

# DREAM BIG

Dennis Carlton Woods was born to Flavia Bell Taylor and Meldon Hubert Woods on December 3, 1943, in their home on the Eastside of Detroit, MI. He was born into a busy household, which ultimately included seven children (in order: Meldon Hubert II, Flavia Bell, Dennis Carlton, Phillip Lee, Roland Clayton, Kenneth Reese, and Andre Kevin). The tempo of the household and their father's death in 1956, pushed Dennis to quickly understand the importance of creating opportunities for himself.

Education played a significant role in shaping Dennis' life. He attended Miller Elementary School, Durfee Middle School, and graduated from Cass Technical High School in 1962. He believed that hard work and the right educational opportunities could open doors for his future. Throughout his school years, he actively participated in various sports, such as basketball, football, and track and was a dedicated member of the school's swim team. He played multiple sports until he found one that could help him get to his next goal, a subsidized college education.

Dennis' prowess in the pool earned him a swimming scholarship to Tennessee State University (TSU) and a path towards his future goal. Driven by his desire to excel and surpass his modest beginnings, Dennis majored in biochemistry and pursued a career in medicine. The swimming scholarship took him through his first two years at TSU, but in subsequent years, he returned to Detroit to work summers at the Ford Motor Company foundry to save up for tuition, room, and board. Dennis firmly believed in working hard. In order to make the most out of every opportunity, talent will only take you so far. He believed hard work is needed to cross the finish line.

Nonetheless, he somehow managed to lift his head out of the books and foundry soot to pledge Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., Alpha Theta Chapter, crossing the burning sands on December 5, 1965. That same year, he met his future wife, Polly Ann Freeman. Committed to the idea of working smarter, not just harder, he chose a partner who he always described as brighter, even than him, who was also studying the medical sciences. They married on August 19, 1967.

Always on the lookout for the next best opportunity, Dennis enrolled a few months later at nearby Meharry Medical College in 1967. Dennis made a significant impact during his time at Meharry, serving as the Editor-in-Chief of the *Meharrian* in 1971, while also holding positions such as Class Treasurer, Pre-Alumni Association Treasurer, and participating in the Urology Club. His leadership skills extended beyond the classroom as he captained the Meharry basketball team. Together, Polly and Dennis welcomed their daughter, Delisa Chimene, in 1970. Despite the challenges of balancing academics and family life, he persevered and graduated in 1971.

As part of his clinical rotation, Dennis Woods had the opportunity to work in Mound Bayou, Mississippi at Taborian Hospital, one of the only hospitals in the state that allowed colored medical practicum students to train. He often regaled others with stories of him living with an elderly woman on an old plantation and learning to pick cotton. Not one to miss an opportunity to be a part of history, while in Mississippi, he also had the privilege of interacting with the remarkable civil rights activist, Fannie Lou Hamer. He chose to specialize in ophthalmology and expanded his medical expertise through externships at prestigious institutions such as Stanford University and Temple University's Wills Eye Institute.

In 1971, the family moved back to Detroit. Dennis began his medical career at Harper Hospital, where he completed his residency and welcomed his namesake, Dennis Jr., into the world. Driven by his passion for operating on his own terms, Dennis Woods ventured into private practice, co-founding the Detroit Medical Group, a multi-specialty group encompassing radiology, obstetrics, laboratory services, internal medicine, ophthalmology, and pediatrics, which served the community for over 40 years. In 1982, Polly & Dennis welcomed their third and last child, Krystle Charon.

Dennis was heavily involved in the rearing of his three children, paying special attention to their education and well-roundedness. He exposed all of his children to education, sports, and the arts, assuming that they each had their own special gift, and it was his job to find it and support it. He dreamed dreams for each of them, bigger than they could imagine. Each child was encouraged to play an instrument, participate in a sport, and push the limits of their abilities in the classroom. The approach he had used in his own life of broad exposure, followed by specialization was a process he later impressed upon his children: Expose yourself to different activities. Find your niche, strength, or God-given talent. Then, throw yourself into it as if your life depended on it. From the start, he had a plan for his life and encouraged his children and others to do the same.

In addition to his family responsibilities and medical pursuits, Dennis played a pivotal role in the development of Trappers Alley. He was a member of the founding Americal Development Company that conceptualized the project as an indoor marketplace. Although the project eventually changed hands, Dennis's involvement in the early stages remained a significant achievement. With a passion for politics, Dennis actively supported various political figures, organizing fundraisers at his home for Governor Blanchard and Mayor Coleman Young.

