

Changemaker Michele Wright is Making Her Unique Mark On the World and Says ‘With Synergy, the Sky Is the Limit!’

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[Michele Wright]

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[Michele Wright](#) is a highly-acclaimed changemaker, author, educator, and role model, who is constantly making her unique mark on the world.

A native of Tuskegee, Alabama, Wright, Ph.D., has so many accolades and accomplishments that it would take several books to list all of them. Everywhere she goes, she proudly leaves behind a tremendous positive change in her wake.

She has been at the forefront of women's rights, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) for underserved youth, and our global resources, to name just a few of her accomplishments.

Known for advocating for health equity and her dedication to spreading awareness of [The Wright Cystic Fibrosis Screening Tool](#), Wright is a tireless champion who gives 110 percent to every undertaking. She is a shining example of how one impassioned woman can make a difference in so many aspects of our lives.

When asked what skills are needed for us to become dynamic leaders and changemakers in our respective fields, Wright explained that foremost, “we need to have passion for compassion. If not, then everything we are doing is for the wrong motive. And if our heart is not in it, then it will be difficult to endure the race for the greater good of others.”

“We also need to be committed to the understanding that quitting is not an option and that as dynamic leaders and changemakers we are stronger together than we are as individuals,” this inspiring leader says. “Because individually we may have energy, but standing together on one united front we then create synergy! And with synergy, the sky is the limit!”



[Michele and Terry Wright]

What is your definition of success?

The definition of success means different things to different people and has a tendency to evolve throughout one's life. Success, in my opinion, is being the best you that you can possibly be and not letting any obstacle deter you from fulfilling your potential.

During my one-on-one interview with Gayle King, editor-at-large of *O, The Oprah Magazine*, which is published in my 2009 award-winning book, [*Dear Success Seeker: Wisdom from Outstanding Women*](#), (Simon and Schuster), Gayle expounded, "As you progress in life, even your own definition of success changes. Every woman has to determine her own definition because what may be successful for you may not be successful for me. Success is very personal."

If you could go back in time and speak to your 20-year-old self, what would you say? Would you do anything differently?

I would say, "Michele, be kind, gentle, patient, and forgiving to yourself as you are to others." I would also tell my younger self, as my mother always told me, 'talk less and listen more.' Additionally, I would remind myself how beautiful, special, and incredibly awesome I am, because I am indeed a one-of-a-kind! Lastly, I would encourage myself to enjoy the journey as much as the destination while knowing that all things work together for the greater good.

What are three character traits that have been the most instrumental to your success?

Faith, Prayer, Hard Work

When it comes to your current projects what are you the most passionate about?

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I am the Co-Founder, Board Chair, and the Senior Executive Director of the [**National Organization of African Americans with Cystic Fibrosis**](#) (NOAACF), which was started in honor of my husband, Terry Wright, a 59-year-old African American man who was not diagnosed with Cystic Fibrosis (CF) until the age of 54 despite being seen by an array of healthcare practitioners, enduring countless hospitalizations and surgeries, and having all the classic symptoms of CF — a progressive and genetic disease that's often perceived to affect only the Caucasian population. Through widespread involvement, partnerships, outreach, and diversity, inclusion, and equity initiatives, NOAACF has strategically helped to ensure that communities of people who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) are well informed of CF's existence, prevalence, and impact on underrepresented communities.

My husband and I also co-founded and co-chair the Blacks, Indigenous, and Other Minority Ethnicities with Rare and Genetic Diseases (BIOMERGD) Conference, an annual event hosted by NOACF that coincides with Rare Disease Day and Black History Month, with a mission to help increase awareness of rare diseases in BIPOC communities by focusing on one genetic disease and one rare disease each year.

Additionally, we created and led the development of The Wright Cystic Fibrosis Screening Tool© — in both patient and provider versions — to help people self-identify symptoms that *could be related to CF*, as well as help medical providers identify people who may have CF, especially those who are BIPOC. This tool is now available in both English and Spanish as a free download for patients and providers/associations to license.

