

The Road I Built: A Journey of Resilience & Legacy

The transformation from a Black girl to a Black woman is rarely a single moment; it is a hard-won evolution forged in resilience, radical faith, and self-determination. My story expanded with deep cultural richness and detailed emotional depth from the Mississippi mud to steel highways.

It began in the heavy, suffocating heat of the Jim Crow South—a world calculated and designed to keep Black girls quiet, small, and bound to low ceilings. But history reached straight into our lives when Emmett Till was brutally murdered just ten miles from where my family drew breath. The terror of that violence broke the silence, prompting my family to pack up our lives and join the Great Migration. Leaving the Mississippi Delta wasn't just a move; it was an exodus toward survival.

We settled in a small Iowa town under wide, open skies. Iowa raised me on a steady diet of midwestern grit, quiet dignity, and a relentless work ethic. It was there, amidst the cold winters and long fields, that I learned to step into the future early. While society was still deciding what Black girls were capable of, I was mastering keypunch machines in the infancy of computer technology, translating data into opportunity.

Yet, life tested me early. After two children and the painful ending of a marriage, I found myself standing at a crossroads. That quiet Iowa town had given us safety, but I knew in my spirit it

could no longer hold the weight of my ambitions for my family. My children deserved more exposure, richer opportunities, and a wider canvas to dream. Coupled with a deep, ancestral longing for a warmer climate, I made a choice born of pure courage. I took my children, gathered our lives, and took a leap of faith across the country to California.

California wrapped us in a tropical warmth that felt like a long-awaited embrace, but surviving on the West Coast as a single Black mother was no simple feat. The financial pressures were heavy, and the margin for error was non-existent. Driven by faith, determination, and a sharp mind, I carved out a career in computer operations within the high-stakes oil and gas industry. Day after day, I pushed through the corporate grind, proving my competence in roomfuls of people who rarely looked like me. I sharpened my skills, built an unshakeable resilience, and turned every obstacle into armor.

After 16 years of building on the West Coast, my company presented a generous relocation package to Houston. That move marked the shift from endurance to ownership. Life in Texas felt gentler. There was no snow, and the equity built from my modest 1,000-square-foot California condo paid for half of a 2,600-square-foot home that I designed and built from the ground up. Laying that



TS#34

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foundation in Texas soil wasn't just about real estate; it was the physical manifestation of my sweat, sacrifice, and survival.

It was in Houston that my true transition fully blossomed. I was no longer the Black girl navigating systems built to restrict her; I had become a Black woman fully aware of her sovereign power. In Houston, I met the love of my life. Together, our shared drive, my insatiable hunger for greatness, and an undeniable work ethic sparked a powerful new chapter. I wasn't content just working in corporate infrastructure—I wanted to own the infrastructure. While still balancing my full-time career, I stepped into the male-dominated transportation industry and launched my own woman- and minority-owned trucking company.

Today, I have three 18-wheelers rolling down the nation's highways. Every spinning tire is a moving testament to the Mississippi dust we left behind, the keypunch cards that started my career, the single-mother nights in California, and every door I refused to let stay closed. From the shadows of Jim Crow to commanding a commercial fleet, God's grace has been absolute. The road I traveled wasn't given to me—I built it, paved it with pure purpose, and lined it with an unshakeable legacy.

I am Janet Berry; TS#35 of 52 of The SoulTown Magazine. I want to thank you all for having SOUL! 🌟

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