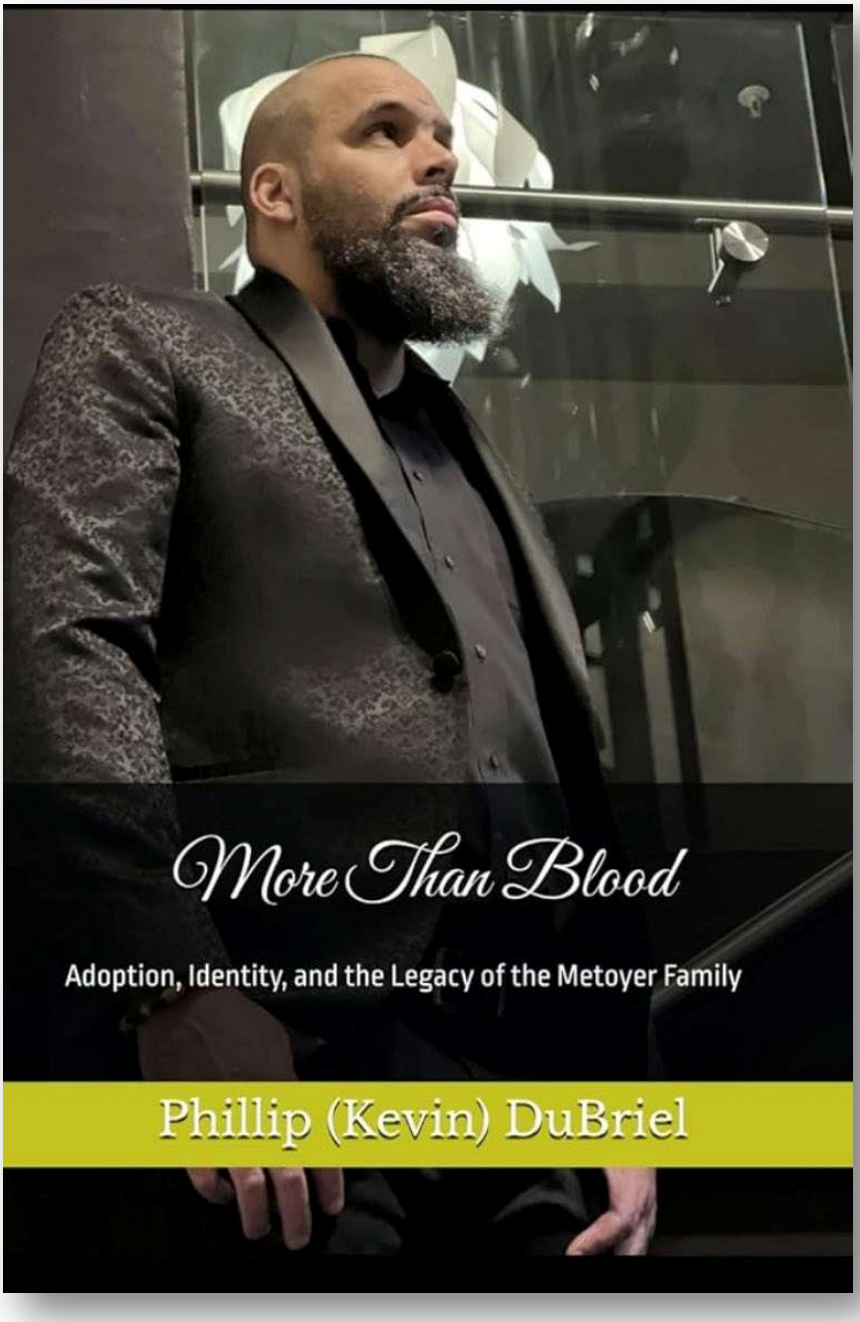
More Than Blood
Adoption, Identity, and the Legacy of the Metoyer Family
Phillip (Kevin) DuBriel

MORE THAN BLOOD

ADOPTION, IDENTITY, AND THE LEGACY OF THE METOYER FAMILY

Written and Organized

by

Maham the Mentor

ISBN:

A TRIBUTE TO MY GRANDPARENTS

Nay-Nay and Re-Re
Anthony and Maria Metoyer of Albuquerque, New Mexico

Before this story became mine, it was theirs.

Anthony "Nay-Nay" Metoyer and Maria "Re-Re" Metoyer were more than grandparents—they were pillars. Married for over 50 years, they built a life rooted in faith, love, discipline, and family. In a world where so much falls apart, they stood strong together.

They raised eight children with care and conviction:

- **Greg Metoyer**, the eldest son, a leader in his own right.
- **Marsha Gayle Metoyer**, my mother, the flame-bearer of our legacy.
- **Emily Metoyer**, lovingly known as Auntie PeeWee, full of life and laughter.
- **Anthony Metoyer**, or Uncle Tony, a namesake and symbol of strength.
- **Paula Metoyer**, my Auntie Paula, whose warmth and presence always made you feel at home.
- **Marty Metoyer**, my late Uncle Marty, whose memory still breathes through the stories we share.
- **Lynn Metoyer**, Auntie Lynn, who carries on the tradition with grace.

Adoption, Identity, and the Legacy of the Metoyer Family

- **Kevin Metoyer**, my late Uncle Savage and beloved Godfather—whose spirit still watches over me.

Every gathering at Nay-Nay and Re-Re's house felt sacred. The smells, the voices, the music—it was more than a home, it was a sanctuary. It's where I learned what love looks like in action. What resilience sounds like at the dinner table. What culture tastes like in every bite.

They didn't just raise a family—they built a dynasty. And I am proud to be a part of that living legacy.

Thank you, Nay-Nay and Re-Re. This book carries your name, your values, and your example on every page.

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Introduction

More Than Blood

By Phillip Kevin DuBriel

"Blood may define your ancestry, but legacy defines your calling."

I was born Phillip Kevin DuBriel, a twin—side by side with my brother Paul Kertis DuBriel—on April 29, 1977, in Los Angeles, California. But our journey didn't start with celebration. Our biological father, a Black man, was murdered on New Year's Eve of 1977—five months before we were born. Our biological mother, a white woman, died from a drug overdose just four months after we entered this world. We were left behind with siblings, scattered by the system. But we were also spared. Chosen.

At one year old, Paul and I were adopted by John Arnold DuBriel and Marsha Gayle Metoyer—two deeply rooted Creole descendants whose names echo through the history of Cane River, Louisiana. We were given new names, new homes, and most importantly, a new beginning. And that beginning placed us inside the living legacy of one of the most remarkable Black families in American history: the Metoyers.

I didn't grow up knowing what that meant. Not fully. I just knew our mother was proud and our father was loving and full of laughter. They didn't carry themselves like royalty—but they carried something regal in their spirit. As I grew older, I began to notice that there was something sacred about the name Metoyer. Something unspoken, but heavy.

It wasn't until I found myself with a lot of quiet time in Texas—staring at my past, searching for my purpose—that the full truth began to unfold. My roommate, a Jamaican brother named "Sixteen," pointed to a worn book in his hand, *The Feast of All Saints* by Anne Rice. "This name look familiar?" he asked, and showed me a passage that mentioned the Metoyer family.

I froze. That was my mother's name. That was *our* name.

That moment cracked open a door I didn't know existed. I started reading. Digging. Asking. And what I discovered was astonishing: a history of free people of color, landowners, church builders, visionaries. The Metoyer family had defied the odds—emerging from the bond between Marie

Thérèse Coincoin, a formerly enslaved African woman, and Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer, a Frenchman who fought in the American Revolution and later fathered her children. Those children became architects of a Creole legacy that still shapes Louisiana today.

The more I learned, the more I understood that I wasn't just adopted—I was *anchored*. I wasn't just saved from a broken beginning—I was placed in a purpose.

My life hasn't been easy. I've stumbled a few times. I know what it feels like to truly be a second-class citizen. I've had to climb out of pits others thought I'd never leave. But through it all, I held onto the values my parents taught me and the legacy they gave me. That's what this book is about.

It's about how legacy chooses you, even when the world forgets you. It's about how identity is shaped by who claims you, not just who creates you. It's about being more than blood.

This story is for anyone who has felt like an outsider in their own skin. For anyone who has searched for meaning in chaos. For anyone who has ever been adopted—by a family, by a culture, or by a calling.

I am Phillip Kevin DuBriel. I am Maham the Mentor. I am Metoyer. And this is our story.

Let the legacy begin.

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CHAPTER ONE:
CANE RIVER ROOTS

They say some places call to you before you even know their name. For me, that place was Cane River. I wasn't born there, but my roots run deep in that land. It's the soil that cradled my ancestors, where legacies were built and where I first began to understand who I was—and who I came from.

My grandmother, Louise DuBriel (Conant), lived next door to St. Augustine Catholic Church in Isle Brevelle. That church wasn't just a landmark—it was a witness to generations of faith, struggle, and resilience. We didn't live there full-time, but we visited often—especially during holidays. Christmas, Easter, summers. Every visit felt like home, even if we didn't live in that house. That church bell rang like a heartbeat across the river. It reminded us that even in a world constantly shifting, Cane River stayed rooted.

I was adopted, but never disconnected. My parents, John Arnold DuBriel and Marsha Gayle Metoyer, brought me and my twin brother Paul into a legacy that far exceeded biology. We were born in Los Angeles, moved to Albuquerque as babies, then on to Colorado Springs, Arlington, Fresno, Marksville, and finally Dallas. We lived in many zip codes, but our spirits never left that soil in Natchitoches Parish.

One of my greatest memories came during one of those holiday visits. Paul and I, being boys, found ourselves playing behind the church—in the graveyard. In Louisiana, burials are above ground, and those white stone

tombs looked like the perfect playground to our young eyes. But my grandmother knew better. She came outside, switch in hand, and reminded us of the sacredness of where we were. We weren't just jumping on stones—we were walking among ancestors. That lesson came quick, sharp, and unforgettable.

That's the kind of woman my grandmother was. Loving, firm, quiet in her power. She cooked like a seasoned queen and contributed to local cookbooks. Her meat pies? Legendary. You could taste generations in every bite.

And that's where my story begins—not just in a moment of discipline, but in the realization that even correction carries culture. That's how Cane River speaks: through traditions, through food, through silence, through legacy.

The Birthplace of Free Black Power

Marie Thérèse Coincoin was born into slavery around 1742. Her story could've ended there—but it didn't. She formed a lasting partnership with Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer, a Frenchman who freed her and fathered ten children with her. Claude fought for France in the American Revolutionary War. Marie, once enslaved, became a landowner, healer, and liberator of others. Together, they planted the seeds of a dynasty.

