge. From there it led to the U.S. Army, to Johns Hopkins, to a Rhodes Scholarship, and to a White House Fellowship. At Oxford, he studied the Islamist presence in the shadowy Tri-Border region of Latin America. He's had boots on ground in Afghanistan, and at one point he ranked as the youngest commissioned officer in the U.S. Army. He's worked for Deutsche Bank as an international investment banker. He's launched a nonprofit program to help inner-city kids. And he's been crowned by *People* magazine as one of the nation's "most eligible bachelors."

He's just 28 years old, and he thinks that his future might lie in public service, perhaps even elective office. Talk to pretty much anybody who knows Moore and the conversation will eventually get around to fantasizing about his future. These folks never seem to wonder *whether* he's going to find his way into some history book as a man who took a city or a state or a country or maybe the whole world in his hands and made it a better place; they only wonder *how*—and *how soon*—he'll pull it off.

But that story is still unfolding, and only time will tell how it turns out. The story that can be told in full right now about Moore's life is a smaller and more personal tale. It's about a lost boy who finds his way in the world with a little help from faith, family, friends, and teachers.

Just two memories linger in Moore's mind of the most important man in his life. In the first,



The death of his newscaster father when Wes was a little boy had a lasting impact.

a little boy rages over the injustice of being banished to his room. There's a knock at the door, a gentle voice asking permission to enter, and then the rage subsides at the sound of soothing, sensible words flowing from the mouth of a man who always loved playing peacemaker.

In the second, a little boy spins around, almost in unison with the mother at his side. Both seek the source of a sudden crash. Sprawled on the ground not far away is that peacemaker, only now he's fighting to catch his breath.

Moore was not quite four when his father died at age 32 from acute epiglottitis, a bacterial infection that causes inflammation in a little flap above the trachea. Untreated, that flap gets big enough to block the windpipe. The elder Westley Moore had taken himself to a hospital earlier in the day, but doctors had dismissed his discomfort as a sore throat.

For a while the family stayed on in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. There, Wes and his two sisters got a sense of the goodwill their father had built up while working as a TV newscaster and pitching in with community-minded causes. That first Christmas without him, the stacks of gifts sent by his

friends and admirers rose as tall as skyscrapers in the children's eyes.

"My husband worked in the evenings, so he'd be home during the day, spending all that time with the three of them," Joy Moore says during an interview in her home in Severna Park, a suburb near Baltimore. "Wes was very young, but I'm not surprised he has his memories. I believe that the two of them formed a special bond in the time they had together. I think that Wes' angst, his restlessness, his searching, whatever it was he was going through, it was always about trying to deal with that loss."

Eventually, the family moved to the Bronx so they could be closer to Joy Moore's relatives. Her two brothers and her parents pitched in to help raise the kids while she worked as many as three jobs at a time so she could send the children to good schools. She enrolled her son at Riverdale Country School, a top-of-the-line college prep.

The stories Wes Moore has to tell about his Riverdale days are not happy ones. He was seven or eight the time he and a classmate got into a verbal skirmish of the your-momma-this-oh-yeah-well-your-momma-that variety. It ended with the other kid saying, "Your dad didn't like you at all, and that's why he went and died!"

"I still remember that kid; his name was Steve Booth," Moore says. "I wanted to knock him out so bad. I ended up crying uncontrollably for a long time. It got bad enough that they had to call my mother to come in from work."

How does a son get to know a father he loves but barely remembers? Moore studied old pictures, like the one of his father teaching his noodle-

armed boy to swim. He pored over old newspaper clippings about his father's TV career. He read the poems his father wrote for his children. He listened intently whenever a relative or friend shared an anecdote.

Eventually, he gained some sense of the complexities of the journey his father made in life, especially coming as he did from a family that endured its share of alcohol and drug addictions. "My mother told me once that



"I believe that the two of them formed a special bond in the time they had together," says Joy Moore, of her husband and son. "I think that Wes' angst, his restlessness ... it was always about trying to deal with that loss."

the reason my father worked so hard at making everything right with his own family was that it was his mission in life to create a different kind of family environment than the one he grew up in," Moore says.

