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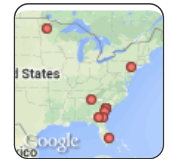
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2014-02-05 / Social & Community News

Savannah’s First Black Eye Doctor Changes Direction And Focus

(Part One of a Four Part Series)

Where's the story?



13 Points Mentioned



[1816 Abercorn, Dr. Jim Dandy's 1st office.](#)

As we celebrate Black History Month, there is an African American doctor in [Savannah](#)...the eldest of 6 children, who worked beside his mother in [Lake City, Florida](#), from the age of 14 until she sent him on the bus to Bethune Cookman College with a prayer and \$29 to get a college degree. He has been a successful businessman in Savannah for 42 years, but his story is one of disappointment, perseverance, tenacity, faith and triumph. Circumstances being a little different, James Alphonso Dandy would have been a hard-hitting left-fielder in the majors, but late in his high school career, he suffered from night blindness, limiting his options to playing for the Chicago Cubs, who didn't play home night games until 1988. (Before that, if it got dark during a game, everybody just packed up their things and went home). Baseball's loss was the optometry world's gain. In the 1960's, there were very few Black Eye Doctors in the United States. We asked Dr. Dandy, "What inspired you to become an Optometrist?" His account is as

follows: "When I was 25 years of age, in the Air Force, stationed in [Wadena, Minnesota](#), I discovered that I had an incurable, progressive, degenerative eye disease that would lead to blindness...Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP). I was devastated. I decided to get out of the Air Force and go back to school to become an Eye Doctor so that I could find out more about the disease and perhaps even help to find a cure. After being discharged, I moved to [Miami, Florida](#). When checking the classified section of the Miami Herald Newspaper, I discovered a job opportunity at the University of Miami Medical School. It was a Laboratory Technician in Birth Defect Research. I worked at the Miami Medical School from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. and the Miami International Airport, waxing and buffing floors, from 6 p.m. to 12 midnight. My goal was to save enough money to go to medical school. Ironically, the young lady, Phyllis Peterson, who trained me for the technician's job, moved to Savannah. The research center at the University of Miami Medical School was located next door to the world renowned Bascom Palmer Eye Institute. One of the doctors there informed me that he had never seen a Black Optometrist. That peaked my interest. At the time I did not know the difference between Optometry and Ophthalmology. I had earned a four year degree in Biology from Bethune Cookman. I discovered that in order to be an Ophthalmologist, I would have to go to school an additional eight years. Optometry was only an additional four years. I applied and was accepted at Howard's Medical School and the Pennsylvania School of Optometry (PCO). I chose Optometry, because I was not sure how many years I had left before blindness would become my reality. After one year of working at the University of Miami Medical School and the Miami International Airport, I made my decision. I moved to [Philadelphia](#) and began classes PCO. I was one, of only four Black students on a campus of approximately 500 students. So, of course, everyone knew the student on campus who had this somewhat rare eye disease...Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP). On a typical day, one of the upper classmen would stop me and request that I accompany them to the laboratory so that he or she could look inside my eyes.

Four of my professors counseled and strongly advised me to leave school. They all said that I was wasting my time. They all said that I would not be able to practice for more than eight years at best. My faith in God kept me going. Because the curriculum was so rigorous, the PCO administration advised students not to maintain any employment. However, I HAD to work. I worked two part time jobs: one at Albert Einstein Hospital, waxing and buffing floors again, and very interestingly, as a Night Watchman in the Administrative and Classroom Building. One of the manifestations of RP is Nyctalopia (night blindness), and here I was a Night Watchman! Another important thing happened to me in [Philadelphia](#): I met my lovely wife, [Evelyn](#)." Dr. Dandy was asked, "What made you come to [Savannah](#) after graduating?" His response. "After graduating from PCO in May of 1972, I decided to practice in my home state of Florida, specifically, Daytona Beach, Florida. However, Dr. C. Clayton Powell,

an optometrist in [Atlanta](#) told me that I should look at Macon and [Savannah, Georgia](#). I eliminated Macon because I had heard of the Macon Mayor's negative attitude toward Black people. Actually, I could have gone to just about any city in the country and I would have been the only Black Eye Doctor. Evelyn and I decided to visit Savannah and I called some friends, Zeline and Fred Foster. They introduced me to Dr. Wesley J. Ball, who in turn, introduced me to Dr. Henry Collier and Dr. Stephen McDew. I looked at the Collier Professional Building, then located on the corner of [West Broad and Bolton Street](#), where Dr. Collier practiced with his two brothers. Unfortunately, the space that he had available was too small for my needs. Dr. Ball then told me that if I would set up practice in Savannah that he would renovate space in his building to suit my taste and not charge me any rent for the first three months. Dr. Ball was on the Board at Carver State Bank. He promised that the bank would provide me the financing to start my business and finance a home for my family.