Their children were the first generation of what we now know as Cane River Creoles. Free people of color who not only survived—they thrived. One of their sons, Nicolas Augustin Metoyer, helped build St. Augustine Catholic Church in 1829—the first Catholic church in America established by and for free people of color. A church that still stands, still sings, and still claims us.

This isn't just history. It's family.

Creole Pride, Creole Pain

The Metoyers were trailblazers—but also flawed. Some descendants, after earning freedom, became slaveholders themselves. It's a hard truth. A contradiction. But real legacy means facing every layer.

Some say they did it to protect family. Others argue power corrupted what was once righteous. I don't claim to know every reason. I just know the truth matters. We can be proud and still be honest. The same bloodline that built churches also built systems of ownership. But legacy isn't about denial—it's about reckoning.

And through that reckoning, we reclaim what matters: resilience, wisdom, and the duty to do better.

A Legacy That Chose Me

I used to wonder if being adopted disqualified me from this heritage. I know now that it never could. Because I didn't just carry the name—I carried the values. I wasn't born Metoyer, but I was *called* Metoyer. And there's a difference.

My name was changed to reflect Catholic Creole tradition. From Kevin to Phillip Kevin DuBriel. From Kertis to Paul Kertis DuBriel. It was intentional—just like everything else in our upbringing. We went to Catholic school in Marksville. We sat in Mass. We walked through cemeteries holding hands. We learned early that life and death were sacred, and that being Creole meant you carried culture in everything you did.

And when my father died, I returned to that same churchyard in Cane River to lay him to rest. St. Augustine wasn't just where we prayed. It became the resting place for those who made us.

Home Isn't Always Where You Sleep

We didn't grow up in one place. But Cane River was always calling. It was in our cooking, our values, our music, our laughter. It was in the rhythm of my father's storytelling and the quiet grace of my grandmother's hands. It was in the way our family corrected us—with love, but firmly. It was in the switch, yes—but also the smile that followed.

Now, as a grown man, I see Cane River not just as a destination—but as a mirror. A place that shows me who I've always been. A place that reminds me that even though I was born into chaos, I was raised in legacy.

This is the beginning of that story. And it's only the beginning.

CHAPTER TWO:
MY GRANDMOTHER'S EYES

Before I ever knew what a legacy was, I knew the sound of my grandmother's voice.

Louise DuBriel (Conant) wasn't loud, but she didn't have to be. Her presence spoke for her. She carried a stillness that could fill a room, and a quiet strength that said, "I've seen things you couldn't imagine, and I survived them all." If Cane River had a heartbeat, it echoed through her.

She lived right next door to St. Augustine Catholic Church in Isle Brevelle, Louisiana—the oldest Black Catholic church in America. That alone says something. She didn't just live on holy ground; she was part of it.

When we visited her—for Christmas, Easter, summer breaks—it wasn't just a family trip. It was a return to the source. Her home felt older than time and warmer than any fire. The smell of gumbo and cornbread greeted you before she ever reached the door. And when you finally saw her standing in the doorway, apron tied, eyes soft but sharp, you knew you were in the presence of something sacred.

The Cook and the Keeper

Cooking was more than something Grandma Louise did—it was something she was. Her kitchen was her sanctuary, and her food was her language. She didn't speak her wisdom in long lectures. She spoke it in plates.

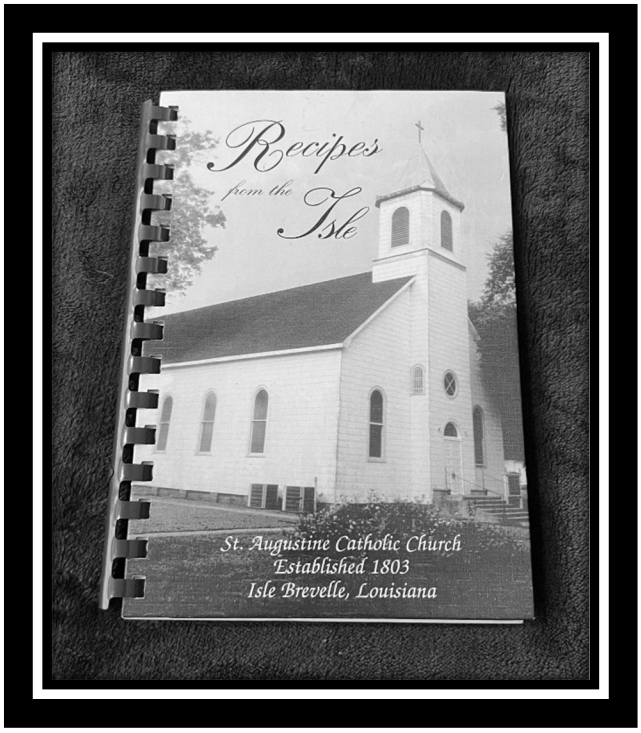
Meat pies were one of her most famous dishes—flaky, golden, and filled with seasoned ground meat, onions, and magic. My twin brother Paul and I used to sit at her kitchen table, watching her hands work fast but gentle. She'd show us how to fill the circles of dough and fold them just right, pressing the edges closed with a fork.

"Don't overfill it, baby," she'd say, without even looking.

"Don't press too hard, you gon' bust it."

It wasn't just about the recipe. It was about the rhythm. About care. About knowing when to stop and when to trust that something simple could hold something sacred.

She was proud of her cooking, but she never bragged. That's how I found out she had been featured in a cookbook titled *Recipes from Isle,* published in 1988–89. She didn't bring it up. I found it sitting quietly on a shelf, nestled between old pictures and a family Bible. Her name Louise DuBriel, printed on several pages. Page 17, 33 and 35. A legacy in black ink and red sauce.



Her Eyes

There's a reason I named this chapter My Grandmother's Eyes. Because in them, I saw everything.

Her eyes held stories she never said out loud—stories of struggle, of migration, of watching the world change and still remaining rooted. She had watched children grow and elders pass. She had seen seasons of pain and celebration. And through all of it, she held a gaze that never flinched.

I remember one day, after Paul and I got caught playing in the graveyard behind St. Augustine, she came outside like a storm. In Louisiana, folks are buried above ground, and to us, those white tombs looked like something to climb. To her, they were sacred.

She didn't yell. She didn't need to. One look. One switch. One lesson.

That day, I saw something in her eyes: not anger, but expectation. As if to say, "You come from something. Act like it."

The Link to the Metoyers

According to our family tree, Louise DuBriel (Conant) is my main link to the Metoyer family. That means something. It means the strength I saw in her wasn't random. It was inherited.

She came from the same line that birthed Marie Thérèse Coincoin and Nicolas Augustin Metoyer. She stood on the same land. She walked the same roads. She prayed in the same pews. She passed down the same sense of dignity that shaped generations.

She didn't talk much about the past, but her whole life was history. When she prayed, it felt like she was speaking directly to the ancestors. When she cooked, it felt like she was feeding souls, not just stomachs. When she looked at us—her grandchildren—it felt like she saw the future and the past all at once.

A Holiday at Grandma's

Holidays at Grandma Louise's were different. Time slowed down. Laughter echoed louder. The air smelled like a mix of wood, fire, and food that took all day to make.

The whole family would pack into her house. Cousins, aunts, uncles. Wooden chairs and Antique tables. Soul music. like Al Green came floating from the old radio. Kids running barefoot across the yard. And Grandma, always at the center, calm and steady like the eye of a storm.

She never raised her voice, but she ran the show.

I remember her humming while she cooked, her voice low and sweet. She'd open the oven and pull out pans like a magician revealing secrets. Sweet potato pie. Rice dressing. Corn maque choux. And always—always—those meat pies.

It was more than a meal. It was a gathering of spirits. A communion.

Carrying Her Spirit

Now that I'm older, I realize I carry her with me.

In the way I move through rooms with quiet confidence. In the way I protect family, even when I don't speak it out loud. In the way I pay attention to people, watching their eyes more than their words.

My grandmother taught me how to see. Not just with sight, but with spirit. She taught me how to recognize legacy in the small things: a folded meat pie, a story told twice, a Bible verse underlined in a soft hand.

The Widow and the Warrior

My grandmother was a widow. Her husband—my grandfather—Wesley DuBriel, died in a tragic wagon accident while hauling hay when my father, John Arnold DuBriel, was still a little boy. Life could have fallen apart after that. But not for her. Not for Louise.

She raised five children on her own: four boys—Wesley Jr., James, Lloyd, and John—and one daughter, JoAnn DuBriel. Each of them carried her strength in different ways, but it was her presence that held them together. She didn't have much, but she made enough. Enough love, enough food, enough fire to keep her family standing tall.

She wore the pain of loss like an old coat—heavy, but familiar. And through it all, she never stopped praying, never stopped feeding, never stopped guiding. That's why when we speak her name, we do it with reverence. Because she didn't just survive—she sacrificed.

Her Legacy

Louise DuBriel (Conant) wasn't a celebrity. She didn't march in protests or write books. But she lived the legacy.

She preserved the dignity of the Metoyer name by being exactly who she was. By planting herself next to a church built by her ancestors. By cooking food that brought people together. By raising children who would raise children who would one day write her name into history.

She didn't need a stage. Her kitchen was her altar. Her life was her sermon.

And I was listening.

The Last Visit

I still remember the last time I saw her on Cane River. Her body was smaller, her walk slower, but her eyes were the same.

Sharp.
Clear.
Filled with fire.

She looked at me like she always had—like she knew something I hadn't figured out yet. Like she trusted that I would.

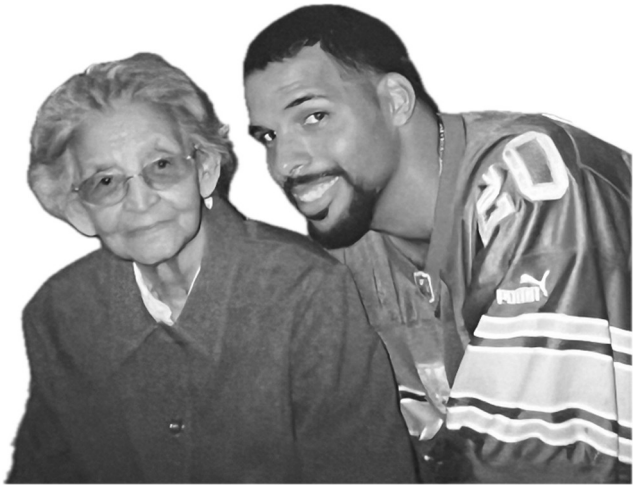
And I have.

I understand now that she was the bridge. The one who held the past together long enough for me to find it. The one who showed me that even if you're adopted, even if your life takes you across states and struggles, your roots will always find you.

She was the proof.

And now, I carry her in everything I do.

Her hands. Her spirit.
Her eyes.