And what, in the end, do such revelations add up to for children left behind?

"Me and my sisters, I guess we feel that God must have taken him for a reason," Moore says. "Maybe He felt that my father had done his job in life. Maybe his job in life was to create our family and to create us. That's why we take it so seriously, this feeling that we need to make sure we accomplish in life what we need to accomplish. It's in order for him to not have died in vain."

Moore pauses for a long moment. "Maybe that seems strange, an odd way to look at things," he continues, "but we feel such a passion to make him proud. I think about it sometimes, how I'm just a little more than three years away from reaching the age when he died. It makes me feel like I have to speed up. Impatience is a big flaw of mine, and I think it has to do with this feeling inside me that tomorrow is something you're never guaranteed."

Wes Moore tries not to make too much of his youthful troubles. The fact is, countless kids grow up with less than he had and go through worse than he did, and plenty of them manage to grow up and

do just fine by themselves and their families. But Moore doesn't want to make too little of his troubles, either, not while there are too many kids out there who never really find their way, and not while there are people out there who maybe could use a little reminder of the power they have to influence young lives that cross their paths.

"There's a reason my life has evolved the way it has," he says. "It's because of the people who came in and helped me at those strategic moments where there was a fork in the road. Needless to say, the most

prayerful time spent communing with the memory of her late husband: "What would he do if he were here?"

Then she turned to her family, not just for advice but also for the financial help she needed. Her parents took out a second mortgage on their home to help pay the tuition at Valley Forge.

Joy Moore likes to joke that Wes was "a good kid who had a great way of hiding it." He could have earned A's, but instead was happy with C's. He should have been grateful for a strong middle-class upbringing, but instead coveted glitzy diversions like the Sega Genesis video-game consoles that all the other kids at Riverdale Country had.

By age 10 Moore was a handful—cutting classes, pulling pranks, and disrespecting teachers. "It was the usual delinquency stuff," he says. "It's the same thing you see today with kids here in Baltimore and in any city. It starts with acting out in class, but there's a good chance it'll progress to petty theft and hanging out on the street corner and get worse from there."

That progression is personified in Moore's mind by an older boy named Deshawn who went to the public school in his neighborhood. The girls all swooned over Deshawn, and he was a talented basketball player. Working for neighborhood drug dealers gave him an aura of boldness and danger.

Of course, Moore had lots of better role models to choose from. His uncle worked in the pharmaceuticals industry. His grandfather was the first-ever black minister in the Dutch Reformed Church (his motto in life—"Walk with faith, not fear"—is one that Moore has sort of adopted as his own now).

But 11-year-old boys aren't trying to figure out how to behave like upstanding adults; they're striving to become teenagers and aching to win the respect and affection of their peers

in the process. Those are things the Deshawns of the world too often get in abundance.

"He was the coolest dude I knew," Moore says. "Me and all my friends, we all wanted to be just like him. He's in prison now, doing 15 years. Some of my old friends ended up going down that route, too."

