Tell us a little bit about yourself.

I am Jamee Ellisa McAdoo, so my initials are JEM. Since I started writing and performing, I have been going by, “JEM.” I think my dad started telling me that I was a gem. It’s basically the same pronunciation as my initials so, like a gem, I am weird, unique, beautiful, and worth millions [chuckles]. My parents both used to work at a poetry radio show, so what I do is in my blood. I have always gravitated towards the arts, creativity, and writing. I remember in fifth grade, I wrote my first good poem, it was called, “You Are.” My parents both told me how beautiful it was, the love poem I wrote.
mom couldn’t believe I wrote it, she was like, “You did not write this.” That’s when I say my poetry started getting good but in sixth grade, I wrote about desegregation. I had read a book in my English class, and I didn’t understand why that had happened. So, I wrote about how I didn’t get racism, and I didn’t get why they said we are less than humans. That started my professional career because I started getting invited to different churches, schools, and getting paid to do poems for African American events. When I was 16, I went to New York for the summer because I had gotten accepted to an internship. My dad had found out that there was a book festival the last week of my internship. He was like, “Do you want to publish your book? You can do it at the New York festival!” I was like, “What!” [chuckles]. So, we did it. It was kind of rushed but it was for my upcoming 17th birthday which was coming up in August. Because of that, there were 17 original poems. It was a combination of all my favorite poems, I guess, and it showed all the typical 16-year-old experiences, you know, friendships, crushes, and finding yourself. Later on — you know, I currently go to Jackson State University and a year later, on Aug. 17, they had a Mississippi book festival that I signed up for and I got to share my book there, as well. So, that is how I got started in poetry.

Because of your love for the arts, have you always known what you wanted to go to college for?

My major is mass communication with a concentration on multimedia journalism. Since poetry has been my passion for so long, I haven’t really imagined a future where it is not in my life, so I knew I wanted to continue writing, performing, and incorporating that somehow into my life. As far as conventional jobs though, I was very confused about what route I was going to take for a professional career. It has changed a lot. I used to say, “Oh, I want to be a teacher—an English teacher, or a communications teacher, and just be an author on the
I didn’t mention that I was the very first Miss Heritage when I was 17 years old, which was back in 2019. It was a pageant to bring diversity into the Miss Arkansas pageant system. I was the only black teenager competing last summer and there were 39 of us. That was a very tough experience. It was a whole week of competition. You do different events each day and I won every single night in my category, which was crazy! Especially for a first-timer. I wore natural hair-styles every day, and I am so happy that I stayed authentic throughout the whole process. I just proved to myself and others that brown girls can be beauty queens, too.

Do you think you already know what your purpose in life is?

"I just proved to myself, and others that brown girls can be beauty queens, too."

I would say yes, or at least I know part of it. I am sure there could be many different ones at different stages of my life, but ever since middle school when I got my ball rolling with poetry, I knew, really early then, that I loved it, that I had a passion for reaching and inspiring people. I think that as I have grown, it warms my heart to see the impact that I leave. There have been times that I get tired of everything that I am doing, and then I am like, “What am I doing?” I realize that it’s bigger than myself and that it’s my purpose.
and others that brown girls can be beauty queens, too. That experience definitely taught me a lot of my purpose, which is to inspire and to let people know that you are capable, that you can publish a book at 16, that you can get paid to fly out to New York to do what you enjoy, that you can win fourth runner-up in a big pageant even when it’s your first time, and that you can reach people no matter your age or demographic.

If you feel comfortable sharing, tell us what was one of the most difficult experiences you’ve had to go through in your life so far and what motivated you to keep moving forward.

"I realized that life is too short and that the only way I would get back to the Jamee I wanted to be is by being the Jamee I wanted to be."