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CHAPTER THREE:
BLOOD, LAND, AND LIBERTY

The Beginning of the Metoyer Family

To understand my story—and the story of any Metoyer—you have to go back to the beginning. Not just to a name or a location, but to a defining moment in early American history, in a place where enslavement and freedom, love and power, survival and legacy all collided: Cane River, Louisiana.

The Metoyer family was born from the fire of contradiction. From the relationship between an enslaved African woman named Marie Thérèse Coincoin and a French merchant, Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer. Their story wasn't a fairy tale. It wasn't neat or clean. But it was real. And it produced one of the most remarkable free Black families in American history.

The Woman They Called Coincoin

Born into slavery around 1742, Marie Thérèse Coincoin was owned by the St. Denis family in the French colony of Louisiana. She was a healer, a midwife, and a woman of deep intelligence. During her time in bondage, she was leased to Claude Metoyer, a wealthy Frenchman and trader in Natchitoches Parish.

What started as an arrangement turned into a long-term relationship. Over the course of many years, Coincoin and Claude had ten children together. Claude eventually freed her and several of their children, allowing them to form a unique household of free people of color.

Coincoin did not simply accept freedom—she built on it. She became a landowner. She farmed tobacco. She bought enslaved people herself (a difficult but historically documented truth). She used her wealth to protect her family and secure their status in an environment designed to erase them.

Her legacy is not without tension. But it is also unmatched in power.

Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer – Soldier, Settler, and Father

Born in France, Claude Metoyer came to Louisiana as part of France's efforts to expand its colonial presence. Though full details are limited, it is

likely he participated in France's military campaigns in the American Revolutionary War, especially in support of the Spanish-led efforts in Louisiana against the British. Whether soldier or merchant, he was a man of influence and standing.

But his legacy will always be tied to Coincoin.

In a society ruled by slavery and racial division, Claude crossed every boundary to form a family with a Black woman. Their children were not only born free but were equipped to lead. He transferred land, resources, and education to his sons, particularly Nicolas Augustin Metoyer, who would go on to lead an extraordinary chapter in American history.

The First Twins: January 22, 1768

Two of the most important children born to Coincoin and Claude were twins, born on January 22, 1768:

- Nicolas Augustin Metoyer
- Marie Susanne Metoyer

Their birth marks the beginning of a tradition of twins within the Metoyer family—a symbol of balance, blessing, and divine design. This tradition is reflected in my own story, in my brother Paul and me, twins by blood and by purpose.

The Rise of Free People of Color

The children of Coincoin and Claude became part of a growing class of *gens de couleur libres* — free people of color — who flourished in Louisiana under Spanish and later French colonial rule.

The Metoyers became one of the wealthiest and most influential families of African descent in the American South. They owned thousands of acres of land, plantations, and even enslaved people, which remains a complex and painful part of the legacy. But they also built schools, invested in the

church, and protected extended family members from being sold or scattered.

They formed a community of strength—rooted in faith, Creole culture, and Catholic tradition. And at the heart of that community was a church.

St. Augustine Catholic Church

In 1829, Nicolas Augustin Metoyer used his wealth and leadership to found St. Augustine Catholic Church in Isle Brevelle, Louisiana. It was the first church in the United States built by and for free people of color.

That church became the center of spiritual and social life for generations of Creole families, including my own. My grandmother Louise DuBriel (Conant) lived next door. My father, John Arnold DuBriel, grew up hearing the bells every day. I was raised hearing stories about it before I ever stood beneath its steeple.

St. Augustine is more than a church. It is a monument to faith in the face of racism. A living archive of what Black hands can build when given even a sliver of freedom.

Legacy Etched in Land

By the time Louisiana became part of the United States through the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the Metoyers had already laid down a foundation of landownership, independence, and cultural resilience.

While American laws began to erode the status and rights of free people of color, the Metoyers fought to hold onto what they had built. Some lost land. Others endured legal battles. But the spirit of Cane River never died.

Today, descendants of Coincoin and Claude are spread across Louisiana, Texas, California, and beyond. And that includes me.

I am not just a storyteller. I am a living chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: CLAUDE THOMAS PIERRE METOYER

Love, War, and Legacy

History is full of contradictions. So are the people who shape it.

Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer was one of those people. A Frenchman, a soldier, a wealthy landowner—and the forefather of an enduring Creole dynasty. His story begins in the turbulence of revolution but is rooted in something even more radical for its time: love.

A Revolutionary Beginning

Claude Metoyer was born in France and made his way to Louisiana during the height of colonial expansion. He fought in the American Revolutionary War on behalf of France, standing alongside allied forces against the British. It's easy to forget that France played a key role in helping America gain independence—and men like Claude were part of that effort.

This early commitment to freedom, ironically, would be at odds with what came next in his personal life. But war, like love, rarely unfolds without contradiction.

Coincoin – A Bond Beyond Law

In Louisiana, Claude met a woman named Marie Thérèse Coincoin, a formerly enslaved African woman of remarkable intelligence, strength, and independence. Their relationship, forbidden by law and complicated by race, class, and custom, endured for years. It defied every expectation of the time.

Together, they had ten children. One of them was Nicolas Augustin Metoyer, who would go on to become one of the wealthiest free people of color in Louisiana and founder of St. Augustine Catholic Church—the very same church where my father and grandmother are buried.

The bond between Claude and Coincoin wasn't sanctioned by marriage—interracial unions were illegal in colonial Louisiana. Yet, Claude made the conscious choice to honor their relationship, support their children, and position them for success. He even arranged for Coincoin to be freed, a rare act of agency in a brutal system.

Claude provided land, livestock, and formal acknowledgment of their children—a radical decision in a time when Black families were torn apart by slavery. And while Claude later married a white woman and had a second family, the Metoyer name remained most closely associated with Coincoin's lineage.

This dual legacy—of privilege and defiance, of slaveholder and liberator—is part of what makes Claude such a paradox.

Involvement in Slavery

Here lies the hard truth: Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer, despite his deep ties to a formerly enslaved woman and their children, owned slaves.

Even Coincoin herself, once freed, went on to own slaves—some argue it was a strategy for protecting family members. But regardless of intent, it reflects the disturbing complexities of that era.

Claude's participation in slavery doesn't erase his revolutionary service or his love for Coincoin—but it forces us to reckon with the contradictions of heritage. To inherit from Claude is to inherit a legacy of resistance, resilience, and responsibility.

He was a man who loved a Black woman deeply enough to defy laws but still upheld the very institution that oppressed her people. That tension lives in the DNA of many Creole families, including mine. And we must face it honestly.

A Legacy Still Living

What Claude began—the land, the lineage, the cultural identity—has rippled forward for over two centuries. His children, particularly through the Metoyer line, became founders of churches, schools, businesses, and towns. They laid the foundation for what we now call Cane River Creole culture.

This chapter is not about judgment—it's about truth. Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer was a man of his time and ahead of it. A man who both upheld and challenged the systems he lived in. He left behind more than property and bloodlines—he left behind questions, courage, and a story that must be told in full.

To understand the Metoyer family, you must understand Claude. Not just the soldier. Not just the slaveholder. Not just the father.

But all of him.

The contradiction, the courage, the complexity. That is the real inheritance. And it's one I'm proud to carry with both eyes open.

CHAPTER FIVE:
ECHOES AT MELROSE
FINDING OUR FACES IN HISTORY

When you walk into Melrose Plantation, the air changes. The walls speak. The floors whisper. And if you listen close enough, you can almost hear the voices of our ancestors calling out through the corridors. It's more than a museum—it's a portal. And for those of us descended from the Metoyer legacy, it's also a mirror.

Among the many artifacts and heirlooms inside Melrose, one piece stands out to me the most: a framed photograph from a Metoyer Family Reunion—a portrait filled with faces, generations deep. And among those faces, there is one that means the world to me: my mother, Marsha Gayle Metoyer.

To see her name etched in history, beneath layers of kinship and heritage, is to be reminded that this legacy isn't a thing of the past—it's still living. And I'm part of it.

A Plantation Unlike Any Other

Melrose Plantation, located in Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana, holds a complicated yet powerful place in the story of the Cane River Creoles. Originally known as Yucca Plantation, it was built in the early 1800s by the descendants of Marie Thérèse Coincoin. Over time, it became a haven for creativity, memory, and Creole culture.

It was a place where the pain of the past met the artistry of the future. Where formerly enslaved people and their descendants became landowners, writers, and painters. It stands as a rare example of a Southern plantation that evolved beyond its origins.

One of the most notable chapters in Melrose's modern history is its connection to Clementine Hunter, a self-taught folk artist who once picked cotton on the plantation and later became one of the most celebrated Black painters in America. Her murals still live on the walls of Melrose.

But beyond the art and architecture, Melrose is a place where Metoyer memory lives.

Seeing Our Story on the Wall

The first time I saw that portrait hanging in Melrose, I didn't know whether to cry or smile.

I stood in front of that framed moment, scanning each face for a familiar one. And there it was—my mother's smile, captured in the middle of our living lineage. That image wasn't just a photograph—it was proof. Proof that we were there. That we had always been there.

For those of us who were adopted, or who have lived across states, images matter. They tether us to something bigger. They restore what the world sometimes tries to take.

That moment grounded me. It told me: You are not a footnote. You are part of the root.

More Than A Building

Melrose is not just a place where tourists come to learn about Cane River history. It is a living document. Every photograph, every brick, every family tree speaks to the survival and brilliance of our people.

What made this visit even more powerful is how close it was to where my grandmother lived. Just a short drive through the winding Cane River backroads connects Melrose Plantation to her front porch. That nearness was more than geography—it was a bridge across time. A reminder that while history is often kept behind glass and frames, for us, it was just down the road. It was alive.

When I visited, I didn't just see artifacts—I saw myself. I thought about how my mother must've felt when she saw her name. Or how my grandmother's legacy lives not just in recipes or stories—but in a record that strangers can walk by and point to.

Melrose gave me confirmation. It gave me the proof I didn't know I needed.

Carrying the Picture Forward

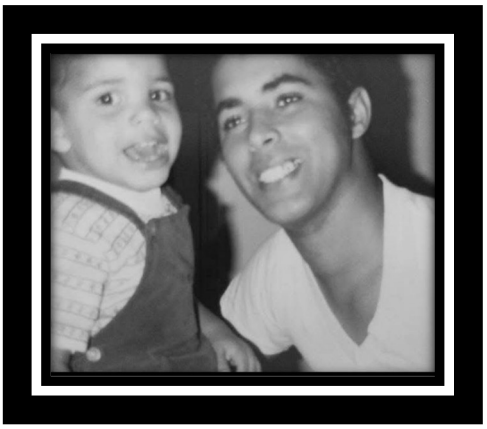
I often wonder how many other people stand in front of that same tree, looking for themselves. Looking for a name that matches theirs. Looking for a sign that they belong.