Barbara Mallard, 1st Employee Dr. Jim Dandy

[Evelyn](#) and I decided this was an offer we could not pass up, so we decided to move to [Savannah](#). Evelyn and the children remained in [Philadelphia](#), where she was teaching school, for six months and then joined me in Savannah. Zeline assisted me in finding a receptionist by introducing me to Corrine Mallard. Corrine could not take the job, but she told me she had a sister, Barbara Mallard. I interviewed Barbara and she became my first employee. She started before the renovation on the building was complete. C.C. Griffin and Mr. Mobley completed the renovation. While they were busy working, Barbara was answering the telephone and making appointments. It was typical that in the evening, when Barbara left for home, her afro would be loaded with sawdust. We were a team. While Barbara was in the office making appointments and setting up shop, I was out in the community passing out business cards and meeting people. During that time I also met Dr. Richard Moore and Dr. Carl Rankin Jordan, both of whom gave me encouragement about opening a practice in Savannah. Ms. Wilhelmena Adams, at the Herald Newspaper, assisted me in designing my stationery and business cards. While I was at the Herald, I met Mr. W.W. Law, President of the NAACP, and he took a box of my business cards. Mr. Law was also a postman and when he delivered mail on his route, he would also hand out my business cards. He was a tremendous help in acquainting the community with my practice. As a result, I became very active with the NAACP, was appointed to the Board and served as Chairman of the Health Committee. Our responsibility was to recruit Black doctors to Savannah. During those years the NAACP had weekly mass meetings every Sunday at 4 o'clock. Invariably, Mr. Law would always introduce me to the Mass Meeting and have me lift the offering. I will never forget the encouragement that he and other provided to me. As the renovation neared completion, I made preparations for a big Open House on November 1, 1972, at my new office at [1816 Abercorn Street](#). Unfortunately, almost no one showed up on that day. There was a monsoon and it poured down rain. On November 3, 1972, my first day of practice, I saw thirteen patients and eleven on the second day. As I have mentioned, Dr. Wesley Ball was also an enormous help! Not only did he help me with the financing and renovation, but he would tell all of his patients about the New Black Eye Doctor downstairs. One day while I was seeing patients, Barbara told me that I had a surprise visitor. The visitor came back to my office, and it was Phyllis Peterson Mack, who trained me for my old lab technician job, back at Miami Medical School! She said to me, "Is this the Jim Dandy who worked with mice, rats, rabbits and guinea pigs in Miami? I can't believe you're a doctor. I've always wanted to be a dentist, so you have inspired me now to go to dental school." "So Phyllis quit her job as a cytotechnologist at [Memorial Hospital](#) and enrolled in Dental School. After Dental School she moved back to Savannah, and she became my dentist. I stayed at the Abercorn Street address for nearly three years. My practice grew and I moved to another part of the city in July of 1975."

Next week: My move to [Waters Avenue](#).

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[With havin so much content](#)

Submitted by [proactol diet pills](#) (not verified) on Tue, 2014-06-03 03:07.

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"GEORGIA'S BEST WEEKLY"

The Savannah Tribune

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2014-02-12 / Social & Community News

Savannah's First Black Eye Doctor Changes Direction and Focus

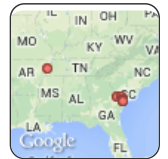
(Part 2 of a 4-Part Series)



[Savannah](#) Family Vision Center
Est. 1975

As we continue to observe Black History Month, we celebrate the achievements of a notable black Savannahian, Dr. Jim Dandy. Part 2 of his series is, in great part, about perseverance, tenacity and faith. As we mark the 50th Anniversary of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Dr. Dandy's struggles, as he moved to [Waters Avenue](#), illuminates for us today, this year's Black History Month theme, Civil Rights in America. We asked Dr. Dandy, when and why did you move from [Abercorn Street](#)? "My practice had grown to the point where I needed more space. I had only one examination room and my brother, Dr. S. Algenon Dandy, was joining me in the practice.