Simultaneously, we led the development and launch of the Advocating for Health Equity and Addressing Disparities© (AHEAD) Initiative with a mission to increase awareness of health disparities in minority and underserved communities and to introduce a successful roadmap and advancement strategies toward achieving health equity in healthcare, clinical treatment, medical diagnosis, and clinical trials across a multitude of disadvantaged populations.

We are also using our rare voice within the rare disease space to advocate for **Terry Wright's Law**, which will require that all known CF-causing gene variants (also called mutations) be used for newborn screening and diagnostic testing for cystic fibrosis. This will markedly improve equity in newborn screening for BIPOC individuals, while also benefiting all people with CF who may have delayed or missed diagnosis due to the presence of rare CFTR variants. This is technically possible today with available testing. The road ahead requires approval of this technology by regulatory agencies and resources for implementation across the country. Nevertheless, it is feasible and we will continue our efforts until any baby born anywhere in the US has an optimal and equal chance of having their CF detected by newborn screening.



You are clearly a mentor to future generations of women. Why does this mean so much to you?

Mentoring to me starts by first living by example and creating a humanitarian roadmap for others to not only follow but desire to be! The best mentors in my opinion are those who are not afraid to be mentored and to dare tell you the truth. I have been fortunate to be mentored by my parents, Frankie and Garland Wise, my entire life in addition to my elder sister Monica Wise and other very close friends and confidants.

I am also so fortunate to have Dr. Amy Hester, Ph.D., RN, BC, the Co-Founder, Chairwoman, and Chief Executive Officer at HD Nursing, LLC, as not only my personal and professional mentor and friend but as one of the founding board members of our non-profit NOAACF.

One thing I love about Dr. Hester is that she doesn't hesitate to tell me the truth (the good, bad, and/or ugly). And, in my honest opinion, we all need more people who are willing to sometimes have those uncomfortable conversations with us in an effort to ensure that our path leads to becoming a better us not just for ourselves but for the benefits, growth, and mentoring of others.

Please talk about the honor of receiving the Nations of Women Leadership Award and what it means to you.

Winning the Nations of Women Leadership Award is a most incredible honor. As a Leader and Change Maker, my life mantra is "The BEST is yet to come!" The BEST requires knowing that we are better, stronger, and wiser together than we are separate. Thus, I am delighted to be included in this beautiful and phenomenal community of diverse, unique, leading, empowering, inspiring, impacting, and connecting women from across the globe working individually, collectively, and synergistically to bring about a positive change that will significantly and positively impact today and for future generations!

Tell me about your philanthropic endeavors, including the Red Cross and Sickle Cell Support Services and others, and what this means to you.

I am a multi-dimensional Senior Executive with experience providing dynamic leadership in diverse roles, including pharmaceutical/biotechnology sales, healthcare administration, and business development to Fortune 100 companies and an international non-profit organization.

Professionally, one of my greatest moments was serving in the role of Chief Executive Officer of the Greater Ozarks-Arkansas Region (GOAR) with the American Red Cross. As the former CEO of this noteworthy organization, my team and I forged a regional collaborative initiative with several organizations throughout the community in an effort to exponentially increase the number of diverse blood donors across the state and potentially the entire nation. Through our first Arkansas statewide blood drive with a regional assembly of 40-plus churches, my team was able to recruit more than 250 church members (with 137 blood donations successfully collected) for this initiative, thus marking the largest turnout of African-American donors and the highest number of African-American blood units collected at a single event in the group's history.

One of my many personal achievements as GOAR CEO was the development of a nationally distributed video on “Why Give?” which was ultimately used as a national tool for the successful recruitment of diverse donors within multiple regions throughout the American Red Cross. Consequently, this video has become a Red Cross staple in the recruitment of African American blood donors and I am proud to say that it is still widely used today.

Talk about The Wright Cystic Fibrosis Screening Tool.

As part of my husband’s and my unrelenting commitment to health equity, it is important that we are focused on bringing light to such a challenging and oftentimes dark journey. And this embodies a dedication to identifying solutions to better embrace the unfortunate and oftentimes devastating narrative, as was the case with my husband’s 54-years late diagnosis.