And that's why this story matters. That's why *More Than Blood* had to be written.

Because it's not just about history—it's about living proof. It's about the way a framed piece of paper on a plantation wall can turn into a moment of spiritual clarity. A moment that tells you: You are seen. You are part of something real. You come from greatness.

And as I walked away from Melrose that day, I didn't just feel proud.

I felt found



CHAPTER SIX:
MY FATHER'S VOICE
JOHN ARNOLD DUBRIEL

If my mother shaped the intellect in my life, then my father, John Arnold DuBriel, shaped the discipline and soul.

He wasn't just a dad. He was a presence. One of those men whose love didn't always come with big words but always came through. He was the kind of man who showed up, stood tall, and stayed real.

My father was more than important to me—he was central. In many ways, he played a bigger role in my life than anyone else. I saw the world through him. And through him, I learned what it meant to be a man.

Richard Pryor Funny, Godfather Loyal

The first thing people remember about my dad, besides having a good heart, is his sense of humor. He was funny like Richard Pryor—not just because of the jokes, but because of the timing. He could take any moment and turn it into something unforgettable. His laughter had soul. His stories had layers.

He didn't just crack jokes—he taught lessons in between the laughs.

One minute he'd have the whole room cracking up, and the next he'd hit you with something real. Wisdom with a wink. Truth with a grin. That was his magic.

And just like Richard Pryor, his humor came from realness. He had lived through pain, through pressure, through poverty—and still found a reason to laugh.

A Father First

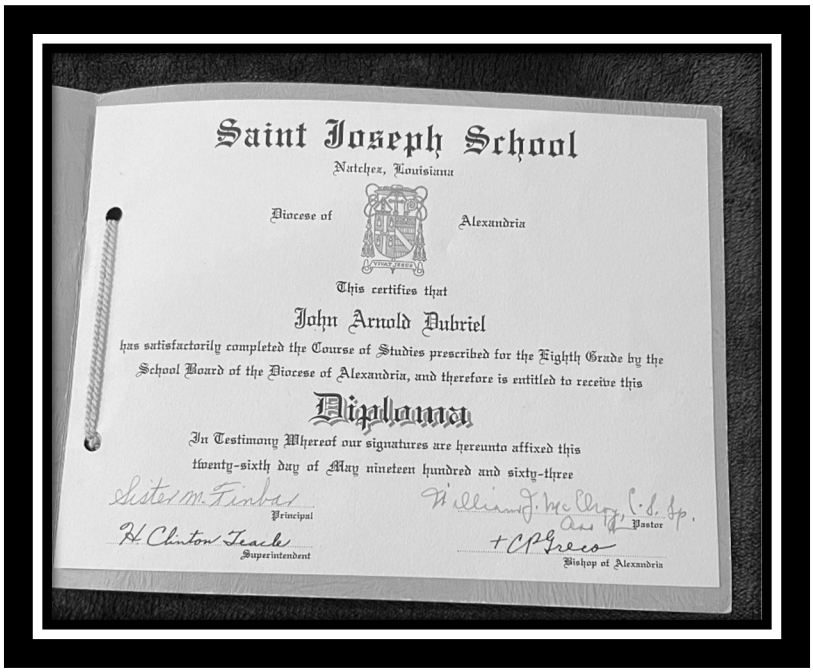
My father, John Arnold DuBriel, was born on March 9, 1949, on Cane River, Louisiana, which is located in Natchitoches Parish. Just like my grandmother, he grew up next door to St. Augustine Catholic Church in Isle Brevelle. That church wasn't just a landmark to him—it was part of his soul. He could hear the bells from his window, feel the hum of Mass through the walls, and walk to the altar from his own front steps.

We are historically a Catholic family. That faith wasn't just tradition—it was life. And my father lived it. As a boy, he served as an altar boy at St. Augustine. He'd wake early, put on his robe, and carry himself with quiet

pride. It taught him duty. Discipline. Reverence. It rooted him in something higher.

But his foundation didn't stop there. He also attended **St. Joseph Catholic School in Natchez, Louisiana**, where he completed his eighth-grade education in 1963. That diploma wasn't just paper—it was proof. That even as a young Black boy in the Jim Crow South, he could walk with knowledge, with purpose, with God.

At St. Joseph, he learned more than reading and writing. He learned structure. He learned presence. He learned that manhood doesn't begin with loudness—but with obedience. Not the kind that bows down, but the kind that stands tall.


Saint Joseph School

Natchez, Louisiana

Diocese of Alexandria

This certifies that

John Arnold Dubriel

has satisfactorily completed the Course of Studies prescribed for the Eighth Grade by the School Board of the Diocese of Alexandria, and therefore is entitled to receive this

Diploma

In Testimony Whereof our signatures are hereunto affixed this twenty-sixth day of May nineteen hundred and sixty-three

Sister M. Finbar
Principal

H. Clinton Teache
Superintendent

William J. McElroy, C.S.Sp.
Pastor

+C.P. Greco
Bishop of Alexandria

The Backbone and the Balance

John Arnold DuBriel wasn't afraid to be a father. He leaned into it. He did the work. He didn't disappear when things got hard. He didn't just provide—he protected.

He was caring in a way that didn't always use words. It showed up in the small things—rides to school, quiet talks, subtle looks that said more than sentences ever could. He knew his kids. Knew when to give space and when to step in. He raised me and Paul with equal measures of expectation and grace.

When life got loud, my father was calm. He didn't panic. He didn't run. He stood like an oak tree—firm, rooted, unmoved.

There were times I pushed limits. Times I made mistakes. But he never made me feel less than. He corrected me, yes. But he also believed in me. He reminded me that I was more than my worst moment.

And when I couldn't see a future, he saw it for me.

The Metoyer Line Through Him

My father had deep roots in the Metoyer family. His bloodline carried the same resilience, the same quiet dignity, the same loyalty to faith and family. He didn't brag about it. He lived it.

While others searched for identity, he simply was. A man who didn't need a spotlight to know his worth. A man whose name carried weight because of how he carried himself.

He didn't tell stories about the past to impress anyone. He passed down legacy the way real men do—through action, through presence, through love.

The Voice I Still Hear

There are moments now, when I'm walking through life as a grown man, that I still hear his voice. Sometimes as a memory. Sometimes as a joke. Sometimes as a warning.

But always with love.

He's in the way I move. The way I mentor. The way I correct with care. The way I love out loud—and sometimes in silence.

He's the reason I can laugh in pain, and teach through stories. The reason I can be real and respectful at the same time. The reason I know how to be a man, a brother, and one day, a father.

He was my voice before I had one of my own.

And now, every word I speak in this story—every name I lift, every truth I tell—is touched by him.

CHAPTER SEVEN:
MY MOTHER'S HANDS
MARSHA GAYLE METOYER

If my grandmother, Louise DuBriel, was the keeper of the family fire, then my mother, Marsha Gayle Metoyer, was the one who carried it forward.

There's something about your mother's hands you never forget. I don't just mean how they look—I mean what they do. My mother's hands could correct you with a snap, feed you with a spoon, and hold your world

together without ever shaking. She didn't have to say much; her hands said it all.

She was a woman of purpose, shaped by tradition but not trapped in it. She moved with discipline, cooked like her mother, worked like her father, and loved in a way that wasn't loud, but lasting. Her presence shaped the man I became long before I realized it.

A Metoyer Woman

My mother, Marsha Gayle Metoyer, was born on January 11, 1953, in Alexandria, Louisiana. She was raised with strong southern values and deep Metoyer roots. As a teenager, she moved with her family to Albuquerque, New Mexico, carrying her culture and her pride with her.

My mother was born into the Metoyer legacy, and she wore it like armor. She didn't just teach us our roots—she lived them. She carried herself with quiet dignity, but also with edge. She didn't play about respect, didn't bend for foolishness, and didn't forget where she came from.

There's a grace that's passed down through the women of the Metoyer line, a kind of Southern elegance mixed with strength. My mother could host a dinner, handle a crisis, and check a grown man—all before noon.

When I think about what made her powerful, it wasn't her volume. It was her values. She was rooted. And she rooted us.

The Weight of Raising Twins

Raising twins isn't easy. Raising adopted twins with histories they didn't yet understand is even harder. But my mother never made us feel like a burden.

Paul and I weren't a project to her—we were her sons. Full stop.

She made sure we knew who we were, even when we didn't fully understand it yet. She told us where we came from. She told us about Coincoin, about Cane River, about why we carry the Metoyer name with pride.

When we asked questions, she gave us truth. When we made mistakes, she gave us discipline. When we needed love, she gave us food, conversation, and silence in the right measure.

The Kitchen Was Her Sanctuary

Like Grandma Louise, my mother could cook. Lord, could she cook.

But she didn't just cook meals—she made moments. Her hands seasoned with memory. Her food was layered with history. You could taste generations in her cornbread. Feel ancestors in her gumbo.

The kitchen wasn't just where she prepared food—it was where she poured herself into the family.

You knew not to mess with her when she was working. But you also knew to stand close and watch, because you might just learn something. Not just about food—but about life, patience, and precision.

The Enforcer and the Embrace

Discipline was not optional in our house. My mother had rules, and she enforced them. We weren't allowed to walk around without purpose. You did your chores. You respected your elders. You prayed. You cleaned up behind yourself.

But for every rule, there was also room to grow.

She encouraged us to ask questions. She let us be boys, even when we made mistakes. She wanted us to be strong, but also to be thoughtful.

She didn't raise sons who would just survive. She raised men who would stand for something.

Carrying Her Into the Future

As I got older, I realized how much of her I carry.

I see it in the way I talk to people. The way I protect what I love. The way I move through the world with a quiet strength that doesn't need to be explained.

Her fingerprints are on my spirit.

Even when we didn't always see eye to eye, I never doubted her love. Never doubted her purpose. Never doubted the pride she took in being a Metoyer woman raising Metoyer men.

She didn't just raise children. She raised legacy keepers.

And now, every time I tell this story, every time I speak the Metoyer name with honor—I'm speaking her name too.

CHAPTER EIGHT:
TWINS BY DESIGN
PAUL AND ME

People often say that twins share a special bond, something deeper than regular siblings. And they're right. But when you add adoption, legacy, and a Creole bloodline into the mix, that bond becomes something spiritual.

My twin brother, Paul Kertis DuBriel, has been with me since the beginning. Same day, same hour, same struggle. We entered the world together—not by chance, but by design.

We were born in Los Angeles, California, but our journey never stayed still for long. From Albuquerque to Colorado Springs, then Arlington, Texas, Fresno, Marksville, and eventually Dallas, we moved with the rhythm of survival. But through it all, Paul and I stayed together. That was our rule: whatever life brought, we would face it side by side.