Where's the story?



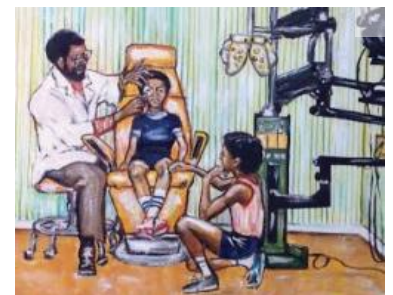
9 Points Mentioned

Early in 1975, I purchased a 2 story structure at [3709 Waters Avenue](#) from Attorney James Blackburn. The building had originally been the Burns Realty Company. I hired Benjamin Polote to increase the footage of the lower level to accommodate a large Waiting Room, Eye Glass Boutique, Business Office, 2 Exam Rooms, a Visual Fields Room and a Diagnostic Room. The completed addition looked like it was always a part of the original building. [Savannah](#) Family Vision Center was ready to do business. Directly across the street was Dr. Quattlebaum and next to him was Dr. Kessler. I was the only black person in the neighborhood. Actually, I was the first black doctor to open an office on the Southside, or across [Victory Drive](#). The move to [Waters Avenue](#) presented a host of shocking experiences and tested my faith and tolerance. I began to practice on Waters Avenue in July 1975. The Nword was spray painted on my building several times. My windows were broken out and my plants and flowers were trampled. Most of this was done at night, but one day, I actually observed a man, from my office window, walking on my flowers and mashing them into the ground. Going out, asking him to stop and being called the N-word to my face and told to leave the neighborhood, required much restraint and strength from the Lord. I had a shovel hidden between the back of the building and the air conditioning unit because each morning I had to clean my parking lot. I would wear jeans, sneakers and a T-shirt to work. This was necessary because persons would bring their dogs to relieve themselves in my parking lot every night. The dog feces were strategically placed at my front door, back door, and all over the parking lot. You can imagine how things would be on Monday morning because they had the whole weekend.

Several times I slept in the office overnight, and did a lot of praying; for fear that someone would set the building on fire. This went on for about 2 months until I hired an employee from the community.

Soon, families from the neighborhood began to use me as their optometrist and consequently, the spray painting stopped, the parking lot looked the same in the morning as when I left it, the night before, and my practice became about 60% white. I used to make my own glasses.

When I was at Pennsylvania College of Optometry, I became involved in Project Haiti, where I was part of a group of students who went to Haiti, and took hundreds of pairs of glasses that we made. So, that's how I learned. Optometrists are not taught to make glasses. I bought my own edger and I would do examinations during the day and make the glasses at night. I hired Uleasa Walker Plummer in 1984. She was a quick study and so enthusiastic. I taught her to make glasses, as well.



Portrait of Dr. Dandy examining his sons, Ronald and Russell, age 9
Portrait by Artie Milton

She eventually became my Office Manager, and worked with me at [Savannah](#) Family Vision Center until I retired. She still remains in my employee. My brother and I opened a second office in [Statesboro, GA](#). Algenon began practicing with me in August of 1975 and we worked together for about 3 years. I also opened a 3rd practice in [Springfield, GA](#), where I worked two, half days a week. I recruited my brother from teaching high school math. I suppose he had teaching in his blood. He left the practice to become the first black faculty member at his alma mater, Southern College of Optometry in [Memphis, Tennessee](#).