Consequently, Terry and I, in coordination with Jennifer Taylor-Cousar, M.D., and Professor of Medicine and Pediatrics, developed The Wright Cystic Fibrosis Screening Tool© — in both Patient and Provider driven uses — to help people self-identify symptoms that could be related to CF and to help medical providers identify people who may have CF, especially those who are BIPOC.

This tool is now available in both English and Spanish for patients and is available to download free and providers/associations to license on [NOACF website](https://noacf.org/health-equity/the-wright-cystic-fibrosis-screening-tool/). For additional information, visit <https://noacf.org/health-equity/the-wright-cystic-fibrosis-screening-tool/> and/or email us at noacf@gmail.com.



Tell me about *My Water Buddy* and your book *The Water Tales*.

I serve as the CEO and Founder of [My Water Buddy® and My Learning Buddy® corporations](https://www.mywaterbuddy.com) (<https://www.mywaterbuddy.com>).

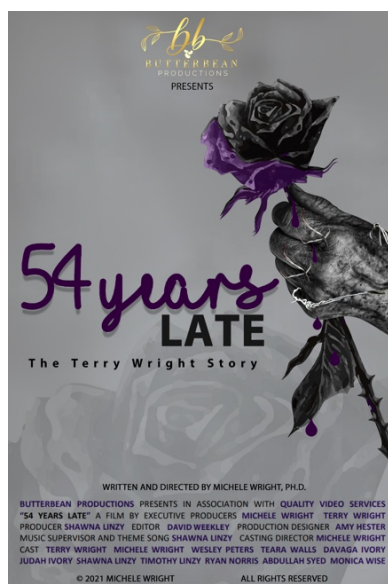
My Water Buddy, Inc. is a multi-faceted enterprise that uses edutainment and, through its engaging cast of creative, fun, relatable, and aspirational characters fashioned as anthropomorphic organs, entertainingly promotes the benefits of drinking water and educates children and their families about the benefits of achieving a more fulfilling quality of life through a healthier lifestyle.

My Learning Buddy, Inc. is an edutainment platform featuring My Water Buddy and Family® animated characters that provides unique opportunities for elementary and special education students to grow, excel, and succeed. The platform inspires total body participation in the classroom while helping children learn to express their feelings and engage with the world outside of the classroom. My Learning Buddy, Inc. offers Social-Emotional and STEM edutainment curriculums.

I am also the author and creator of [*The Water Tales: Ten Life Lessons from My Water Buddy and Family*](#) podcast and children's book, an adventurous collection of ten short children's stories that tell different tales centered around the importance of water, in addition to tapping into life topics that are important to children: autism, bullying, fears, self-esteem, peer pressure, etc.

The Water Tales Podcast won “Best Edutainment Podcast” at the 2021 Baltimore Next Media Web Fest; was awarded “Best Children’s Podcast” at the 2021 Urban Mediamakers Festival; and received the “Award of Recognition” as the winner for both Best Podcast: Episode and Best Podcast: Series at the 2021 Accolade Global Film Competition.

THE WATER TALES Podcast can be viewed through [Podbean](#): and/or via the [My Water Buddy Website](#).



What other interesting or exciting projects are you currently working on?

One of my most exciting current projects is having the opportunity to write, direct, and produce the movie, [*54 Years Late: The Terry Wright Story*](#). This is a film that tells the gut-wrenching true-life story of my husband Terry's late diagnosis of cystic fibrosis at the age of 54 despite being seen by an array of healthcare practitioners, enduring countless hospitalizations and surgeries, and having all the classic symptoms of CF — a progressive and genetic disease that's often perceived to affect only the Caucasian population.

