



Special to the Democrat-Gazette/LARRY DAVIS

**Michele R. Wright** will sign copies of her book *Dear Success Seeker* at 1 p.m. Saturday at Books-a-Million in North Little Rock. The book includes contributions from an array of successful women, including gospel singer Shirley Caesar; Gayle King, editor-at-large of *O, The Oprah Magazine*; and Wilma Mankiller, the first woman elected principal chief of the Cherokee Nation and others.

## Book holds open letters on success by women

Michele R. Wright always knew she had a story to tell.

The 43-year-old North Little Rock woman was born with a severe learning disability and did not begin talking until age 5. She took years of extensive speech-therapy classes.

Nonetheless, Wright went on to excel academically. She earned a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Tuskegee University, in her hometown of Tuskegee, Ala.

She graduated with high honors and as electrical engineering student of the year. She became the first full-time black student to earn a master of science degree in engineering management at the University of Tennessee Space Institute and earned a doctorate in public policy from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. All the while, she nurtured her dream of producing a book on success.

This year marks the reality of that dream. *Dear Success Seeker: Wisdom From Outstanding Women* (Atria, \$14) is a collection of letters by women who are legends in their industries.

Wright will appear at a book signing at 1 p.m. Saturday, at Books-a-Million, 2747 Lakewood Village Drive, North Little Rock.

The book, she says, is specifically for "the woman who has lost hope. Lost hope in hope. Lost hope in herself. Lost hope in success."

Hope can be found in a foreword by Camille Cosby, wife of actor and comedian Bill Cosby, and the transcript of an interview with Gayle King, editor-at-large of *O, The Oprah Magazine*. Contributors include gospel artist Shirley Caesar ("Success begins in your mind and in your heart"), educator and school founder

Marva N. Collins ("Our character is the premise of who we decide to be, and not to live on the opinions of others") and actress Loretta Devine ("You must dream big and know each day you may get all you asked for").

Among others chiming in are actress Mo'Nique; former U.S. Rep. Patricia S. Schroeder; *Essence* magazine editor emerita Susan L. Taylor; restaurant chain founder Leeann Chin; Esperanza Guerrero-Anderson, winner of the 2008 Hispanic Businesswoman of the Year Award; Wilma Mankiller, first woman elected principal chief of the Cherokee Nation; the late civil-rights pioneer Rosa Parks; actress Phylicia Rashad; evangelist Joyce Meyer; singer Patti LaBelle; and Marian Wright Edelman, head of the Children's Defense Fund.

### CLOUD OF WITNESSES

Arkansas contributors include former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Joycelyn Elders ("You should ask for help when you need it"), Patricia McGraw, first black professor at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock ("You must respect knowledge and its acquisition") and Rose Wright, the author's mother-in-law ("Through the storm of life, remember the promises of God").

Wright kicked off her book tour the first of May in Blytheville and recently traveled to Ohio and Alabama.

The reaction "has been so positive and so awesome," Wright says. She has been told the book inspires, motivates, touches the heart, touches the soul.

"The women in the book inspired people to pursue their passion — do things that they love," Wright says.

That's not always an easy decision, and can come with risks. "But sometimes you've just got to dare to do what you dare to do."

Wright is a former employee of Procter & Gamble in Jackson, Tenn., where she was involved in engineering design and project design and implementation. In 1996, she moved to Arkansas and made the transition from engineer to a sales specialist for a pharmaceutical company.

"I am a very, very unusual engineer," Wright says. "I loved the technical aspect [of my job], but I was not one who could sit in an office and be a think tank. So I decided, 'I'm going to get out and get a sales job.'" Everybody thought she was insane, Wright says. "But you know what? I am unique. If it's something that nobody else has ever done, I'm definitely interested." And it was a move that she thanks God she made.

Wright believes her sales job and her former engineering job have a lot in common. Engineering taught her to think problems through and put successful systems in place to overcome them.

That, overlaid with the compassionate nature she has cultivated throughout her life "just kind of equaled double success to me."

One of first people Wright interviewed was actress Ruby Dee. Wright describes Dee as "intriguing and captivating."

"They each bring a unique inspirational story," Wright says of the contributors. "You have some unique diversity in this book," including a "beautiful presence of women of faith." But she's biased toward Dee.

The book was a 15-year labor of love — five years to get her thoughts and vision together and 10 years to bring it to fruition, Wright says. She had times when she wondered if it would happen.

"Anything in life that's worth having, you've got to go through the challenges," she says. "You have to appreciate the entire process, not just the outcome. Sometimes people are so focused on getting to the destination they don't take time to value and appreciate the travel. To me that encompasses success — the obstacles, the process and the journey."

### JUMPING THE HURDLES

One major challenge came in getting *Dear Success Seeker* published. Wright had no publishing connections, "but I did have a vision. I did have some determination and a crazy faith."

An author doing a book signing at Barnes & Noble Booksellers advised her to buy a copy of *The Writer's Market*. The book has a list of literary agents. She found one who was interested in her idea and eventually was connected with Simon & Schuster, of which Atria is a division.

The book was published April 14. "I was so happy to walk in Wal-Mart and see it," Wright says. "I would [advise] anyone [to] let your vision ... be worth the wait."

She also has a key piece of advice for new authors: "Don't ever let anyone else minimize your product. You've got to know in the depths of your heart what you have."

Wright's personal testimony is on her Web site, [dearsuccessseeker.com](http://dearsuccessseeker.com). "I call it the *colour* of success," with "color" spelled the British way. She says it takes different elements to make a rainbow colorful, and her personal success story has been the same.

Wright sees *Dear Success Seeker* as a brand, like *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, with numerous sequels targeting specific groups. She will soon start on the next book in the series and welcomes suggestions from readers.

Wright also envisions *Dear Success Seeker* motivational seminars and speaking services and is developing a success model for organizations, institutions and educational facilities.

For now, Wright says, she's thankful for "the champions of success in my life" — including husband Terry; mother-in-law Rose Wright; and her church pastor, Lloyd Lasker Jr., and wife Stella.

"My desire is for women who have no hope, who may be in despair ... to find hope and inspiration in *Dear Success Seeker*," Wright says.