He was the first Black to graduate from that college in May of 1975. Along with his faculty position, he was also the Director of the Colleges', Hayes Eye Clinic in Memphis. In 1979, I began Hart Contact Lenses. Hart was my mother's maiden name. In 1980, I was appointed the optometrist for the [Coastal Correctional Institution](#). I remained there for 20 years on a part time basis. I was the first doctor, other than the chiropractors, to begin mass advertising and I was heavily criticized. Other doctors believed it to be unprofessional. My sons, Dr. Ronald and Dr. Russell Dandy joined me in practice July of 2003. We practiced together for 6 months until I retired. Dr. Dandy, what were some of the most memorable things that happened during your years of practice? One, I had the opportunity to practice alongside my brother. Two, a dream came true and I was able to practice with my two sons. Three, I was highlighted in the Optical Trade Magazine, Eyecare Business, as being one of the most successful black owned optometry businesses in the United States. As a result of the article, doctors came from all over the country. Black and white doctors called me for tips on how to run a successful business. Some of them actually came to [Savannah](#) to spend a day or weekend with me so that I could teach them how to be successful in optometry. I practiced for 32 years, unlike the 8 years at best, that my professors told me that I would be able to perform. Practicing optometry was a joy to me, so much so that I once went 19 years without taking a vacation. I was forced to retire, because although I had 20/20 central vision, I had no side vision. I saw my last patient on January 17, 2004. I was devastated. I waited until everyone had left, and I cried aloud and asked God why? I truly missed practicing because I loved people, I loved my patients and they loved me. I can say truthfully, that I actually loved coming to work every day. It took a while, but with God's help, I began to live with the continuing loss of my sight and the absence of my beloved practice at Savannah Family Vision Center. It is true that if you trust and wait on the Lord, when He closes one door, He can and will open another for you.

Next week, Series 3 "Recruitment".

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[Great story. God bless you.](#)

Submitted by [Richard Shuster, OD](#) (not verified) on Wed, 2014-02-12 21:37.

Great story. God bless you.

Rich

PCO 72

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"GEORGIA'S BEST WEEKLY"

The Savannah Tribune

2014-02-19 / Front Page

Savannah's First Black Eye Doctor Changes Direction And Focus

(Part 3 of a 4 Part Series)

Where's the story?



15 Points Mentioned



The Savannah Tribune Salutes Black History Month

As we celebrate Black History Month, Dr. Jim Dandy and his commitment to recruiting blacks into the field of optometry, there are some similarities that become apparent. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) like the newly freed black families of the nineteenth century often started out with meager resources. Dr. Dandy arrived at Bethune Cookman College with \$29 and his mother's prayers. What sustained both Dr. Dandy and the HBCUs was the collective dedication and hope for a better future. In spite of their struggles, HBCUs have proudly done more with less. A National Science Foundation study found that the top eight colleges producing African Americans who went on to get PhDs. in science and engineering over the previous decade were HBCUs — ahead of Harvard, UC-Berkeley, MIT, Brown and Stanford. Dr. Dandy recognized the importance of recruiting blacks into the field of optometry.

Dr. Jim Dandy

When asked about those days, he told his story. "Obviously, there was a need for more optometrists to serve our community. There were very few black optometrists in the US. In fact, some optometry colleges had no black students at all. This was crucial to me, especially because of my ensuing blindness.

Historical Black Colleges And Universities

My loss of sight was not preventable, but blindness for many is avoidable with the proper treatment and care. The importance of increasing the number of black optometrists was a cause that inspired me to start a recruitment campaign.

Another black student, Alton Williams of [Wilmington, Delaware](#), and I approached the administration at [Pennsylvania](#) College of Optometry (PCO), and we convinced them of the need to recruit more black students. The administration awarded us a small stipend to pay for our gas and food while we travelled to HBCUs to speak to black students, majoring in the sciences. Alton and I travelled to Pennsylvania, [Virginia](#), [Maryland](#) and [North Carolina](#) to recruit.



During my second year at PCO, I recruited my brother, who was teaching high school math, algebra and trigonometry in our hometown of [Lake City, Florida](#). He quit his job and enrolled in the Southern College of Optometry (SCO), becoming its first black student. When I began my practice in [Savannah](#), I continued my recruitment activities at my own expense. I travelled and spoke at HBCUs in Florida, Georgia, [South Carolina](#), [Mississippi](#) and [Alabama](#). I also became active with the National Optometric Association (NOA), and eventually was elected as President of the Georgia Chapter. That gave me the opportunity to establish partnerships and address the retention and recruitment problems at colleges of optometry. I established a relationship with the administrators at the various colleges and we began to monitor the progress of the black students. If there was a need for tutorial services, the NOA provided them. Also, my brother and I would allow high school students to shadow us in the office, and encouraged them to become optometrists. I often spoke to elementary and middle school students about optometry, as well. Vera Burns, from Savannah State was one of my recruits. Dr. Burns is presently practicing optometry in [Atlanta, Georgia](#), and she also served on the Georgia State Board of Examiners in Optometry.