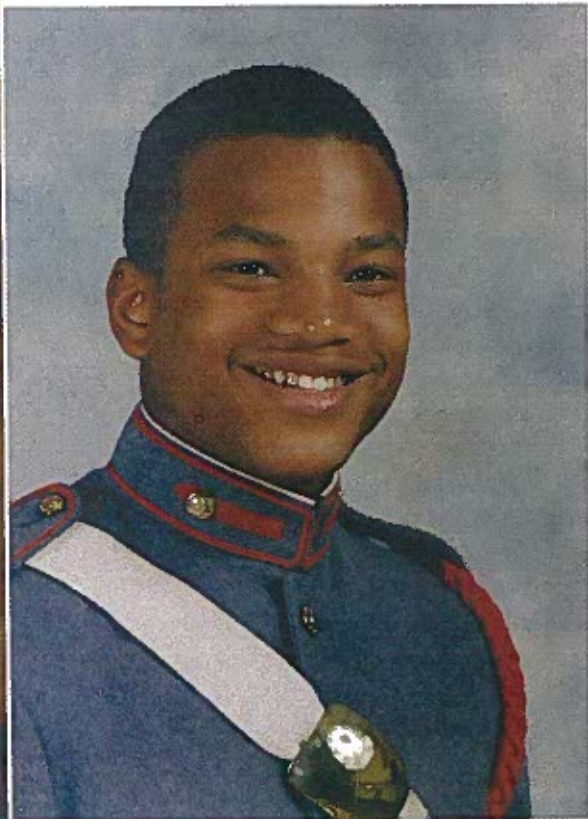
Things hit rock bottom at Riverdale when school administrators started hinting that it was high time Moore moved on to another school. He returned to campus once after leaving Riverdale to see a friend. Later, that friend told Moore how Riverdale's dean of students had pulled him aside and warned him to stay away from "that kid" unless he wanted to end up where that kid was headed: jail.

A lot of years have passed since then, but Moore still shakes his head in wonder over this. How could a professional educator say that about an 11-year-old boy? Even if that boy had done his part to earn a one-way ticket to military school?

There are negative inspirations in young lives as well as positive ones. Perhaps that dean of students deserves a bit of the credit for the way Moore worked so hard while at Hopkins to launch the nonprofit STAND (Students Taking a New Direction), which trains mentors and then matches them with young offenders caught up in the juvenile justice system. It still operates on campus today.

"I know what it's like to have someone give up on you," Moore says.

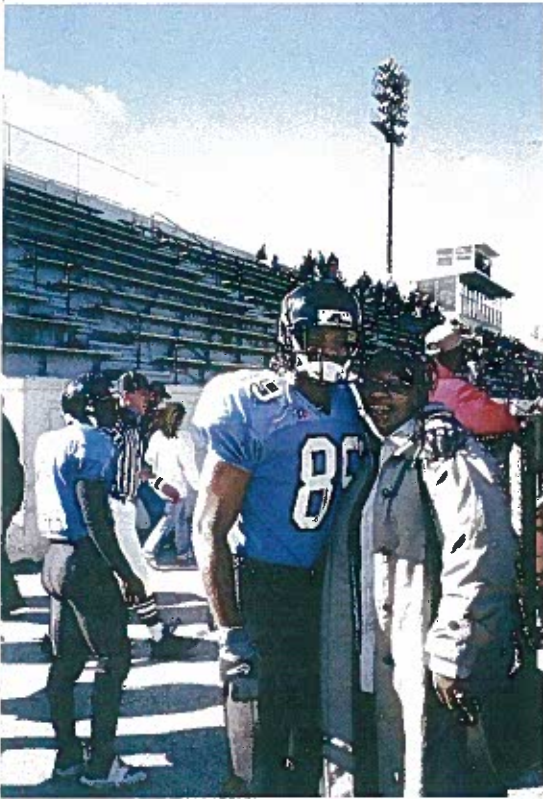
Moore is a tall, muscular man who carries himself with the confidence of a star athlete; in fact, he did play basketball in high school and football at Hopkins. So it's a surprise to hear Latyrus Hill describe Moore as "the tiniest 11-year-old boy



Though his first year at Valley Forge was rocky, Moore stuck it out—and ultimately "found ways to turn opportunities into gold."

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Shipping her boy off to military school wasn't a step Joy Moore took all alone. She paused first for some



Wes with mom, Joy Moore, at a Hopkins football game.

I've ever seen." He remembers the oversized uniform they gave Moore when he got to Valley Forge; it hung so loose that it looked like a military version of swaddling clothes.