But as I grew older and began to understand our adoption and our family name, I started to wonder: Why us? Why twins?

And then I looked deeper into the Metoyer legacy.

Twin Roots in the Metoyer Story

The Metoyer twin legacy began with the very first generation of free Metoyers. Nicolas Augustin Metoyer and Marie Susanne Metoyer were born on January 22, 1768—a pair of twins who would become the first of many. They were the children of Marie Thérèse Coincoin and Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer, and from the moment they were born, twins became something sacred in our story.

The Metoyer family has a long history of large families, and in many cases, twins were more than common—they were treasured. In the Creole world, especially in Louisiana, twins were often seen as spiritually significant. A blessing. A mirror of God's balance.

In Metoyer family records and oral traditions, there are stories of twin siblings who carried forward property, faith, and even the burden of family secrets. Twins were raised to honor legacy, preserve dignity, and pass down memory.

When I found that out, something clicked. Paul and I weren't an accident. We were a continuation.

Our adoption wasn't a break in the bloodline. It was the bloodline reaching out and pulling us in.

Adoption in Creole Tradition

In Creole Louisiana, adoption wasn't rare. It was woven into the culture. Families often adopted children from inside and outside the community—especially mulatto children, those of mixed Black and white ancestry.

The reasons were many: to preserve bloodlines, to raise children within Catholic tradition, or to protect them from poverty, danger, or cultural erasure. In many cases, twins were adopted together—seen as spiritually bound, and too precious to separate.

Creole families, especially those with standing like the Metoyers, often took in these children with love and pride. They believed that family was not only what you were born into, but what you were chosen into.

Paul and I were chosen.

Our mother, Marsha Gayle Metoyer, didn't treat us like adopted kids. She treated us like her sons. Like Metoyers. Like we belonged. And we did.

Two Lives, One Path

Paul and I were never the same, but we were never far apart. I was louder. He was more reserved. I was curious about people. He was curious about truth. But we shared the same DNA of movement, of questions, of loyalty.

We fought sometimes, like all brothers do. But we never separated.

When we were young, we would visit Cane River together. Run around the yard behind St. Augustine. Learn how to fold meat pies in Grandma Louise's kitchen. Get corrected together. Get praised together.

We shared the experience of being outsiders in cities that didn't know our story—and insiders to a legacy that most people never even heard of.

And even when life got hard—even when we took different roads for a time—we always circled back.

Because that's what twins do.

Blood, Spirit, and Design

There's something powerful about knowing you were designed to be part of a family. Not born into by chance, but placed there by intention. That's what Paul and I are: twins by blood, Metoyers by design.

Our journey wasn't perfect, but it was purposeful. We carried the stories of migration, of struggle, of cultural complexity. We carried the DNA of movement, but the roots of legacy. And we carried each other.

When I look back now, I realize that Paul was my first memory, and in many ways, my first mirror. In his eyes, I saw all the things I didn't know how to say yet. All the truths I was still learning. And through our bond, I saw how deep identity can run—even when it has to cross over adoption papers and city lines.

A Metoyer Reflection

Sometimes I imagine the Metoyer twins who came before us. I imagine them walking the same dirt roads, praying in the same pews, learning the same values.

I imagine them looking at us now, two boys from Los Angeles who were carried across the country and brought back to Cane River. I imagine them nodding. Not because we did everything right, but because we carried the story forward.

Paul and I may not have been born on the land. But we were born of the legacy.

Twins by design.

And that design was always Metoyer.

CHAPTER NINE:
CREOLE RESILIENCE
OUR CULTURE, OUR SURVIVAL

To be Creole is to be complicated. Beautifully complicated.

We are a culture born out of blending, of survival, of holding tight to identity even when the world tried to erase it. We're the children of Africa, France, Spain, and Native America. And every one of those bloodlines shows up in how we cook, how we speak, how we worship, and how we live.

But to be Creole from Cane River—that's something even deeper. It's a culture not just of color, but of legacy. It means living with the weight of freedom earned early and held tightly. It means walking the same land where free Black men once owned property, where Creole women passed on power, and where the Metoyer name stood for independence.

The Language of Survival

Creoles were storytellers by necessity. Our history wasn't always written down. It lived in our songs, in our prayers, in our family recipes passed down by memory. We kept our culture alive in whispers and music. And even when the world tried to rename us, to put us in a box, we found ways to keep our truth loud.

We danced it. We cooked it. We baptized it in Catholic churches and seasoned it in black iron skillets.

That's why food isn't just food to us. A meat pie is a love letter. A roux is a reminder. A Sunday meal isn't just about eating—it's about reconnecting with our ancestors through taste and tradition.

Music, Faith, and Celebration

At a Creole gathering, you'll hear laughter that cuts through silence. You'll hear Zydeco or French Creole hymns humming in the background. You'll see generations dancing together, elders guiding the young with rhythm passed down through time.

And always—faith. We didn't just survive through joy. We survived through God. Catholicism wasn't just a religion; it was a shield. A comfort. A compass.

That same faith is what helped keep families together when the world outside tried to pull them apart. It's what helped my grandmother raise four boys and a girl, alone after tragedy struck. It's what gave my father the strength to be both funny and fierce. And it's what gave me the discipline to walk into dark places and be the light.

Resilience Is Our Inheritance

We've had to bend without breaking for generations. The Metoyers knew that. The DuBriels lived it. And I carry that same spirit now.

Resilience isn't always loud. Sometimes it's quiet strength—like a mother holding the house together, like a grandfather keeping the land, like a child learning the same prayers his ancestors said under stars.

It's that quiet strength that defines Creole legacy. And it's that strength I pass on through my voice, my mentoring, and this book.

Not Just History—A Living Culture

Too many people think Creole means "old stories" or "cultural footnotes." But I'm here to say this: We are not history. We are legacy in motion.

We still celebrate. We still gather. We still speak the names of those who came before us—and we do it with pride. Our culture is not something we study. It's something we live.

And the more I learn about my family—about the Metoyer resilience, about the Conant wisdom, about the DuBriel laughter—the more I know that this culture didn't just raise me.

It made me.

CHAPTER TEN:
ADOPTED BUT NOT ABANDONED
MY IDENTITY, MY TRUTH

They say blood is thicker than water. But what they don't always say is that love is thicker than both.

I wasn't born into the DuBriel household—I was brought in. Chosen. And in that choice, I was given more than a home. I was given identity, culture, and a place inside a powerful legacy. That's what adoption meant to me.

In many ways, adoption is its own kind of birth—a spiritual one. And in the Creole tradition, it was never just about legal paperwork. It was about belonging. Creole families often took in children from other branches of the tree—especially twins, especially those of mixed heritage. Our community understood something deep: family isn't always about origin. Sometimes, it's about intention.

Chosen Into Legacy

When my parents adopted my brother and me at just one year old, they didn't just give us their name. They gave us a name with meaning.

My name was changed from Kevin to Phillip Kevin DuBriel, and my twin brother became Paul Kertis DuBriel. That wasn't just a formality. That was tradition. In Cane River Creole culture, it's common to give children the names of saints—an homage to our Catholic roots and a way of wrapping our identity in both faith and history.

It was a sacred act. And even though I didn't understand it at the time, I've come to see how that moment shaped the rest of my life. Our names weren't just new—they were rooted. They placed us inside a sacred lineage, both earthly and spiritual.

My earliest memories as a DuBriel are painted in flashes—family reunions, cooking in the kitchen with my grandmother, Sunday morning Mass at St. Augustine Church. These weren't just rituals. They were confirmations. With every shared meal and every whispered prayer, my place in the family was being carved deeper into the foundation.

Wrestling with Identity

Adoption doesn't come without its questions. There were moments in my youth when I wondered where I truly came from. What my original name meant. Who else shared my face. There's something about being adopted that keeps you balancing between two truths: the one you were born into and the one you were adopted into.

But those questions didn't break me. They built me.

Because every time I visited Cane River… every time I stood in front of my father's grave… every time I saw my mother's name in the portrait at Melrose… I remembered:

I wasn't abandoned. I was anchored.

Still, I'd be lying if I said it was always easy. Growing up, I wrestled quietly with the idea of identity. Was I fully DuBriel? Was I a Metoyer by blood, by spirit, or both? Did I have to earn my place, or was it always mine? Those were the silent questions—the ones you don't always ask out loud, but that live in the spaces between.

I learned over time that identity is not a destination—it's a becoming. And every chapter of my life added more clarity to that truth.

The Strength in My Story

My story is not a contradiction—it's a convergence. I was adopted, yes. But I was also claimed. Raised. Loved. Given stories and traditions that many never get.

My grandmother Louise didn't treat us any different. She loved fiercely. She taught us how to cook, how to hold space for others, and how to keep faith at the center of everything. My father, John Arnold DuBriel, gave us structure and joy. He had the kind of humor that could disarm a room—Richard Pryor funny, but even more heartfelt. And my mother, Marsha Gayle Metoyer, gave us soul. She passed down that Creole strength that knows how to bend but never break.

These weren't just family roles—they were pillars in the cathedral of my identity. I stand tall today because of the foundation they laid.

CHAPTER ELEVEN:
FAITH AND FIRE
A CATHOLIC LEGACY THROUGH ST. AUGUSTINE

The legacy of the Metoyer family wasn't just land and names. It was faith. It was Catholic tradition. It was being raised in the shadow of St. Augustine Catholic Church, where bells rang like memory and Mass grounded us in something eternal. When my parents adopted my brother and me at the age of one, they didn't just give us love—they gave us identity. They changed our names to reflect the Creole Catholic tradition of honoring saints. I went from Kevin to Phillip Kevin DuBriel, and my twin brother became Paul Kertis DuBriel.

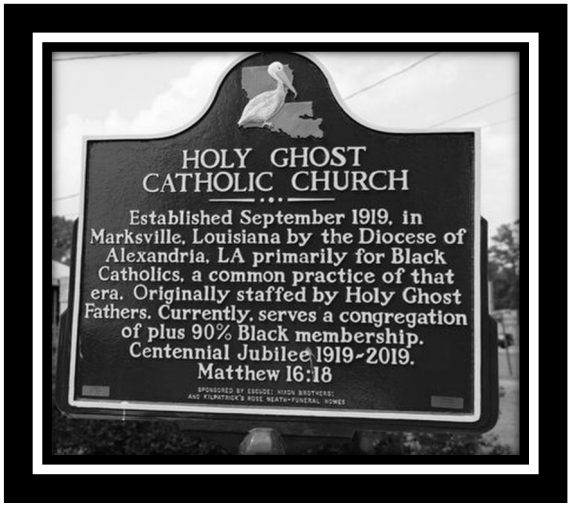
It was a tradition deeply rooted in the Creole culture of Cane River—where names were prayers and saints walked beside us.

