



"Push your shoulders back—and Happy Valentine's Day!"

I blinked.

"Wait... is this an etiquette book? Where are my chocolates?"

"This book," my mother said, holding it up like a promise, "will take you more places than chocolates ever could."

What 12-year-old wants to hear that on Valentine's Day? And wasn't etiquette just for rich people anyway?

But those words stayed with me. They still echo now—especially in moments when I walk into a room, am overlooked, dismissed, or ignored, yet know deep in my bones that I belong there.

I come from people who understood posture as a matter of survival.

My grandparents and parents lived in Clarksville, Tennessee, during the Civil Rights Movement. They knew what it meant to navigate danger with dignity, to speak without shouting, and to hold your gaze steady even when the world wanted you to look down. They taught me to make eye contact in the face of adversity—not as submission, but as quiet defiance.

My grandfather became the first Black Captain of the fire department. My grandmother worked for wealthy families, managing a mansion with such excellence that her own home gleamed with the same care. By the age of six, I knew how to greet adults properly, how to listen deeply, and how to hold a meaningful conversation.

My mother—Momma—was an elementary school educator. She answered questions about manners, hosting, and civility with grace and a warm smile. She would make me stand in front of the bathroom mirror and practice smiling—not to please others, but

Becoming A BLACK Woman

Is Not An Event

It Is A Series Of Reckonings

to prepare myself for a world that would often misread me.

My Daddy? He knew everyone in town. An HBCU graduate of Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee. A proud member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated. A man who earned his master's in education and served as a high school administrator, who built bridges everywhere he went. People loved being around Daddy because he made them feel seen.

In January 2006, as he lay in a hospital bed, he leaned close and whispered something that would later become armor:

"You know when you aren't being treated right by someone."

He died of a massive heart attack on January 9th. Ten days later, my mother succumbed to pancreatic cancer. I was 32 years old, my world collapsed, and yet—because there were so many people who still needed me—I felt like a little Black girl trying to be strong.

Becoming a Black woman is not an event. It is a series of reckonings.

Years later, in a public library in a South Jersey town outside Philadelphia, my son Jackson—then in elementary school—and I experienced racial profiling.

My mother had once served as the director of a library board, and I knew she would have been livid at the audacity unfolding before us. A librarian in the children's section required my son to sign out an iPad—something no other child was asked to do.

Jackson looked up at me with his curious brown eyes and asked,

"Mom, why do we have to sign out an iPad when no one else does?"

My chest tightened. I watched two families walk in after us and receive iPads freely, no forms, no questions.

So I walked to the circulation desk, leaned in, and said—calmly, smiling—

"Could you please explain your iPad sign-out policy? Because I'm noticing it hasn't been applied to everyone today."

She stuttered. And in that moment, I didn't just see

her eyes—I saw her heart.

Jackson and I packed up quietly, returned the iPad, and rode the elevator to the main floor. When the assistant director sat across from me and turned a deep shade of red as I explained what had happened, I maintained my composure. I outlined—clearly and firmly—the steps he needed to take with his staff.

That was the day I stood fully as a Black woman in a town that had tried, more than once, to shrink our presence in spaces that should have been filled with our joy.

A few days later, Jackson and I passed the library and noticed people turning away. A sign on the door read: "Staff out for professional development."

We haven't returned to that library in years. But I will never forget the day my son reminded me—without realizing it—that we deserved better.

His words echoed my father's whisper from 2006. Confidence.

Agency.

Chivalry.

They are now sealed in Jackson's heart. Today, he's a high school student navigating college tours, advanced classes, internships, and social justice protests. His DNA carries me, his father Anwar, our ancestors, and all the lessons passed down through posture, presence, and love.

And when he walks into a room, shoulders back, smiling—that's not just confidence.

That's legacy, all with his beautiful smile!

I am Dorlisa Goodrich Young, TS#8 of 52 of The Soutltown Magazine. I want to thank you all for having SOUL! ☺



TS#8

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