A cadet himself back then, Hill was in the room when Moore called his mother the night of his ill-fated flight into the woods. "At first Wes just kept screaming over and over into the phone how he wanted to go back home," he recalls. "But there came a point when he got real quiet, and he started to listen. I don't want to say he woke up right then and suddenly he was like Superman putting on his cape. But something happened, and we didn't have any more bad outbreaks from him after that."

Neither mother nor son recalls all the details of that traumatic talk. Joy Moore says she promised Wes that if

"There's a reason my life has evolved the way it has," he says. "It's because of the people who came in and helped me at those strategic moments where there was a fork in the road.

Needless to say, the most important one out of all of them is my mother."

he'd just try his best until the end of the school year, she'd let him come home for keeps. Wes Moore remembers there was something in the way his mother screamed, "Stop! Listen!" that made him do just that.

Afterward, he decided to give Valley Forge a fair try. Over the next few weeks, Moore got an introduction to the concepts of discipline and accountability at the heart of a military-school education.

"Back in the Bronx I could always make excuses," he says. "'Oh, my father's not around.' 'Oh, I'm not in the best neighborhood.' 'Oh, this,' and 'oh, that.'"

At Valley Forge, it didn't matter where he'd come from or what he'd done in the past or what his excuse was this time around. All that mattered was whether he did the task. If he did, he'd win a measure of praise and affirmation.

"I look back on it now and one thing this taught me about life is that when you're a kid it's actually easier to do well than it is to do poorly," Moore says. "It's basically a simple game: Listen to what they say and do what they ask. Most of the time, they're not asking you to do something you can't do."

He soon found that most of his new schoolmates held the Deshawns of the world in contempt. His fellow cadets didn't see anything weak or wrong about excelling in school. In fact, the older boy they all wanted to emulate was Letyrus Hill. One of just a handful of African-American cadets at Valley Forge, he'd risen through ranks to become a company commander.

"He was built, so big and so strong," Moore says. "He wore his hat down real low, and he had this deep, commanding voice. He was eight years older than me, and I knew right away that he was the coolest, most intimidating man I'd ever seen. Every time we were in formation I just loved to watch as that F Company would go marching by with Ty Hill in front."

Joy Moore had heard about Hill while making the decision to send her son to Valley Forge. She went out of her way to seek him out before leaving her son behind.

"I remember what she told me," Hill says. "She said, 'My son's new here. Now I don't want you to coddle him, but would you do me a favor and keep an eye out?' She looked a little scared, actually. You know how it is, her baby boy and all. I told her I would."

Hill served as Moore's official "big brother" at Valley Forge, and it wasn't such a bad job. "Even in his screwed-up running-away time, Wes always had a way of endearing himself to you and kind of stealing your heart," he says.

The feeling was mutual. Moore still marvels over how generous Hill was in the years to come with his time, his advice, his reprimands, and his friendship. "Let me tell you the bottom line," Moore says. "That man is a truly transformative influence in my life." In a small gesture of gratitude, Moore has asked Hill to stand among his grooms-

Among the White House Fellows

Established by President Lyndon Johnson in 1964, the White House Fellows program ranks among the nation's most elite leadership-training initiatives for young professionals. Its alumni over the years have gone on to serve as senators, congresspersons, governors, cabinet secretaries, corporate CEOs, Army generals, and university deans.

At 28, Wes Moore is the youngest of the 14 members of the current class of Fellows. He will work through September as a full-time special assistant to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. His responsibilities to date have focused on bringing more transparency and consistency to the ways foreign-aid decisions are made in the State Department. The Fellows program also includes a series of training and educational programming, as well as freewheeling off-the-record sessions with the likes of the president, governors, and corporate CEOs.



"I've seen leadership at a lot of different levels, but nothing like this," Moore says. "The State Department is so massive, and the burdens on Secretary Rice's shoulders when she walks in the door at 6 o'clock in the morning are so extraordinary. Sometimes I look at her and think, 'How do you do this every day?'"