Our childhood was filled with that tradition. We attended St. Augustine Catholic Church for Mass on numerous visits, a spiritual home not just for our ancestors but for our entire extended family. That church was sacred ground to us. It was where we prayed, gathered, and remembered.

My father, John Arnold DuBriel, and both grandparents, Wesley Sr. and Louise DuBriel, are all buried there. I was there the day we laid my father to rest, placing him into the same holy earth that had nurtured generations of our people. That moment connected the past and the present in a way no words could describe.

We also attended Holy Ghost Catholic School in Marksville, Louisiana, during the short time we lived there, which most students were Black. We went to Catholic Mass, learned our prayers, and lived under the influence of the Church. Even before and when we moved away from Louisiana, that spiritual foundation remained.

From Los Angeles to Dallas, I carried pieces of my Catholic upbringing in silence. But no matter where I went, something always called me back to the river. To the why of my story. To legacy.



The Flame Behind the Name

Maham isn't just a title—it's an acronym. It stands for Making All Humans Admire Metoyer. It's an embodiment. A name forged through reflection, resilience, and the recognition that I was born to pour into others. But becoming a mentor didn't happen overnight. It was earned the hard way—through pain, pressure, and prayer.

The turning point came when I found myself in a prison cell, staring at a cold wall and wondering how I got so far off course. But it was in that moment of silence, with everything stripped away, that I met myself—and my purpose—for the first time.

I started reading. I started learning. I started growing.

That cell became a classroom. That pain became my pulpit. That isolation became preparation.

I remembered the men in my family—the strength of my father, the wisdom of my grandmother, the rootedness of our Metoyer legacy. And I knew I had something to give. Something to teach. Something to become.

Servant Leadership is in My Blood

The Metoyer family didn't just thrive—they served. They built churches. They educated. They protected land and people. Whether they were planting crops or founding St. Augustine Church, they did it for more than themselves.

I realized I was cut from that same cloth.

I wasn't meant to be a boss—I was meant to be a servant leader. Someone who listens. Someone who lifts. Someone who understands that real power is in building others up.

So I started mentoring.

Young people from broken homes; some are just trying to find their footing. People like me—searching for meaning in the middle of madness.

And every time I spoke, I heard echoes of my father's wisdom. Every time I listened, I felt my mother's strength. Every lesson I shared was wrapped in generations of survival, culture, and grace.

From the River to the World

Today, I go by Maham the Mentor, but it's more than a brand. It's a mission. I speak truth in rooms where lies once reigned. I teach discipline where chaos used to live. I show people that bloodlines matter, but so do choices.

This book, this journey, this identity—it's all part of that.

I didn't write these chapters just to tell you about my family.

I wrote them to show you how to reclaim yours.

To remind you that even if you were adopted, abandoned, forgotten, or overlooked—you are not a mistake.

You are the continuation of a deeper purpose.

And if no one ever told you where you came from, I hope this book helps you start asking.

Because purpose has a voice.

And today, it sounds like mine.

CHAPTER TWELVE: THE METOYER LEGACY IN MODERN TIMES

We often talk about the past like it's something sealed away in museums and monuments—but the truth is, legacy lives right now. It breathes through the names we carry, the food we cook, the churches we attend, the stories we protect, and the values we choose to pass on. The Metoyer legacy isn't just something to honor. It's something to live.

This chapter is about how that legacy still shapes modern life for descendants like me—and how we're writing new chapters in the same family book.

The Roots Still Hold

Drive through Isle Brevelle or walk the grounds of St. Augustine Catholic Church, and you'll feel it—that quiet pride, that sacred sense of place. You can hear the stories in the gravel. You can feel the prayers soaked into the wood of those pews.

We are no longer a plantation people. We are a people of promise.

Many Metoyer descendants still live along Cane River. Others, like myself, are scattered across the country but carry the traditions with us: family reunions that turn into history lessons, meals that begin with blessings in Creole French, and deep respect for our elders.

We are educators, artists, truckers, ministers, mentors, and activists. We are adopted and biological, Black and mixed, Catholic and not—but still one family. Still Metoyer.

Tradition Reimagined

The traditions passed down to us—like giving children saint names, cooking meat pies for special occasions, or gathering around grandmothers to hear old stories—aren't relics. They're instructions.

Some of us have updated them.

We serve meat pies at pop-up restaurants. We teach our kids about Coincoin and Claude with documentaries and TikToks. We build community gardens instead of plantations. We speak about slavery in classrooms and on stages—not with shame, but with power.

To be a Metoyer today is to carry memory into motion.

Modern Family, Same Spirit

My family—spread across Dallas, California, Louisiana, and beyond—still celebrates the Metoyer story. My twin and I represent a new generation: one raised through adoption but rooted by design. One shaped by adversity, but determined to give back.

We are the proof that legacy has elasticity—it bends without breaking. We are what happens when memory meets mission.

We are raising our children to know who they are. We're tracing our family trees not just for names, but for meaning. We walk with the spirit of Coincoin, with the questions of Claude, and with the calling of community.

The Work Ahead

Being a Metoyer in modern times means continuing the work:

- Fighting for justice in our communities.
- Mentoring young people who feel lost.
- Building generational wealth with integrity.
- Speaking the truth, even when it's uncomfortable.

Our ancestors gave us land. We must give the next generation legacy. They built churches. We must build bridges. They bought freedom. We must teach purpose.

This is not nostalgia—it's direction.

Legacy Is Now

When people ask me what it means to come from the Metoyer family, I tell them this:

It means knowing that every day you wake up with an inheritance of strength. It means knowing that your last name carries the weight of builders, healers, warriors, and visionaries. It means understanding that identity isn't just who raised you—it's what raised them.

I am here because they were. And because I am here—so will others be.

The story continues.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN:
THE ROAD BACK TO CANE RIVER

There's something holy about going back. Not just to a place—but to who you've always been underneath it all. Returning to **Cane River** as a man was different than visiting as a child. As a child, I was just along for the ride. But as a man, I came back with eyes wide open—looking not just for people, but for *meaning*.

It had been years since I last walked those familiar paths—the gravel roads, the oak-lined driveways, the places that once felt like stories whispered through the generations. But this time was different. I wasn't just visiting. I was *remembering*. I was reclaiming.

Sacred Soil and Silent Memories

The first place I stopped was **St. Augustine Catholic Church**.

There's no place on earth more tied to my bloodline than that church. Not just because I attended Mass there as a boy. Not just because it stood next to my grandmother's house. But because it now holds many of the people who shaped me. my father, **John Arnold DuBriel**, and both grandparents, **Wesley Sr.** And **Louise DuBriel (Conant)**.

I stood over my father's grave in silence.

There's something about putting your hand on the earth where your people now rest. It speaks to you. That day, it told me: *You are still part of this. You still belong.*

Even though I'd moved across states—California, New Mexico, Texas—Cane River was the only place that felt permanent. Because no matter how far we traveled, **this** was home. Not just by address, but by **spirit**.

Driving Distance, Generational Connection

From my grandmother's home near **Natchez** to **Melrose Plantation**, the road curves gently along the Cane River. The ride itself feels like a memory—passing places where time refuses to move too fast. The old trees arch like gatekeepers. The homes whisper stories. The river glistens with things it's seen and won't ever say out loud.

I remembered walking into Melrose and seeing the **Metoyer family reunion portrait**, the one where my mother's face is captured in full color, frozen in legacy. That wasn't a museum exhibit. That was family. That was *proof*.

A New Chapter Begins With a Return

This time, I wasn't just tracing my roots—I was planting new ones. I came back to Cane River not just to remember, but to remind myself that my story doesn't begin or end with me.

It's a continuation.

Every person who poured into me—every memory, every tradition, every name change—made me into who I am now: **Maham the Mentor**.

And Cane River? It's the soil that gave that name meaning.

The Legacy Lives in Me

I'm not just a visitor anymore.

I am part of the living history of this place. When I tell young men about identity, or when I speak in schools and prisons, I speak from *this* ground. From a line of people who fought, survived, built, prayed, and *believed*.

The road back to Cane River isn't just about nostalgia. It's about *ownership*. Not legal ownership—but spiritual. Emotional. Cultural. *Blood ownership*.

And now, when I leave Cane River, I don't feel like something was left behind. I feel like something was picked up.

Because when I go back now, I don't just see where I came from.

I see who I'm becoming.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: THE MENTOR EMERGES – REDEMPTION WITH A PURPOSE

I was not supposed to be here—not in this way, not with this purpose. But that's the beauty of grace. When life wrote my beginnings in pain and abandonment, God still reserved the right to finish my story with power and legacy.

Maham the Mentor didn't arrive overnight. He was forged through fire, loss, resilience, and ultimately, transformation. And while my roots trace back to Cane River and the Metoyer line, my impact grows forward through service.

From Prison to Platform

When I was paroled in 2014, I knew one thing: I didn't want to waste my second chance. I was tired of prison walls and broken dreams. I needed something more than just freedom. I needed purpose.

I was a free man again, but I wasn't the same man who went in. I had walked the yard, earned degrees, and more importantly, made a covenant with God: if He gave me my freedom, I would use it to serve.

The outside world had changed, and so had I. Finding work wasn't easy. The labels that followed me—felon, troublemaker, statistic—were louder than my voice at first. But I had a vision. And that vision became action.

One of my first steps was helping my brother launch Superior Wash, a truck-washing business in Memphis. I used everything I learned in prison—discipline, leadership, entrepreneurship—and helped lay the foundation for something real.

But even as the business grew, I knew my purpose was bigger than money.

Planting the Seeds of Purpose

The name Maham the Mentor began to take shape during this time. It wasn't just a title. It was a calling. MAHAM stands for Making All Humans Admire Metoyer—a declaration that no matter where I came from, I was a walking reflection of strength, heritage, and healing.

I began volunteering with organizations like MOF (Miles of Freedom), helping formerly incarcerated individuals find work, housing, and dignity. I stood before youth in juvenile facilities and shared my story—not to glorify the streets but to dismantle the myth that crime equals power.

Every speech, every mentoring session, every reentry class was an act of repentance and redemption. I wasn't just paying back society—I was pouring in to the future.

Mentorship by Example

Being a mentor isn't about being perfect. It's about being honest. I tell the truth about the night I got shot, the first time I held a gun, the moment I felt broken. Because if I can own my story, others can find the courage to own theirs.

My story connects with young people, not because it's glamorous—but because it's real. I didn't read about the streets—I survived them. And I came back to change them.

When I speak to a young man with his pants sagging and his head down, I see myself. And I speak life into him the way I wish someone had done for me.

