

Adams

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concerned (about the opposition). I just thank God that I got another chance. It was pretty humbling."

This year has been a difficult one for Adams and her family. In January, Adams lost her sister, Rita Adams Harris, to COPD. It was the fourth sibling she has buried, including her twin sister Inese Williams, who died of an aneurysm in 2000. Both Adams' parents are also deceased.

"We've seen a lot of death, my sisters and I," said Adams, who pays homage to her loved ones' memories with a "Wall of Mourning" in her home, where she displays the hats she and her family wore to the funerals of those closest to them. "My family used to be kind of big - it was nine of us - and then all of a sudden, everybody started leaving."

In addition to the grief she suffered at the loss of her sister, Adams was fighting her own health battles. Since fall 2012, she had been struggling with nausea, fatigue and loss of appetite.

"I knew something wasn't right, I just couldn't put my finger on it," said the Morgan State University alumna. "...I was just sick. It was hard to define."

At first, Adams, a high performance team coordinator for Johnson Controls, wrote her discomfort off as a virus or temporary illness, but as the months wore on with no relief in sight, she began to seek professional help.

"I started going to the doctor and they couldn't find anything wrong with me. They thought it was the flu," she related. "...Nobody could tell me what was wrong."

By the spring, Adams, who had always been physically active, was a shell of her former self. Her hair was falling out, she had lost 30 pounds and her energy levels were at an all time low. She struggled to perform the tasks she had always loved, from cooking for her family to serving on boards and commissions in the city. In April, she developed lesions on her chest, which her dermatologist determined were the result of lupus.



Denise Adams stands beside her Wall of Mourning.

"When she said that, I felt some relief because I'm thinking, 'Now that's what's wrong with me,'" she recalled. "...I'm like, 'Okay, I can fight this. It's like diabetes or anything else, I just need to manage it.'"

Doctors began treating Adams for lupus, but her condition continued to deteriorate. She was out of work for all of April, with the exception of the two days when she had City Council meetings. After the second Council meeting that month, Adams returned home completely spent.

"All I could think about was 'If I could just go to bed, I'd feel better,'" she said. "I went to bed and I never really got up. I have three cell phones and all of them died in the bed. I really didn't want to be bothered. I really didn't want anyone to know how sick I was. I really didn't want to deal with it."

Fortunately, Adams' family is close-knit and her younger sister Tanya Adams was keeping close tabs on her. After 24 hours without hearing from her, Tanya went to check on Denise, panicking when she encountered a dark, silent house.

"When I came through the door, it was like dark, so I started hollering 'Denise!' and she didn't answer," related Tanya, a teacher's assistant at Kimberley Park Elementary School. "I hoped I didn't find her dead."

Tanya said she finally found her sister in her bed, dehydrated, semiconscious and battling a 103-degree fever. She called 911 immediately.

"I looked like someone from a third world country," Adams declared. "I tell her all the time she saved my life."

Adams was rushed to the hospital, where doctors discovered the source of her nausea: her appendix had been leaking toxic fluids into her system for months and required surgery. During the surgery, doctors found a benign tumor on her appendix and had to remove the organ entirely. It was a shock to the patient, who had always been healthy.

"I had never had anything more than a cold or the flu all my life," she said. "...I'm just thinking to myself, 'What's next?'"

Adams came through the surgery and was released, but would be forced to return to the hospital twice more, first for the pneumonia she developed a day after her release, and later because of inflammation in her chest caused by the lupus. Tanya patiently nursed her sister back to health. It was a long process for Denise, who was so weakened by the illness that she required a walker to get around, but in time, she began to regain her former energy and zest for life.

"I'm just glad that Denise is better. I'm just glad that she ran (for City Council) and she won - that's what she wanted," Tanya said. "I'm just glad that Denise is back."

As someone who had always prided herself on her busy life of volunteerism and public service, her illness forced her to take a step back and reevaluate, said Denise, who is already beginning to work as a lupus awareness advocate.

"I began at that point to see how fast I had been moving through this world," stated Adams, who was honored last month with the 2013 Fierce, Fearless & Determined Award from the She Can Make it Foundation. "You've got to know when it's time to stop. What I did was I ran into the wall, and I was stopped by a higher power."