Moore arrived at State as a Fellow just a few months after returning from military service in Afghanistan. There, he had a ground-level view of how foreign aid gets delivered and how State Department policy decisions are executed in practice.

"To go pretty much straight from the field like that to a job where I can see how those policies are created in Washington has been fascinating," he says. "I've tried to speak up at times and point out where the policies we're talking about might not work out quite according to plan out there in the field. I hope I've been a little bit helpful."

—JD

men this summer when he marries his fiancée, Dawn Flythe.

Following Hill's lead, Moore became a rising star at Valley Forge. He earned a tuition scholarship. His grades were perfect. He got elected president of his class. He won so many promotions in rank that he'd end up as corps commander, overseeing all 14 companies of cadets.

"That means he outranked me in the end," Hill says, "and I don't think Wes is ever going to let me live that down."

But Moore's journey toward adulthood wasn't simply a matter of finding a new role model. He also spent time during this period exploring his faith. He joined the academy choir and became a regular at campus ecumenical services. He began studying the Bible on his own, especially stories like Job that touch on the mysteries of God's will and the challenge of coming to terms with the fact that even in God's world tragedy can come calling

on decent men and good families.

And thanks to retired Army Lt. Col. Mike Murnane, Moore also found an opportunity to test himself outside the boundaries of his new military-school comfort zone.

Murnane was the sort of teacher who'd take cadets out to sports games and concerts on his own time. His classroom walls were lined with hundreds of books from his personal collection devoted to American history. That classroom is where Moore discovered his fascination with politics and public policy.

"Once Wes got over that little hump in the beginning, he became a very wise kid," Murnane says. "He had a sense for how to turn opportunities into gold, but it was never something selfish in him. He was a generous kid. He grew into quite a mentor, especially when it came to helping kids who were homesick."

One day in Moore's senior year of

high school Murnane suggested that he enter an oratorical contest sponsored by the American Legion. The challenge at hand was to write and deliver an original speech about the U.S. Constitution. The reward if he won was a nice chunk of much-needed scholarship money for college.

At first Moore begged off, but Murnane persisted. "Every day I'd come into class and he'd say, 'Have you started working on your speech?'" Moore says. "After I finally started, he kept saying, 'Dig deep now. I need you to think hard about this. Dig deep, okay?'"

The speech Moore came up with mixed personal, political, historical, and scriptural perspectives on the way African Americans have been regarded under the U.S. Constitution over the centuries. One Friday night, Murnane and Moore drove to a nearby Legion hall for the first round of competition. Moore was surprised when he advanced to the next stage. The next

week he advanced to the stage after that, and eventually, he found himself competing in the state finals.

“When you’re a leader at Valley Forge, you have to get up and talk—to your platoon, to your company, to your corps,” Moore says. “But this was so different, standing in front of a room packed full of hundreds of adults. These weren’t cadets. They didn’t have to listen to you. So to see all of them sort of hanging on your every word, that’s a powerful feeling. And to have them give you a standing ovation at the end, whew, that’s something, too.”