I also show them what success looks like beyond sports and rap. I talk about business. I teach about credit, ownership, structure. I model consistency. Because mentorship is not just emotional—it's educational.

Community Engagement and Activism

Through my work with PEP (Prison Entrepreneurship Program), I began helping incarcerated men write business plans, sharpen their communication skills, and envision legitimate futures. I became a Top

Entrepreneur in my class—proof that your past doesn't cancel your potential.

With OGU (Original Gangster University), I started working on gun violence intervention and restorative justice projects across Dallas. The mission: turn old gang members into new peacekeepers.

In all of this, I represent the Metoyer legacy—not just by bloodline, but by action. I believe we don't just inherit greatness—we demonstrate it.

Legacy in Real Time

Legacy is not something you visit once a year. It's not a word carved in a gravestone. Legacy is a living rhythm. It's what you teach your children. It's what you leave behind in people, not just in papers.

When I walk into a school or prison today, I bring the spirit of Cane River with me. I carry my grandmother's meat pie recipes in my memory, my father's humor in my speech, and my mother's prayers in my step.

This is what More Than Blood means to me: I am a son, a mentor, a speaker, an entrepreneur, and a vessel of change.

I've helped start businesses, create safe spaces, and redirect lives—not because I'm special, but because I refused to let pain win.

The Mirror and the Mantle

Some people look in the mirror and see shame. I look and see survival. I see responsibility. I see a man with great character. I see a man who rose up out of tragedy and now carries the mantle for those still climbing.

Every time I mentor someone, I remind them of this truth: Your past does not define your future.

We all make choices. I made mine. But I also changed mine. And now, I invite others to do the same.

This is what Maham the Mentor lives for: to remind others that legacy is not about where you start—it's about who you become.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: THE SOCIETY OF IS-REAL BUILDING A NATION WITHIN A NATION

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Some visions don't come from business plans or brainstorm sessions; they're born in pain, raised in purpose, and refined in silence. The Society of Is-Real was one of those visions.

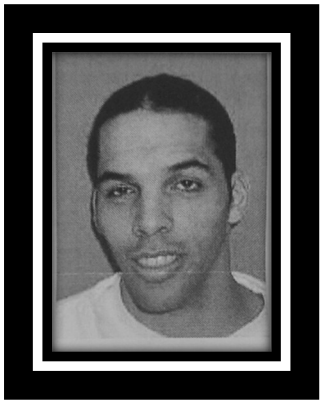
It didn't begin in a conference room. It was born behind prison walls, in the stillness of a cell where I asked God to give me something I could do that would outlive me. Something that would turn my story into someone else's survival guide.

The Birth of the Society

I remember sitting on my bunk, pen in hand, heart on fire. The name came to me like a whisper from heaven: Is-Real.

Not just a name, but a declaration.

This is real. This pain. This growth. This transformation. It was never pretend. And the people I wanted to reach—young men lost in the system, brothers returning from incarceration, families stuck in cycles—they needed something real too.



The name also echoed another meaning: Israel—the biblical symbol of struggle, identity, and chosen purpose. In the same way that Jacob became Israel after wrestling with God, I saw us—Black men, Creole men, adopted sons, broken boys—struggling to become something greater. And in that struggle, we were being named again.

So I wrote. I drafted the mission statement, the core values, the logo—everything that would become the Society of Is-Real.

It wasn't a gang. It wasn't a club. It was a movement.

The Mission and Message

The Society of Is-Real was built on five foundational pillars:

1. **Leadership** – Teaching men to lead themselves before they try to lead others.
2. **Education** – Knowledge isn't power until it's applied. We teach real-world tools: credit, contracts, community.
3. **Entrepreneurship** – We turn hustlers into CEOs. Side hustles into storefronts.
4. **Healing** – Trauma is real. So is therapy. So is forgiveness. We heal openly.
5. **Legacy** – We don't just survive—we build. We own. We pass it forward.

We serve returning citizens, young men at risk, ex-gang members, and anyone seeking to transform their life through truth and structure. It's not about how you start—it's about what you're willing to become.

Who It's For

I designed this for the forgotten.

For the boy who got expelled before anyone asked why he was angry. For the man who came home from prison with no resume, no references, and no roadmap. For the young people raising kids alone while trying to unlearn the pain of their past.

It's for people who want more. More than probation. More than street fame. More than cycles.

We offer a path. And most of all, a mirror—so they can see themselves as worthy again.

Programs and Impact

We don't just talk change. We walk it.

- Workshops on credit repair, resume building, emotional intelligence, and fatherhood.
- Mentoring programs like "From Survival to Structure" that pair youth with mentors who've lived what they're living.
- Entrepreneurial training, turning lived experience into business acumen.
- Community collaborations with nonprofits, schools, churches, and reentry programs.

Through my involvement with MOF (Miles of Freedom), I've helped returning citizens secure jobs, rebuild families, and find peace.

Through PEP (Prison Entrepreneurship Program), I've mentored men who never thought they'd succeed. Many now run their own businesses.

With OGU (Original Gangster University), I've spoken to former gang leaders and helped them transform into community protectors.

The Society of Is-Real is a bridge—from pain to purpose.

Building a Nation Within a Nation

The phrase "nation within a nation" came from W.E.B. Du Bois, who saw Black Americans as a sovereign people inside a country that didn't always acknowledge their humanity. I've reimagined that idea—not in resistance, but in resilience.

We don't need permission to build. We need blueprints. The Society of Is-Real offers those blueprints—social, spiritual, and economic.

We are not rebels—we are rebuilders.

We raise our own leaders. We educate our sons. We build credit. We restore families. We preserve culture. We speak truth. We walk in God.

A Living Legacy

This is the modern extension of what the Metoyer family started—ownership, community, resilience. I don't just talk about my ancestors. I live like they're watching.

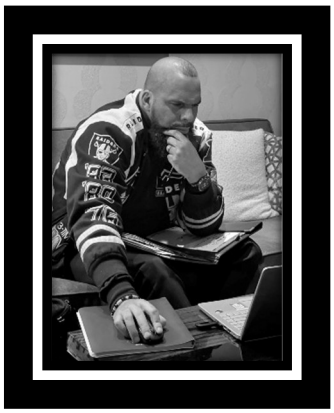
We don't need another statue. We need strategy. And the Society of Is-Real is living strategy. It's how I pass on what was passed to me.

In every young man I mentor, I see Cane River. In every handshake with a father coming home from prison, I feel my father's hands. In every testimony of a man who finally believes he can change, I hear my grandmother's prayers.

This is more than a nonprofit. It's more than a name.

It's a nation within a nation.

And it's real.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN:
MORE THAN BLOOD

This book began with a question: what does it mean to belong?

Some say family is determined by DNA. Others say it's about who shows up, who stays, who teaches, who forgives. I say it's Principles. If we all have the same Principles, Morals and Values, then we are family. Principles are what you believe in—a belief. Even if you think blood makes you family, you'll see in due time, that is just a belief. Some of your blood family will leave you for dead.

I was born into a world of tragedy. My biological parents—one murdered, one lost to addiction—left me and my siblings scattered across foster homes, strangers to each other. My twin and I could've disappeared in that system. But God had other plans.

He placed us into the hands of John Arnold DuBriel and Marsha Gayle Metoyer—two people whose names were more than just names. They were doorways to a history deeper than any textbook, wider than any river.

The Adoption That Planted a Legacy

I wasn't just adopted into a household. I was adopted into a story.

A story that began in colonial Louisiana with a woman named Coincoin and a man named Claude. A story of freedom earned and faith built. A story rooted in resilience, contradiction, land, love, and the unrelenting will to rise.

My parents didn't just raise me. They re-named me. Re-framed me. Rooted me.

They didn't hide the truth of my adoption. They showed me the truth of my inheritance.

Because I may not carry Metoyer blood—but I carry Metoyer spirit. And spirit is heavier than genes.

What I've Learned

I've learned that your past doesn't define you, but it does inform you.

I've learned that pain can be a teacher, and loss can be a compass.

I've learned that legacies are not given—they're built.

And I've learned that real love doesn't require biology. It requires sacrifice, presence, and a decision to see value where others see burden.

Being a Metoyer isn't just something I claim. It's something I live—in the way I mentor, in the way I build, in the way I speak, and in the way I remember.

Legacy is a Circle

I didn't know it then, but all those moves—California to New Mexico to Texas to Louisiana—were forming something in me. I was being shaped for something greater. I was being given a story not just to survive, but to share.

The same boy who once ran through graveyards on Cane River is now laying foundations of purpose in the lives of others.

The same boy who once felt disconnected now builds bridges for others to reconnect.

The same man who once wore a prison ID now wears a mentor's mantle.

That's the power of adoption. That's the power of story. That's the power of God.

Carrying the Name Forward

I carry my parents' names. I carry my twin's name. I carry Cane River's name.

But most of all, I carry the name that God gave me when He spared me: Maham.

Making All Humans Admire Metoyer.

That's not just a brand. That's a calling. It's not just who I am. It's what I do.

I speak so young men will rise. I write so my ancestors will not be forgotten. I mentor so my pain becomes someone else's prevention. I build so that the family name means something more with every generation.

Full Circle

This book began with Cane River, but it doesn't end there. Because the river flows. The story moves. And the legacy continues—not just in museums or gravestones, but in people like me.

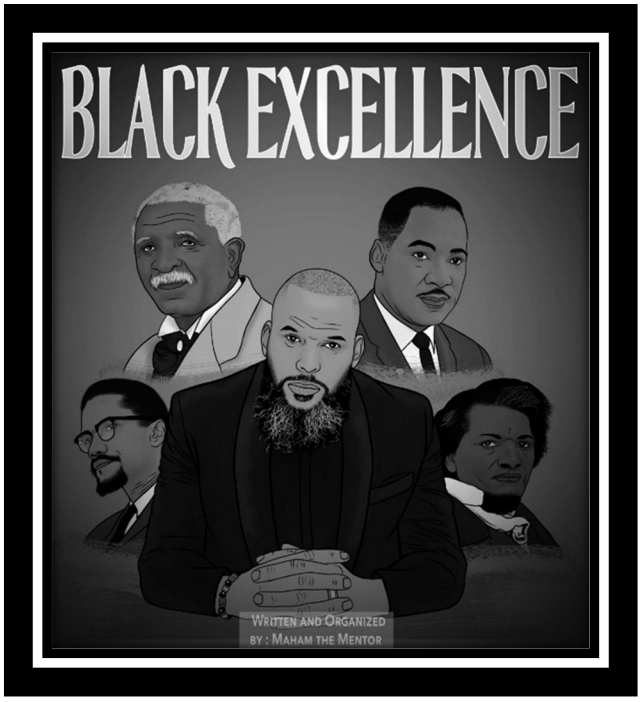
I was never meant to be a statistic. I was meant to be a symbol.

