

They tried to quiet me before I even knew how powerful my voice was.

In a classroom where silence was rewarded, I was vibrant. Curious. Energetic. I asked questions that stretched beyond the worksheet. I finished early and wanted more. I colored outside the lines, literally and figuratively. And for that, I was often sent to the principal's office.

One day, frustrated and dismissive, a principal told my mother I would never amount to anything. I remember sitting there, small in the chair, but listening closely. And then I looked at my mother. She didn't flinch. She didn't argue. She didn't shrink. She looked at me. Her eyes were steady and certain.

When we got in the car, she said, "You are my child. You are a Child of God. You are smart, beautiful, and brilliant. Black is beautiful."

That was the defining moment. Not when the principal spoke. But when I decided who I would believe. In life, people will insert their opinions and expect you to believe them based on their titles and prestige. My mother had the last word. I took her words and ran.

That was the day I transformed from a Black girl reacting to the world... into a Black woman defining herself within it. I wasn't broken. I was different, and different is divine.

# MORE THAN THEY

My mother poured identity into me when the world tried to question it. She told me stories of Elliott, South Carolina—of dirt roads leading to Sumter, Bishopville, and Lynchburg. Of family, of faith, of resilience. She told me about her days at Benedict College, the pride of a historic HBCU. She spoke of unity, the thunder of the 101 Marching Band, and the sacred sisterhood of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. I would stare at her green-and-pink sweater hanging in the closet, knowing it represented legacy.

These stories helped me to decide to join the sorority of Delta Sigma Theta, Inc.

Through her stories, I saw possibility. When television didn't reflect me, I found myself in the pages of *Jet* and *Ebony*. I saw Black excellence. Black beauty. Black joy. And slowly, I began to see myself.

My curls, rich brown skin, energy, and bold questions are who I am unapologetically. It is not accidental. It is intentional.

Jeremiah 29:11 became a promise over my life. The very traits that once got me removed from class—my energy, my voice, my fire—became

# I M A G I N E D

the tools that shaped my calling. I decided I would never allow a system to define my ceiling. I would build my own sky.

Today, I walk the halls as the proud principal of Kittrell Elementary School in Waterloo, Iowa, where greatness starts here, not because someone predicted it, not because it was easy. Because I believed what my mother saw before I could see it myself. Thank you mom.

The little girl who was told she would never amount to anything now looks into the eyes of children who feel "too loud," "too curious," "too different." And I lean in close. "You are not too much," I whisper. "You are more than they imagined." And so am I.

*I am Cassandra Hart TS#12 of 52 of The SoulTown Magazine. I want to thank you all for having SOUL! 🌟*



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