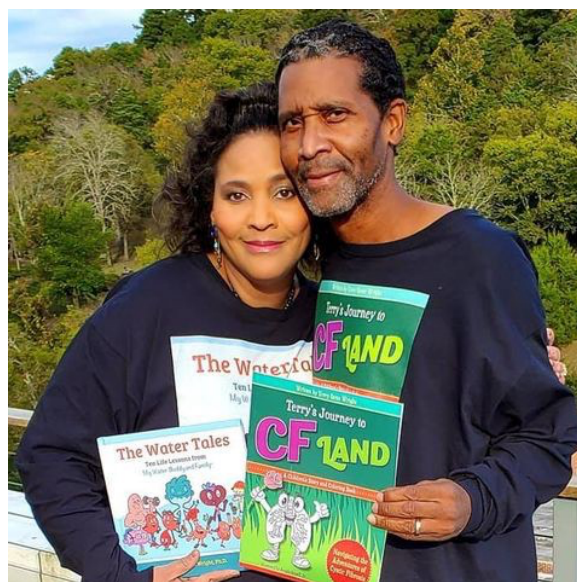
To date, *54 Years Late* has won accolades from more than 40 film festivals, including winning both the *Best Documentary Award* and the *People's CF Choice Award* at the Inaugural 2021 Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Film Festival sponsored by The Bonnell Foundation: Living with cystic fibrosis in partnership with the I See You Awards. Please visit the [54 Years Late website](#) for a full list of awards and cast members and to watch this docudrama. You can also stream on Vimeo at vimeo.com/ondemand/54yearslate.

I will also be presenting at the 13th Annual World Music & Independent Film Festival in March 2022 where I have also been nominated for Best Director and Best Actress for *54 Years Late*, alongside Shawna Linzy (nominated Best Original Song for “Everything” and Best Supporting Actress), Tera Walls (nominated for Best Supporting Actress), and Wesley Peters (nominated for Best Actor).

Terry and I are also working towards bringing *54 Years Late* to the big screen as a full-length feature film. Additionally, we have our sights, high hopes, and expectations on securing a Motion Academy Award for this project.

What is your primary motivation and drive behind the work you do?

My drive is simply to do my divine purpose in life and ordained destiny in Christ to make a difference for the betterment of others for not only today but for generations to come!!!



What is the best advice you ever received and from whom?

The best advice that I have ever received was separately and cohesively from my parents, Frankie and Garland Wise.

My mother, Frankie Berry Wise, an Award-Winning Professional Homemaker, Cook, Animal Rights Activist, and Author told me, (which is also featured in her written letter that is featured in my book, *Dear Success Seeker*), “This leads me to the best advice I can provide you: talk less, listen more. In this capacity, you will have a closed mouth and open ears to take advantage of countless words of wisdom. Undoubtedly, there is a time to talk. However, with appropriate and strategic listening and thinking, you can speak with both wisdom and knowledge. You will also logically know when, how, or if to talk. And when you do speak, choose your words wisely and sensitively.”

Likewise, my dad, Garland Wise, a long-standing Graduate, and Professional Advisor and Pre-Health Advisor and Director of the Learning Resource Center at Tuskegee University, advised me to always remember, “If I have seen at all and done any actions worthwhile or made any contributions, it was because I appreciated, respected, and emulated the legacies on my forebears, and was motivated enough to stand on their shoulders.”

How grateful am I to stand on both of my parent’s shoulders as I continue to prepare for others to stand on my own shoulders!

You have received a great deal of notoriety and many accolades in your career. So, what are a few of the accomplishments that make you the proudest?

Wow, that’s a difficult question, especially since several of them have such sentimental meaning to me and fall in different unique pockets.

For instance, it is extremely sentimental to me to be a native of Tuskegee, Alabama where I was born on the campus of Tuskegee University and had the opportunity to receive my Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical Engineering. During my tenure as an undergraduate student at Tuskegee University, I was delighted to serve as Miss Engineering and President of the Engineering Representative Council.

Two of my proudest moments as an undergraduate student at Tuskegee University was graduating “Electrical Engineering Student of the Year” and having the opportunity as Miss Engineering to host the 1990 Tuskegee’s annual Engineering Alumni Banquet and that year’s speaker, Tuskegee Engineering Alumnae and former NASA Engineer Lonnie Johnson. It was during that banquet where Lonnie Johnson unveiled his very own created Power Drencher which hit the toy shelves that same year. Little did we know that Johnson’s invention, which was later rebranded the Super Soaker, would not only become the top-selling toy of 1992 but go on to do more than \$1 billion in sales and ultimately become one of the most successful toys of all times.

Additionally, I was delighted to have organized, chartered, and served as the Founding President of the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) at the University of Tennessee Space Institute (UTSI) and to become UTSI's first National GEM Consortium (GEM) Fellow. I was also privileged to make history as the first full-time African American student to earn a master's degree in engineering management from UTSI.