A symbol that family is more than blood. A symbol that history can be redeemed. A symbol that from brokenness comes brilliance.

So, if you're reading this and wondering whether you belong—know this:

You don't need a perfect past to claim a powerful future. You don't need to be born into a legacy to live one.

Sometimes, the family that chooses you is the one that changes you. And sometimes, you don't find your roots—they find you.



Character will get you into places that money cannot. How you maintain your composure and behavior is important. Your true value isn't your wealth or your family—it's your character. Guard it with your life. Life is not fair; it may not be your fault, but it's always your responsibility on how you want to deal with it. If you knew better, you can do better. The more you know, the less you can be manipulated by anyone, even me.

This is my testimony. This is my offering. This is my inheritance.

Not just Metoyer. Not just DuBriel. Not just Maham.

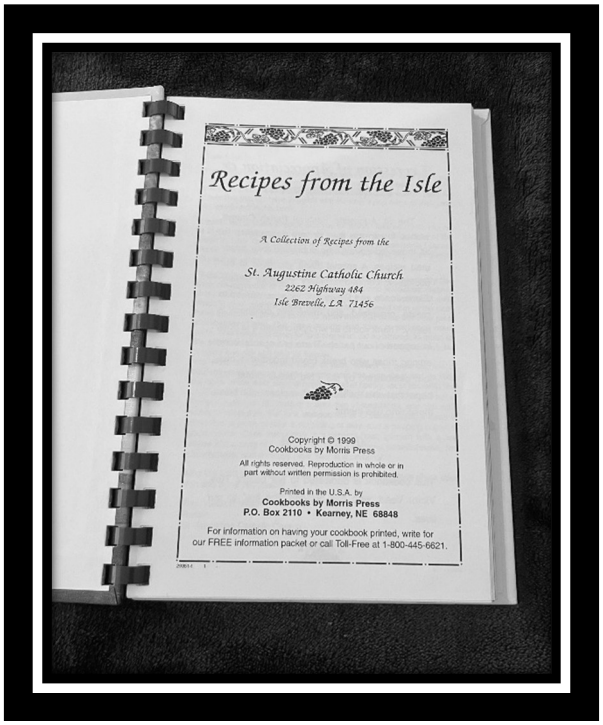
But more.

More Than Blood.

The End. And the beginning.

Mahamthementor.com

Bonus Section



From Our Past

(Written by Joseph Moran, included in Louise DuBriel Conant's family cookbook)

In a letter written to a friend after his return from a trip taken with his father, **Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer**, to his native France, **Augustin Metoyer** expressed his intent to build a church for his community.

Impressed by the French villages he visited, whose churches served as the centers of community life, Augustin was determined to bring the same tradition to the village of his people at home, in Louisiana, on **Isle Brevelle**.

And so, upon his return home, he engaged the services of his brother **Louis**, an accomplished builder, to construct a church on land that he would donate for the purpose.

According to Augustin's wishes, the church was completed before the end of the year **1803**, and named in honor of his patron saint, the great Catholic scholar and Bishop of Hippo, Africa: **Saint Augustine**.

Tribute was also paid to his mother, **Marie Thérèze Coincoin**, founder and developer of **Yucca Plantation**, and her ancestral homeland.

Upon being completed, **St. Augustine Church** earned the unique distinction of being the first — possibly the only — Catholic church in the United States founded, independently financed, and built by **people of color for their expressed use**.

The original structure was architecturally impressive and unique for its day, largely because of the roof-covered galleries on either side, which ran the entire length of the building. This design was not only visually striking, but also practical, offering natural air circulation during Louisiana's hot, humid summers.

The church attracted visitors from afar — especially architects and builders — due to its beauty and functional integrity. It is even depicted in the background of a **portrait of Augustin Metoyer**, which still hangs in the present church that replaced the original in **1916**.

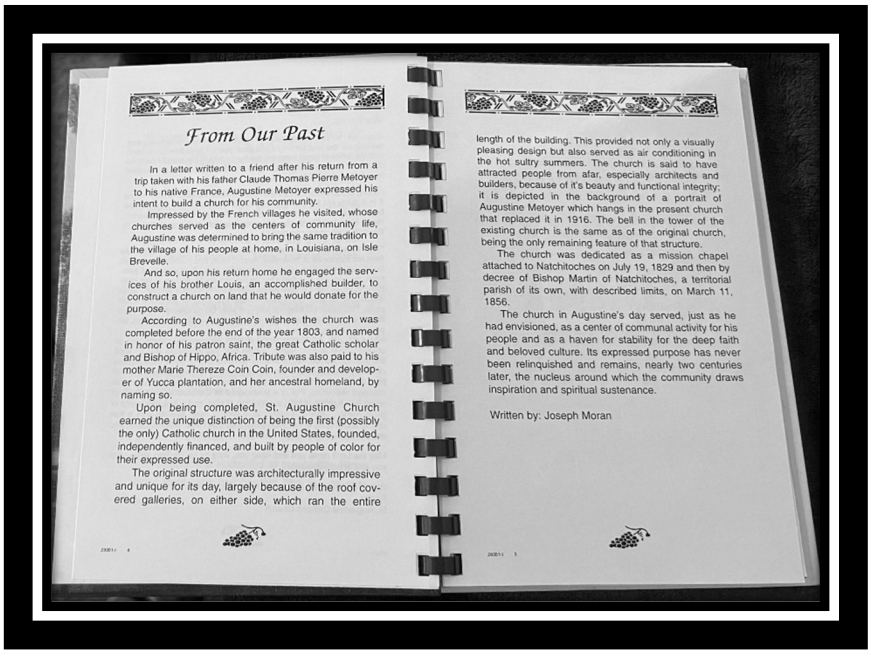
The **bell in the current tower** is the **same bell** from the original church — the only remaining physical piece of that historic structure.

The church was first dedicated as a **mission chapel** attached to Natchitoches on **July 19, 1829**, and later, by decree of Bishop Martin, became a **territorial parish of its own** on **March 11, 1856**.

In Augustin's day, the church served exactly as he envisioned — as a **center of communal activity**, a beacon of **faith and culture**, and a haven of **stability and spiritual strength** for his people.

That purpose has never been relinquished. Nearly **two centuries later**, **St. Augustine Church** remains the nucleus around which the Isle Brevelle community draws its inspiration and spiritual sustenance.

— *Written by Joseph Moran*



From Our Past

In a letter written to a friend after his return from a trip taken with his father Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer to his native France, Augustine Metoyer expressed his intent to build a church for his community.

Impressed by the French villages he visited, whose churches served as the centers of community life, Augustine was determined to bring the same tradition to the village of his people at home, in Louisiana, on Isle Brevelle.

And so, upon his return home he engaged the services of his brother Louis, an accomplished builder, to construct a church on land that he would donate for the purpose.

According to Augustine's wishes the church was completed before the end of the year 1803, and named in honor of his patron saint, the great Catholic scholar and Bishop of Hippo, Africa. Tribute was also paid to his mother Marie Thereze Coin Coin, founder and developer of Yucca plantation, and her ancestral homeland, by naming so.

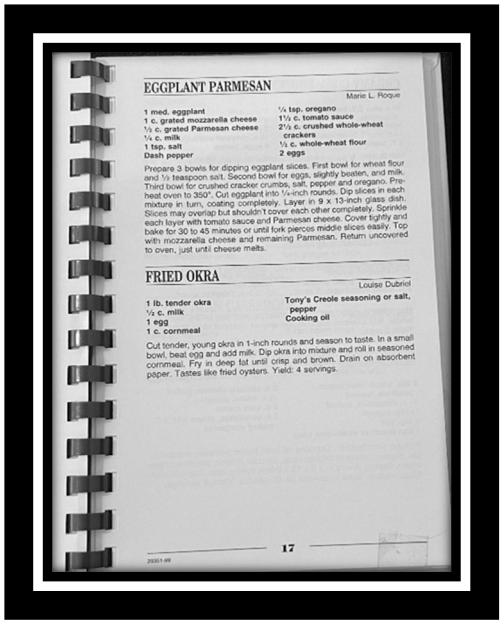
Upon being completed, St. Augustine Church earned the unique distinction of being the first (possibly the only) Catholic church in the United States, founded, independently financed, and built by people of color for their expressed use.

The original structure was architecturally impressive and unique for its day, largely because of the roof covered galleries, on either side, which ran the entire length of the building. This provided not only a visually pleasing design but also served as air conditioning in the hot sultry summers. The church is said to have attracted people from afar, especially architects and builders, because of it's beauty and functional integrity; it is depicted in the background of a portrait of Augustine Metoyer which hangs in the present church that replaced it in 1916. The bell in the tower of the existing church is the same as of the original church, being the only remaining feature of that structure.

The church was dedicated as a mission chapel attached to Natchitoches on July 19, 1829 and then by decree of Bishop Martin of Natchitoches, a territorial parish of its own, with described limits, on March 11, 1856.

The church in Augustine's day served, just as he had envisioned, as a center of communal activity for his people and as a haven for stability for the deep faith and beloved culture. Its expressed purpose has never been relinquished and remains, nearly two centuries later, the nucleus around which the community draws inspiration and spiritual sustenance.

Written by: Joseph Moran



EGGPLANT PARMESAN

Marie L. Roque

1 med. eggplant
1 c. grated mozzarella cheese
½ c. grated Parmesan cheese
¼ c. milk
1 tsp. salt
Dash pepper
¼ tsp. oregano
1½ c. tomato sauce
2½ c. crushed whole-wheat crackers
½ c. whole-wheat flour
2 eggs

Prepare 3 bowls for dipping eggplant slices. First bowl for wheat flour and ½ teaspoon salt. Second bowl for eggs, slightly beaten, and milk. Third bowl for crushed cracker crumbs, salt, pepper and oregano. Preheat oven to 350°. Cut eggplant into ¼-inch rounds. Dip slices in each mixture in turn, coating completely. Layer in 9 x 13-inch glass dish. Slices may overlap but shouldn't cover each other completely. Sprinkle each layer with tomato sauce and Parmesan cheese. Cover tightly and bake for 30 to 45 minutes or until fork pierces middle slices easily. Top with mozzarella cheese and remaining Parmesan. Return uncovered to oven, just until cheese melts.

FRIED OKRA

Louise Dubriel

1 lb. tender okra
½ c. milk
1 egg
1 c. cornmeal
Tony's Creole seasoning or salt, pepper
Cooking oil

Cut tender, young okra in 1-inch rounds and season to taste. In a small bowl, beat egg and add milk. Dip okra into mixture and roll in seasoned cornmeal. Fry in deep fat until crisp and brown. Drain on absorbent paper. Tastes like fried oysters. Yield: 4 servings.

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