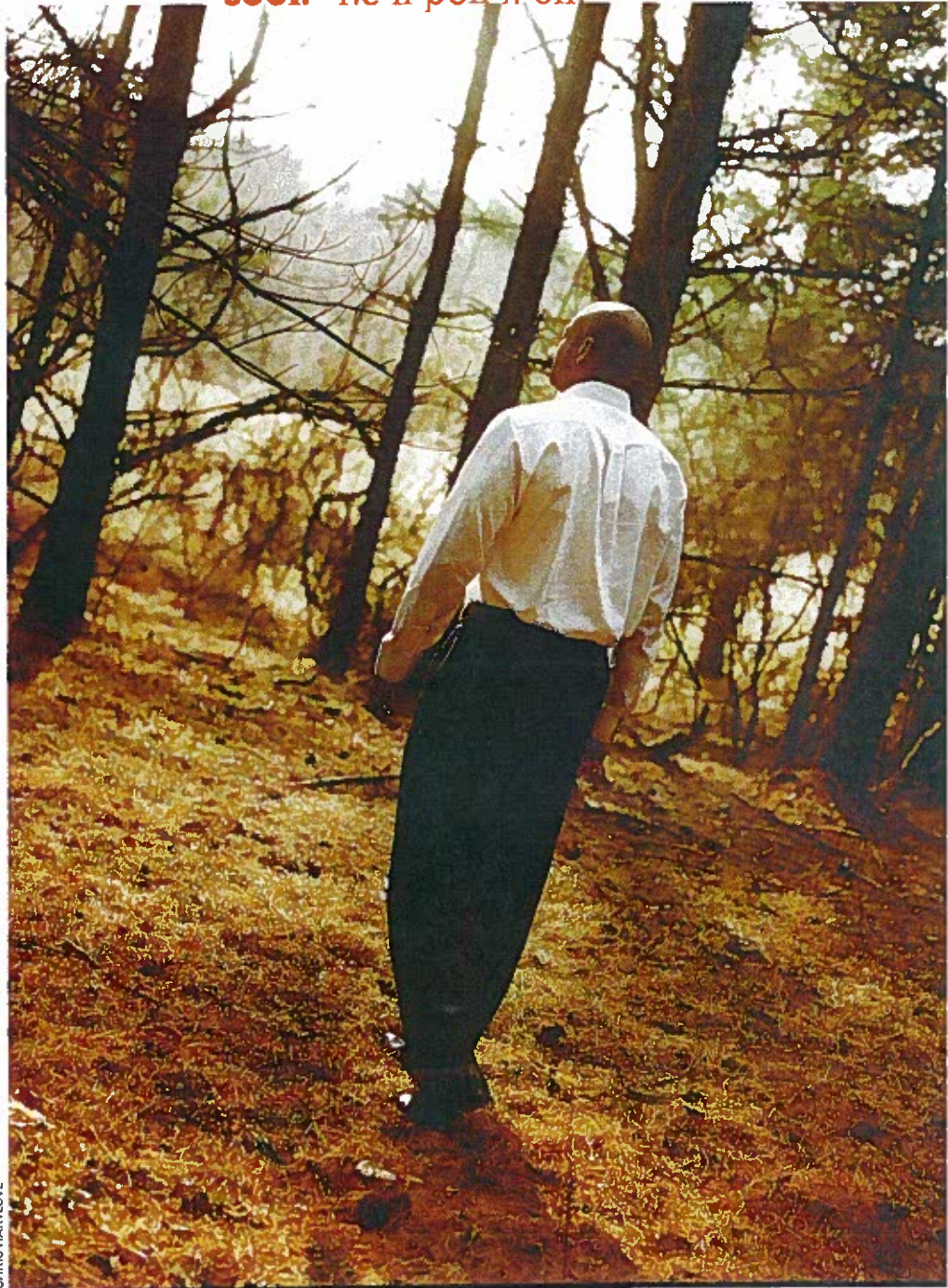
Joy Moore had made her move from the Bronx to Severna Park by this time, so she was able to drive up that night to watch her once-wayward boy hold an American Legion crowd spellbound while exploring a topic as complex and as difficult as the history of race relations in America.

“To see him that night and think about where he’d come from, it was the first time he’d put everything together,” she says. “When they called his name as the winner, well, of all the things he’s accomplished in his life up to this point, that’s the one that really just took my breath away. I think that whole process in that oratorical contest really helped define the person he is now.”

Moore made it to the national finals in that contest, finishing fourth in the country. He walked away from it with some of that scholarship money, but looking back, that prize doesn’t seem nearly as important as the way he also walked away with a sense that the possibilities ahead of him in life might just turn out to be as boundless as the stars in the night sky. ★

Jim Duffy is a freelance writer based in Cambridge, Maryland.

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CHRIS HARTLOVE