Furthermore, I am proud of receiving my Ph.D. from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville and having the opportunity to defend my dissertation titled, "A Case Study of America's Top Corporate African-American Women Leaders: *Towards the Development of a Novel Afro-American Feminism Success Model*," which featured my personal interviews with eleven prominent African-American female powerhouses including Ursula M. Burns, the former Chief Executive Officer and Chairwoman of the Board of Xerox Corporation and the first Black woman to run a Fortune 500 company.

But what can make anyone prouder than to go back to their humble beginnings and uplift and inspire, as I did as the Black History Month speaker for the University of Tennessee Space Institute, which was sponsored and hosted by the institute's same National Society of Black Engineers chapter organization that I founded years prior.

Subsequently, on the 25th Anniversary of receiving my B.S. from Tuskegee University, I was afforded the opportunity to return to my alma mater to serve as the keynote speaker for TU's 2015 "Order of the Engineer" Spring Commencement Ceremony, which is held in honor and recognition of all Engineering student graduates.

What was so remarkable about this experience was being joined by two other Michelle's whose names were also added to the roster of Tuskegee University's 2015 Commencement speakers, including the now-retired United States Navy Admiral and Vice Chief of Naval Operations, Commander Michelle J. Howard, the first female and first African American four-star admiral, who spoke as the ROTC Commissioning Speaker. The other "Michelle" was the Former First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama, who delivered Tuskegee University's 2015 and 130th Spring Commencement Ceremony. So, without question, this experience was a most notable occasion.

However, this all culminated into yet another proud moment in 2018, when I served as the guest speaker and became the first recipient of the "Outstanding STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) Leadership Award" presented by the Area Development Director of the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) on behalf of the South Metro Atlanta Tuskegee Alumni Club (SMATAC) during their inaugural "Signature Scholarship Gala." These accolades help to reiterate my mission and deepest passion to help underrepresented students to become leaders in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM).

Today, I continue my commitment to STEM and underserved youth as the President and Board Chair of the Milton Pitts Crenshaw Aviation Training Academy (MPCATA), an organization named in honor of the late Tuskegee Airman Milton Pitts Crenshaw and whose mission is to provide young people opportunities to pursue careers in aviation and the aerospace industry.

I also served as the Board Member and Technical Executive Officer for the Arkansas Mentoring and Networking Association, Inc. (AMNA), a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting opportunities for historically underrepresented STEM students in Arkansas, including opportunities to gain valuable access to STEM scholarships, internships, professionals, and careers.

Through these various STEM initiatives, my board and team of volunteers have been able to help more than 100 students pursue interests and careers in STEM and helped to secure over a million dollars in college scholarships.

What are a few things you are looking forward to in 2022, both personally and professionally?

Personally, in 2022, I am looking forward to being a better, greater, stronger, and wiser version of myself and to continuing to grow closer in my relationship with God, my husband, family, friends, and loved ones. Professionally, I would love to see both *54 Years Late* and *My Water Buddy and Family* on the big screen and as household names globally. I would also like to continue our quest in Advocating for Health Equity and Addressing Health Disparities through our numerous projects and platforms.

What does the next chapter of your career look like?

The next chapter of my life is not only about being a better me — spiritually, physically, mentally, emotionally, and financially — but being able to better help and serve others with my gifts, voice, and assets! It is not only my duty and responsibility but it is my passion and destiny!

Is there anything else that you want to add about your work and career?

Yes, remember that you are beautifully and gloriously made and if nobody else believes in you, then do believe in yourself and learn to become your own greatest cheerleader. And if you don't believe you are unique, then simply look around to see if you see another you. Stop trying to be someone else and start learning to not only love yourself but embrace your strengths and weaknesses, and successes and failures. Nobody is perfect, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't strive for perfection and work with a spirit of excellence. So, today forward, become the BEST you that you can possibly be. And, remember, The Best Is Still Yet to Come! So, Make it Happen! The Sky is the Limit!

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Authority Magazine



Written by

Debra Wallace

Writer, autism activist, motivational speaker; all with the intent of improving the world one story at a time.