The experience has prompted Adams to make some big changes in her life and her career. Effective Dec. 31, 2013, she is retiring from Johnson Controls, after nearly 17 years of service, to devote her energy to the Council full time. Armed with the wisdom of her harrowing experiences, Adams, who was sworn in as a member of the North Carolina League of Municipalities last week, says she is truly making her comeback, and she's better than ever.

"I feel fearless. I feel like I can do anything - nothing can stop me," she declared with a grin. "I am being driven by something bigger than DD Adams now. I have been given another chance, and I'm not going to waste it. Life is short, and I'm going to live everyday like it was my last."

Acclaimed singer slated to hit the road

BY LAYLA GARMES
THE CHRONICLE

After a three year-hiatus, crooner Chris Murrell is preparing to take on the world, again.

Murrell has traveled extensively as a member of the Grammy Award winning Count Basie Orchestra, circling the globe 11 times and exploring the farthest reaches of Europe and Asia.

Despite his penchant for jet setting, Murrell has lived a quiet life in recent years. The singer took a break from traveling with the group several years ago and returned home to care for his ailing mother. Bernice Murrell, who passed away in 2009, was the first person to recognize the talent in her young son that would someday become not just a career, but a lifelong passion.

"My mom saw something that nobody else in the family saw," remarked Murrell, 56. "I'm glad that she saw that. It changed the direction of my life."

At 10, Murrell said his mother "dragged" him to a Tots Choir rehearsal at the family's church, Saints Home United Methodist, on a Saturday morning.

"Back then, Tots Choir rehearsal was Saturdays from 12 until 4," he recalled. "Now, a 10 year-old boy wants to be either eating cereal and watching cartoons or playing basketball (on Saturdays), so she had to drag me."

To his surprise, Murrell said he took to singing instantly.

"I don't know what Ms. Matthews said to me or did to me," he said, referencing the late Ruthie Lee Matthews, who directed the Tots Choir. "I just know that something was done. She lit a fire under me, and that started a 20-year career."

Since joining Count Basie in 1991, Murrell has graced the stage alongside icons of the music industry - from Frank Sinatra to Tony Bennett - performing for digni-



Chris Murrell

PR Photo

ties and celebrities alike. Murrell is slated to rejoin the group next month and can't wait to get back onstage.

"I asked God, I said, 'God, just let me keep my throat and put me back in where I can fit in,'" he said of reclaiming his career. "To start off going to sing for the king of Thailand is really one hell of a way to start, and I'm looking forward to that."

During his time at home, Murrell has entertained himself by playing local gigs and founding two organizations. He serenades women across the world through Tenderness, his song delivery service, and shares the lessons he has gleaned from traversing the globe through SongSpeak, a two-part program that includes educational and musical components.

"The need for uplift has always been a goal of mine, especially us (African Americans). We need self-love more than anybody on earth, and I want to be a part of that," he remarked. "...You cannot enslave a culturally aware human being, and that's where I am now. My search has been to find the good things about our culture."

Over the course of his journeys,

Murrell has experienced countless different cultures, and while he doesn't claim to speak the language of all the nations he's visited, Murrell says finds a way to make his message heard.

"I try to get the important things. I know how to say 'You're a beautiful woman' in just about every language there is," he said with a grin. "I try to learn a little bit about every country that I go to."

Pianist Turner Battle, who has worked with Murrell for over two decades, says Murrell has a knack for connecting with his audiences.

"His passion, his ability, his overall understanding of what he does from a performance nature ... and being true to the art form, it all comes through with his performance in a variety of settings," said Battle, a Greensboro resident and professional musician since 1978. "...I think the music loving public is better overall by the fact that Chris exists and he's in a position to do more things. I think it's good for the art form; I think it's good for music."

Battle, a N.C. A&T State University alumnus, said he believes Murrell is meant to sing. The accomplished performer added that he is glad to see Murrell finally returning to the stage full time.

"I think it's about time," Battle said. "He's one of the top guys out there, and I think it's great that he's doing it."

Whether onstage or off, singing is something that he could never turn his back on, Murrell said.

"I sing everyday - I'm consumed with singing," he confessed. "My soul is completely satisfied, more than (with) anything else I can do."

Rejoining Count Basie will be like coming home for him, Murrell said.

"Have microphone, will travel," he declared with a wide smile. "I'm raring to go."

For more information about Chris Murrell, visit <http://www.chrismurrellmusic.com>.



Battle

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