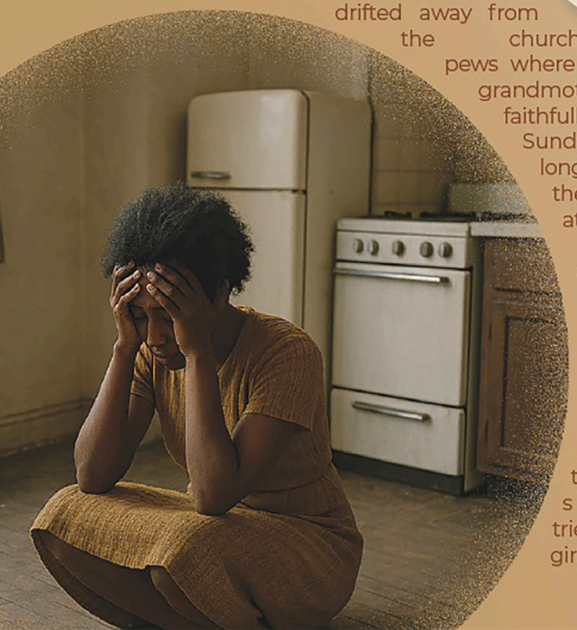
EVELYN'S STORY

STRENGTH, STRATEGY, SURVIVAL

Evelyn's story is a journey from a heartbroken daughter to a resilient Woman of God. It is a testament to faith, hard work, and the silent strength required to raise a family when the world expects you to fail.

The Moment the Music Stopped for young Evelyn, the moment the music stopped was the very day her prayers seemed to be answered. Her mother promised they would finally be a family, and two hours later was killed in a car accident. In an instant, Evelyn's world shifted from hope to a deep, simmering anger—not just at the world, but at God. "It was like He just dangled my dream in front of my face for an hour or two and then snatched it away," she recalls. That anger turned her into a rebel and a loner. She drifted away from the church pews where her grandmother sat faithfully every Sunday, no longer feeling the push to attend.

> "Evelyn's life proves you don't need a title to be a pillar of strength, have the audacity to recognize that you possess the power to change; you are the hero you have been waiting for."



By the age of 16, Evelyn found herself pregnant with her first son, Brian. In the 1960s, society tried to hide girls in their position, but Evelyn stayed rooted. Her true transition—the moment she realized she was no longer a Black girl protected by the dreams of childhood, but a Black woman who had to be her own protection—came in a hospital bed.

The day after Brian was born, she received a "Dear John" letter from his father. [A letter usually written to servicemen from wives or girlfriends back home ending a relationship.] Fleeing responsibility, he had enlisted in the military during the Vietnam War and was breaking up with her. Evelyn learned strength at her grandmother's kitchen table, where faith was folded into every lesson and prayer was as constant as breath. It was her grandmother's steady voice, firm hands, and unwavering belief in God that shaped the woman she would become. To this day, Evelyn carries her grandmother's prayers like armor—protection, power, and promise wrapped into one.

Holding her newborn son, the soft edges of her youth hardened into a resolve that would define the rest of her life. She looked at her son and made a vow: "We're going to get through this together. We're going to be alright." In that moment of abandonment, the Black girl, now mother, vanished, and the Black woman took the lead.

Evelyn didn't wait for a handout. While returning to high school to complete her education, she became the engine of her own life—washing dishes at a bowling alley and working steam tables to pay for her own cap and gown. She was determined to graduate, proving that her life was not a cautionary tale, but a blueprint for survival.

She eventually forgave Brian's father and married him after his return from Vietnam. He returned a stranger, broken by war. When she followed him to a military base in Kansas, she found herself in an efficiency apartment with no money, no phone, and no food. Standing in that empty kitchen, having not eaten in days, she hit her second defining realization of woman hood: "Even though I'm married, I'm going to have to be the one. I can't depend on him." She packed her bags, returned to Waterloo, Iowa, and began the long, steady work of raising her four children on her own terms.

This legacy of quiet strength remains at the core of the woman she has become. Evelyn went on to have 3 more children and spend 40 years as a dedicated healthcare worker. Today, she is a wife, a grandmother, and a "Gigi" to her great-grandchildren. Though she is the mother of a Bishop, she remains remarkably humble—so humble that she shies away from the title of "Church Mother," viewing it as a position of honor she isn't sure she "fits."

Yet, to everyone who knows her, Evelyn DeKoster is the very definition of a Woman of God. Her advice to the next generation is born of fire and experience: Listen to one another.

"The world has gotten out of balance because we've stopped communicating. The older generation has the experience, but we have to stop and listen to what the younger ones are feeling, too. We need that respect for authority and respect for self to come back."

From a 16-year-old girl washing dishes to a woman who has seen the hand of God move through decades of struggle, Evelyn's life proves you don't need a title to be a pillar of strength, have the audacity to recognize that you possess the power to change; you are the hero you have been waiting for.

I am Evelyn DeKoster, TS#10 of 52 of The Soultown Magazine. I want to thank you all for having SOUL!

TS#10

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