When I read this question, I thought about how junior year of high school was the start of me losing myself. All my life—it was pretty good, you know, I was Jamee McAdoo. I was bubbly, full of light, and energy. I had a positive aura, and people liked to be around me. Then in 11th grade, I lost friendships, started getting jealous of people, started comparing myself, my grades were lower, and my energy just started slowly going down. In my senior year, I didn’t enjoy any of the senior things. I was just ready to get out, and I had a really bad energy, which came into my freshman year of college because I was like, “I don’t even like myself anymore.” I realized I wasn’t the same person that I was when I was younger. I also had this, “I don’t care” attitude. It was a really dark place, I guess you could say. However, in December 2019, ironically when the whole world has literally been corrupted, you know, a new headline every day, yet 2020 has been my best year. Personally, I feel better than I have ever felt before. I have finally felt like I am back to being that younger version of me that I like and even better because I have grown, and I know now how to correct some of the bad habits I had in the past. So pushing through that—I lost one of my closest friends, Treylin, who died in a car crash in November 2019. I had to come home during my first semester of college three different times for three different funerals. All of that just added up, and I was depressed but towards the new year, leading into January—I do a lot of self-evaluating and I just talked to myself, “Life is too short,” and I remember a quote that I love which is, “Every 60 seconds you spend upset or sad is one minute of happiness you never get back.” Every time I think about that, I am like, “Wow, that is so true!” [chuckles]. You never get happiness back if you are wasting it being sad. So, I realized that life is too short and that the only way I would get back to the Jamee I wanted to be is by being the Jamee I wanted to be and that helped me snap back into it.

Talk about the support you receive from your family and the importance of finding and having a support system to help you achieve your goals.

My parents were both radio show hosts and educators. I guess that’s where the
arts and the importance of education. They have always made sure to expose us to certain things, encourage us to do certain things, and try new things. They basically didn’t allow us to have stage fright. When we went to forums or different events, they would be like, “Oh, you go ask your question,” or, “Do your poem!” They have always encouraged us to share our gifts and not be afraid to express ourselves, which I think is very special because I don’t know who I would be now if I didn’t have parents who supported and encouraged my hobby. They are so much of who I am, and I think it’s sad that some people feel like their families don’t support them, but that has never been a problem for me. That also led me to not depend on them as much now because I know in the back of my head that they will support me and I know that they love me no matter what so now, I have to believe in myself. I need to do different things on my own and make myself proud because I know that’s going to make them proud. I love being part of a family that values expression and supports creativity and the arts because that is so much of who I am and that is because of who they are.

If you had to give advice to the younger version of you, what would you say to her?

So to that 14-year-old girl right before everything got crazy, I would tell her, “Do not let anything faze you,” because I let
things get in my head and that is also when the anxiety kicked in due to expectations, and because I have always set high standards when it comes to certain things for myself. I would tell her, “Don’t worry about what people might think, just do you. Don’t worry about how things might look, just do whatever makes you happy.”

If you had to choose one word to describe Jamee McAdoo, what would it be?

I would definitely say ambitious. I am a visionary, and I am very goal-oriented. I always have a to-do list, and I don’t feel productive unless I am checking things off my lists. I already know I get that from my mother [chuckles] because she is very organized when it comes to tasks. Like I said, I am very ambitious. When I see something for myself, I get tunnel vision and I don’t stop until I get there.

What would you say to people who feel lost and don’t know what their mission in life is?

"It is a balance of not stressing yourself out because of knowing that you don’t have to have it all figured out, but also taking some kind of initiative to guide yourself on the right path to where you could be happy with yourself."

I would say that it’s okay to not know what you see for yourself right now. I would tell them to find comfort in knowing that there is already a path laid out for you and that everything does happen for a reason, but I would encourage them to meet destiny halfway, to try new things, to try to think about things they could be talented in so they can find what makes them happy. You have to step outside of your comfort zone, evaluate yourself, and ask, “What am I good at? What makes me happy? What makes me feel proud of myself?” It is a balance of not stressing yourself out because of knowing that you don’t have to have it all figured out, but also taking some kind of initiative to guide yourself on the right path to where you could be happy with yourself.