Dennis also cherished his role as a member of the Deacon Board at Plymouth United Church of Christ (PUCC), dedicating years of service to his church community. He could often be seen alongside his grandson, James Pope, filming Sunday service for the church's livestream. Throughout his life, Dennis always sought to take on leadership roles. Whether that role was basketball team captain, Editor-In-Chief, or deacon, he felt most comfortable leading from the front. He pushed himself and others to test their limits and take calculated risks.

Dennis had a profound appreciation for the arts, particularly performing and visual arts that celebrated the Black experience. He made annual trips to New York to attend Broadway theatrical dramas and musicals. He appreciated fine dining. He loved music, from classical to blues to soul to R&B. He also purchased, curated, and promoted fine art. He owned and operated the Pyramid Art Gallery in Harmonie Park along with friends and colleagues. The group sold and promoted the artwork of now well-renowned Black artists like, Ronald Scarborough, Romare Bearden, Carl Owens, Varnette Honeywood, Jacob Lawrence, and the photography of P.H. Polk. Ronald Scarborough even spent some time in residence at the gallery, working in a basement studio with windows visible to gallery attendants, watching the master at work.

Dennis enjoyed hobbies such as photography, gardening, genealogy, and travel. You usually could not catch him without his professional camera and bag in tow, following behind your professional photographer to get the shots he missed or encouraging everyone at the family reunion to take one-on-one photos with grandma. He spent hours, painstakingly sorting and editing these photos, ultimately compiling them into thick, labeled, leather bound albums. He may have more photos of you and your family than you do. He was also an avid gardener, tending to rose, vegetable, and perennial gardens at his home, participating in the Indian Village Home & Garden Tour, and encouraging his children to till the soil with him. He was a passionate member of the Fred Hart Genealogical Society, using his medical background to present on topics like the scientific basis for Ancestry DNA test kits. He also attended and helped to plan trips to Greece, Ghana, and Amsterdam with his church and pastor, Rev. Nicholas Hood III. These excursions were not merely vacations but transformative experiences that shaped his worldview even later in life.

Dennis knew the importance of building networks and making connections with experienced others. He saw so much value in relationships, he may keep in touch with your friends better than you did. He was unafraid to be bold in his requests, ask for favors, and return in kind when able.

Dennis believed in investing in his family and was proud to have hired just about every extended family member as a paid employee at his medical practice. Whenever he met someone new, he would scan his brain for the additional connections he should make to those already in his mental rolodex and provide you with their contact information. He was always looking for ways to support and guide those around him. He was known for his generosity, mentorship, and willingness to help others map out their own journeys.

Dr. Dennis C. Woods, a remarkable physician, husband, father, and mentor who touched the lives and hearts of many, passed away on May 26, 2023. His life was a testament to the power of dreaming big, pursuing education, taking calculated risks, and embracing diverse experiences. He leaves behind a legacy of hard work, dedication, and the belief that everyone has something special to offer. He instilled in others the importance of maximizing their potential and investing in relationships. His family will forever cherish the memories and lessons learned from a man who lived life to the fullest and encouraged others to do the same. In celebrating the life of Dr. Dennis Woods, we honor his adventurous spirit, his commitment to excellence, and his ability to inspire and guide others. His legacy will live on through the lives he touched and the memories he created.

Dennis was preceded in death by his parents, Meldon Hubert and Flavia Bell Woods, and siblings Meldon Hubert II, Flavia Bell Woods Moore, Phillip Lee, Roland Clayton, and Kenneth Reese. He is survived by his younger brother, Andre Kevin Woods; wife, Polly Ann Freeman Woods; three children, Delisa Chimene Woods, Dennis Carlton Woods, Jr., (Courtney), Krystle Charon Woods Hollier (Adam); nine grandchildren, Cordell Parichuri, Nicholas Woolridge, Lyndon Woods, Dennis Woods, III, Aidan Woods, James Pope, Jalisa Pope, Lillian Hollier, and Adam Hollier, Jr.; and one god-daughter, Whitney Imani Smith. Others that live on to cherish his memory include a host of nieces, nephews, relatives, and friends that he kept close to his heart.

