

CANCER EMPOWERED MY NEW LIFE: ON THE BIG SCREEN



Archon Franklin Ojeda Smith

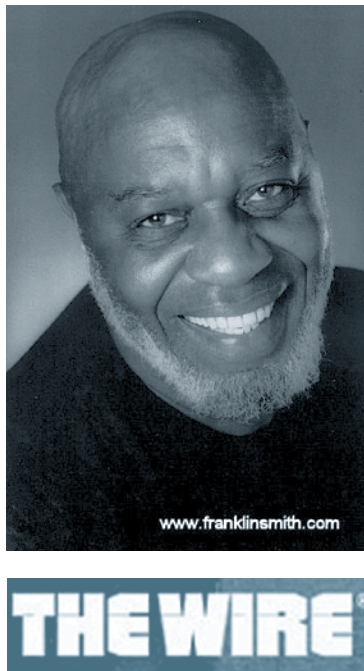
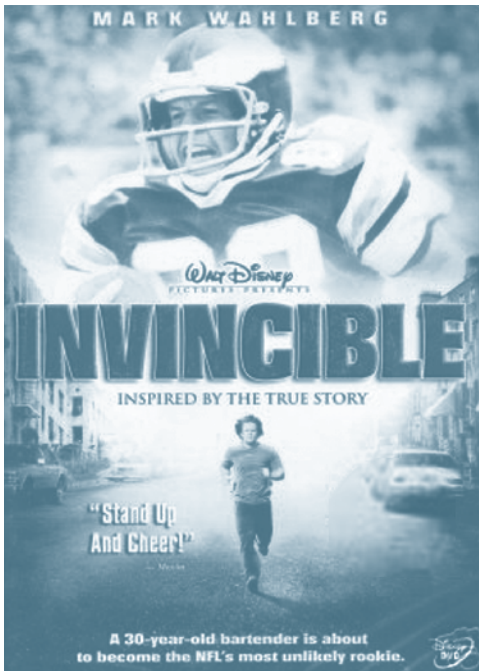
By Archon Franklin O. Smith, Delta Epsilon Boulé

This past summer if you saw the popular Disney football film *Invincible*, you might have thought, “Darn, where have I seen that brother playing Les, the cantankerous equipment manager?” If you’re a fan of the cutting-edge HBO series *The Wire*, you might have recently watched a minister on the show being wrongfully stopped and abused by the police and thought, “That’s the same brother – I know him.” And if you’ve had the

opportunity to see Vanessa L. Williams’s tender and touching movie *My Brother*, you saw him again, playing the role of a Liberian cultural attaché railing against the influences of rap music. “Darn these senior moments,” you might have said. “Who is he?”

Senior moments aside, you have certainly seen me and read about some of my experiences, right here in THE BOULÉ JOURNAL.

I am that brother: Archon Franklin Ojeda Smith of Delta Epsilon, Southern New Jersey. Here is a taste of some of



what I wrote in our journal, in an endearing and insightful tribute to our Archousai:

“Do we listen to words you give to the wind... You were at our shoulder, facing the racial wind when Sigma Pi Phi was born as its opposing twin... When the sword was raised against oppression, it was often in your hand, and many ask why you cry when history draws you as a man...”¹

I have also had a battle with cancer, which I spoke about in *THE BOULÉ JOURNAL*, crediting our fraternal creed:

“Within Sigma Pi Phi, Archons hold to the principle that we must, to the best of our ability, aid one another. Archon Williams lives this tenet ... I fought a battle with cancer this past year (1999) and Joe (Archon Joseph J. Williams) was my guiding angel... Experience has taught me that fear can paralyze, that fear does not yield to the educated, nor bend to the accomplished; instead, fear stands in salute of only those who find the will to act...”²

Act I did, and in acting I was spared and blessed with a new life. The new life is acting. You see, in the hospital I had an epiphany: I heard, “WILL YOU DO IT NOW!” I said yes! I knew exactly what was being asked of me because the need, the passion, the impulse and the compulsion toward acting had been a hushed whisper at the back of my mind for more than forty-five years. I had run away from it for all those years until cancer ran me down. On that hospital bed, being dripped fed chemotherapy, I was finally quiet enough, scared enough and less willful enough to listen and truly hear. I swore that night that if I was spared, I would take an acting class. When I was able, I did. (For a fuller description of the experience visit www.franklynsmith.com.)

I took that first class, then another, and another. I have been in acting classes ever since and will continue; for me, it is a way of life. Going to classes and auditions is what I do. And when I am congratulated for booking a role, I am fond of the wry admission that “...even a blind squirrel in the woods finds a nut every once in a while.” My life has become even more of a juggling act: It’s a five-hour commute to New York City; it’s a three-hour-plus run to Baltimore/Washington, D.C.; it’s an hour run to Philadelphia; and when I’m lucky, I get to go to Los Angeles. I love it! It’s all new, and so am I!

I have been a professor for more than thirty-four years. And with God’s grace, I am able to take the acting classes, go to auditions, and at times book jobs. I can’t tell you what it means to have this new learning, this excitement, at a time in life when so many of my cohorts are mired in the process of retirement, looking back and shutting down. Instead, I’m privileged to open up to new experiences, new people and a whole new world. Over the decades I have tried to be a dedicated teacher and a giving community person. I’ve touched the lives of thousands. But in this new medium, I touch millions. This new medium, this new work, is all a continuum, a part of my journey. I have simply gone from teaching and mentoring in the classroom and community to storytelling on screen. To do so, I have had to put down some responsibilities, but I am more than blessed because in the areas I have neglected, my Archousa Debra fills the void, so that we maintain balance. She enables my journey! She, along with my brothers and the Archousai of Delta Epsilon, are fully supportive and constantly encouraging. I have a network of strong, unequivocal support. I don’t know where this journey will lead, but I am not worried, nor willful; I am walking by faith. Ω

¹ “Standing in the Light of Love and Devotion,” p.150, *The Boulé Journal*, Vol. 64, No. 1, Spring 2000.

² “Living the Fraternal Creed: To His Full Ability Aid the Other,” pp.33-34, *The Boulé Journal*, Vol. 64, No. 2, Summer 2000.