I suppose, because of my eye problem, I wanted everyone to become an optometrist. My daughter Ronlyn worked in my front office, at [Savannah](#) Family Vision Center and upon graduation, enrolled in Howard University's Pre-Med program. You see, it was my dream for Ronald and Russell to become Ophthalmologists and for Ronlyn to become an Optometrist. Ronlyn, however, told me on one of her visits home that she wanted to talk. We drove to [Daffin Park](#) and I listened. Ronlyn became teary eyed and immediately I thought, "My God the girl is pregnant". But the fact of the matter was that she really did not want to become an optometrist. She was only doing it for me, so I told her no, that I wanted her to be happy and to do what she wanted to do...to follow her dreams, not mine. Consequently, she went back to Howard and changed her major.

Ronald and Russell practically grew up in my office, for they were part of the janitorial team and on Saturday and Sunday, after church, we would clean the office. When they were five or six, they would dust and run the vacuum. As they got older, they swept the parking lot, mowed the grass and pulled weeds from the flower beds. When they got in high school, I taught them how to assist me in the Examination Room. Now, I never pushed them, but I heavily encouraged them and prayed that they would decide to go into ophthalmology. During their fourth year in medical school they were doing their rotations. They approached me and said, "Dad we have decided to do our residency in ophthalmology." I was so happy and thrilled. I went into my office, got down on my knees and said Hallelujah Thank You, Jesus! God answers prayers!

[Savannah](#) Family Vision Center became a training ground for Eye Practices in Savannah and throughout the country. Barbara Mallard Smalls, my first employee, is now the manager of the Optical Department at Wal-Mart. Tangie Solomon, a former employee, is now a Certified Ophthalmic Technician at Georgia Eye. Calista Haynes, a former employee, is now a top salesperson at Eye Glass World in Atlanta. MacArthur Griffin, a former employee, is now a practicing Optometrist in [Morrow, Georgia](#). Edward Sammons did an externship in our office and is now a practicing Optometrist at South Coast Medical. The following optometrists began in my office: Dr. Sherri Becker, [Hampton, VA](#).; Dr. Sylvian Ung, Austin TX.; Dr. Jacqueline Lucas, Winona, MS.; and Dr. Jakelyn Parker-Herriott, Savannah, GA.

It is my sincere hope that I have played a part in recruiting black science majors from HBCUs, into the field of optometry. I am confident that the doctors I recruited have saved someone's sight. I also know that one day, a cure will be found for the disease that has robbed me of my sight. Who knows, it may be a black man or woman, and they just might be one my recruits.

Next Week,

Part 4: Change of Focus

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PRE-OWNED BLOWOUT AT KIA COUNTRY OF SAVANNAH

“GEORGIA’S BEST WEEKLY”

The Savannah Tribune

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2014-02-26 / Social & Community News

Savannah’s First Black Eye Doctor

Changes Direction and Focus



(Part 4 of a 4 Part Series)

“Destiny is not a matter of chance; it is a matter of choice. It is not a thing to be waited for; it is a thing to be achieved.” William Jennings Bryan

Dr. Jim Dandy’s journey is not a matter of chance. When he was diagnosed with a progressive, degenerative eye disease that would eventually render him blind, he chose to go to Optometry School; to get married, to become a father; to encourage other young African Americans to pursue the practice of optometry and to become a successful businessman. He chose achievement over failure and tenacity over apathy.

The Beginning: Dr. Jim Dandy at his first [Optometry Office 1816 Abercorn Street](#).

“Acceptance of one’s life has nothing to do with resignation; it does not mean running away from the struggle. On the contrary it means accepting it as it comes... To accept is to say yes to life in its entirety.” Paul Tournier

“I opened my optometry practice at 1816 Abercorn Street on November 3, 1972 and moved to 3709 Waters Avenue July of 1975. Now, Savannah Family Vision Center has closed its doors after 42 years of service to Savannah and the Low Country. I have 42 years of precious memories. I still have my sign-in sheet from the first day that my office opened on Abercorn Street. Most of those patients remained with me throughout my entire tenure, and those who are still alive go to my sons. Everywhere I go in Savannah, Jacksonville, Charlotte, Atlanta, Charleston and other places, I run into former patients because I was seeing 3rd and 4th generations. I have been so fortunate and blessed.”

