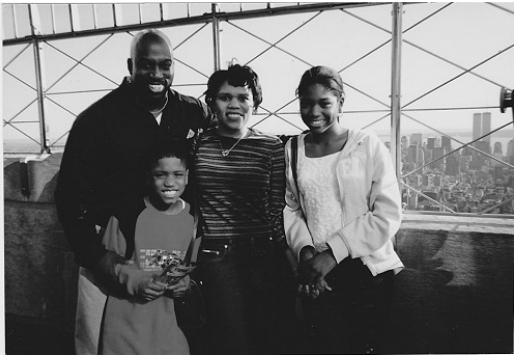


A LETTER FROM: **Dotteanna (Dotti) Garlington**

I implore you to grant my Dad, **Dr. Ernest Garlington**, clemency. He will honor your decision by bringing positive recognition to the progressive and improved clemency guidelines. My Dad will serve as an example of how to take a negative situation and turn it into a positive. In so doing, he will help others and continue to serve his community.

I did not attend my college graduation on May 11, 2008; my Dad was incarcerated on May 2 of that year, and walking across the stage wouldn't have been a celebration without him. Despite my family's wishes, I strongly felt that if my Dad couldn't be there, I didn't want to take part in the ceremony either. Instead, I cried most of the day and fought feelings of depression, anxiety and anger. I would rather not experience any significant life events without my Dad, including a wedding. Unless he is able to walk me down the aisle, I cannot envision a wedding ceremony. Anyone who truly knows my Dad would understand my decision. He is an incredible man and the best father on the planet.



During our family's crisis, the stories perpetuated by the media were very hurtful to us. I don't believe they conveyed the true character of my Dad, but through it all, he — more than anybody — helped us all stay strong. He remained the same through it all, never indicating if he felt angry or bitter. Instead, he focused on the Bible and his faith. He exercised, worked out and kept smiling. He showed us the way and lifted our spirits.

He has helped so many in his community, honored teachers, mentored youth, volunteered services, coached sports teams, carpooled kids, purchased uniforms, fed people, tutored and attended every extracurricular event in which my brother and I participated. There are many other examples I could give, but the bottom line is that I have always known my Dad as the most caring, responsible, dependable and loyal man.

My Dad has been my hero and the inspiration behind my academic achievement. When I experienced learning challenges, was frustrated and lacked confidence in my abilities, he motivated me and enhanced my self-esteem. Through example and encouragement, he passed his value of education and hard work on to my brother and me. His work ethic and focus on academic achievement have given me a mission in life to help others.

I am, and always will be, a "Daddy's girl." By that, I mean my Dad's approval, attentiveness and unconditional love empowers me and gives me a sense of strength to overcome obstacles. My Dad listens to me and guides me to reach my potential and divine destiny. Our entire family has persevered by supporting and inspiring one another. The hardest part of enduring his absence is not being able to talk to him about my everyday experiences. There are times when some funny, silly, or great thing happens and the



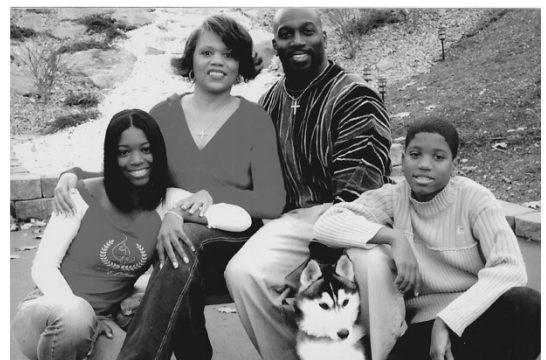
first thing I think is, “Wait until Dad hears this.” I have to either tell my mom to tell him or wait until I can drive seven hours to see him.



Unfortunately, my biological father, Hopson, wanted to break my mom to show her that life with him was better than with my dad; he wanted to break my dad to show that he was better than my dad; and he wanted to break me and DJ to show that we needed him. The irony is that it backfired. I should say "thank you", because his actions did just the opposite — it made us all closer and stronger. I don't think I'd be as independent as I am today and I doubt I would ever have thought I could do some of the things I have done. I proved to myself that I can fly and not fail. Some people made a big deal out of my brother and me changing our last name to Garlington. We did it for three reasons: We bonded with our dad, Ernest Garlington; my biological father, Hopson, rejected us; and it also made it easier in school and public places for us to have the same last name as my mom. She and my dad wanted us to say "Hopson-Garlington" instead of "Garlington", but my brother and I chose not to. I really don't understand how Hopson could make an issue out of it when he previously had supported his best friend, a lawyer and my godfather, in having his stepdaughter's last name changed to his.

When my brother, DJ, first decided to call Ernie “Dad,” I really thought I would continue to call him Ernie. However, his unconditional love and commitment to our family led to my feeling as if he not only earned and deserved the title, but he surpassed any expectations one would dream of having in a father. He patiently dealt with my initial attitudes and tantrums. Whenever I first rejected him as part of our family, he told me that he understood.

As I began to accept Ernie, my original plan was to call him “Dad,” and retain “Daddy” for my biological father. However, that quickly changed as the family times that my dad created bonded us all. Once, when I had a group of friends over to practice for cheerleading, Dad moved all of the furniture out of the family room so we could practice there. I kept calling him “Ernie” when I asked for his help, so my friends started calling him Ernie, too. My mom pulled me aside and told me that they should call him “Mr. Garlington” instead, out of respect. It was a few days before Christmas and I told her that she was ruining Christmas. She didn't understand, so I explained that no one would be hearing me say “Ernie” after Christmas because in addition to the present I had purchased, my main gift for Ernie was written in a card, telling him that I would love to call him “Dad.” Over the years, I have grown even closer to him and I am truly a daddy's girl because of the way he respects, loves and protects me.



My goal is to influence educational policy and address the achievement gap experienced by minority youth. During the four years that my Dad has been incarcerated, I have worked as a school counselor while pursuing my Ph.D. My Dad continues to lead and guide us in serving and giving back to our community. Imagine what

he would be able to do if he were home! He and I would work together to encourage children to read and advocate for education reform. My enthusiasm and drive continues to increase when I think about supporting my Dad's projects. He is so creative and innovative in developing ways to help children and youth. I would use his concepts and join him to speak to students at schools and community organizations. We would use our very challenging experience to show people how families can persevere through adversity.

Sincerely,

Dotteanna Garlington