Where’s the story?



5 Points Mentioned



Progress: Savannah Family Vision Center 3709 Waters Ave. Mr. G (CEO of Cazal Eyewear) and U.W. Plummer, General Manager



“My change of direction began in 1989 and 1990 when I took business management courses from [Sterling Management Systems](#) in [Glendale, California](#). At Sterling, I sat next to a podiatrist from [Nebraska](#) and many of our conversations were centered around our professional similarities, including diabetes and its affect on the eyes and feet. Diabetes is the leading cause of blindness and the leading cause of leg, foot and toe amputations. I found podiatry so interesting that when I returned to Savannah, I told my office manager that, one day I am going to open a podiatry practice.”

“The pain you feel today is the strength you feel tomorrow. For every challenge encountered there is opportunity for growth.”

New Direction: Dr. Jim Dandy, founder and President of Antioch Foot & Ankle Group, 9104 Middleground Rd, Suite 2

Unknown

“In the early 1990s my uncle, who was diabetic, had both legs and thighs amputated and was on dialysis when he passed. In 1999, I was diagnosed with diabetes. In 2005 my sister Voncile, who also was diabetic, was on dialysis and had a toe amputated. Shortly thereafter, she was sitting in front of her space heater and fell asleep. Her foot was literally cooked, and she didn’t even feel it. The vascular surgeon was about to amputate her foot and lower leg

when she had a stroke and died. This really changed my direction and focus toward podiatry and specializing in diabetic foot care.”

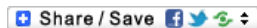
“In December 2005, I purchased [3840 Waters Avenue](#), one block from Savannah

Family Vision Center. I founded Antioch Medical Associates, The Foot and Ankle Group, in March 2006 and hired Dr. Lillian Williams as the Podiatrist. The practice grew, and we moved to 9104 Middleground Road Suite 2 in the building with my sons, one of whom specializes in diabetic eye care. I then hired Dr. Heather Driessen. Both Drs Williams and Driessen have since moved on.”

“In 2008, my brother, Dr. S. Algenon Dandy had a series of 3 strokes due to diabetes, and he passed from diabetic complications. In 2010, my mother had a stroke and she passed from complications due to diabetes. In 2013, my uncle’s son passed due to diabetes complications. He was on dialysis and had both legs and one arm amputated. The death of so many close family members added to my acute interest in devoting the rest of my life toward educating diabetics and reducing leg, foot and toe amputations. It’s a fact that diabetes is hereditary. It has been a source of pain and grief for my family and plagued us for many years. So, it’s personal, and I choose to make a difference in the life of persons with diabetes, especially their foot care.” *“Challenges are what make life interesting and overcoming them is what makes life meaningful.” Joshua J. Marine*

“Of course, no one wants to be blind, but I don’t consider my blindness a handicap or a hindrance. Being blind keeps me from driving, playing bid whist and dirty hearts and watching sports. Actually, I consider my blindness a blessing. Sounds strange doesn’t it? My life has been planned by God. My plan was to go to Officer Candidate School and retire from the Air Force. I was really enjoying playing baseball and fast pitch softball in the Air Force, but God had another plan for me. After all, He is in control and I am overjoyed that He has used me to make a difference in the lives of so many others. So, I give Him all the glory and I count it All Joy. I am most grateful to Savannah and the Low Country for supporting my family and me over the years.”

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Dr. Dandy, what a wonderful

Submitted by Danny Parrish (not verified) on Sun, 2014-03-02 16:43.

Dr. Dandy, what a wonderful life story. I am lifted and encouraged by your faith and commitment to those who have no voice. I was a very good friend of your brother Dr. Algenon Dandy. I just learned of his death last year after searching for him for two years. I was devastated to learn of his passing. Your story helps me move on and find joy in my remaining years.

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Hi Dr. Dandy! My son Victor

Submitted by Victoria Shuman-Miller (not verified) on Sun, 2014-03-02 15:20.

Hi Dr. Dandy! My son Victor was a patient of your's, a long time ago. Thanks for being a great Doctor, and for sharing your story. Take care and God bless!

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