

# From Public Housing to Public Administration

Seven years ago Veronica Evette Brinson could have done what a significant number of others before her had done, give up-then sign up for welfare.

At 16 she was high school student and a single parent. A year later a second child was born.

But Brinson, 23, overcame the stumbling blocks and stereotypes. In June she graduated from Macon's Mercer University and will enroll in Mercer's Walter E. George School of Law this fall. Her journey hasn't been easy.

"I got some looks from adults and other people because of the kids," an affable Brinson said during a recent interview. "I felt that some people felt that I shouldn't be in high school. I had to be mentally tough. I was taking college preparatory classes. I knew I could do it but I felt that some teachers felt that... I was going to ruin everybody. I had to prove to myself that I would finish high school." Life for Brinson has never been easy. She was one of 10 children raised in a single-parent home in a south Macon Public Housing Complex.

"I grew up in Murphey Homes," Brinson offered. "You know, when you're growing up you don't think about economic conditions. I played and did everything little girls do. I didn't know I was in public housing until I was a teenager. I loved school when I was growing up. The teachers at Maude C. Pye Elementary School were like an extended family for me."

Brinson thrived on the attention she received from teachers. Home life was "OK," but school was where she flourished.

"My most positive experiences were in elementary school, not that high school was bad," Brinson said. "I just think that elementary school had the most significant influence on me. I don't know what those teachers saw in me, but they made me feel as if I were one of the smartest people in the world. They did all kinds of special things for me. They told me I was special. It was just a good feeling. I feel that elementary school built my self-esteem. I received a lot of feedback at school. If it had been negative, I think my life could have been different. I think the road I have taken in life was largely determined by my elementary school experience."

One teacher who taught Brinson at Pye is Leona Gray. She's not surprised at the accomplishments of her former student. "I taught her in fourth grade, and she has always been a very intelligent young lady," Gray recalled. "We worked on self-esteem a lot. I believe if a student felt good about themselves, they would have a desire to move on. She had to know where she came from. Gray remembers

Brinson as a timid but determined child without a lot of material things. "She's just an outstanding person," Gray said. "She's a good example of what I'd like to see all of my students become. It's not been easy. She's been through hard times. She just kept going. It shows that it's not where you come

from that matters. Motherhood as a teenager was not something Brinson had anticipated. She entered Central High School full of hope and promise. She didn't disappoint. She proved to be a good student. But the unexpected happened.

That was perhaps the most difficult experience I had ever had - becoming a teen mother," Brinson said. While she was stung by some of the negative reactions to her situation, she was nourished by people who cared. "I had some lovely, strong black women who gave me motivation to move on," Brinson said, her face brightening at the memory. When I look back, I think the thing was, I wanted to make myself better."

And she moved on. Brinson continued to do well in school, even being nominated as a senior superlative. She graduated from Central in 1991.

Attending college was something Brinson had envisioned since elementary school. "I went to Mercer with the intention of going to law school. It wasn't concrete, but it was there." Brinson managed four years of college while working and finding time for her sons, Ryan, 6, and Bryant, 5. She focused on instilling morals and values that she thinks will serve them well in life. Their father has chosen not to involve himself in the children's lives, she said. While she was raised in a single-parent home, Brinson said she had a special relationship with her father, Jimmy Granville. "I love my mother dearly," she said, "but I had this special relationship with my father while growing up. If there's anything special, it's the time I spent with my dad. I lived with my mother, but he had an active part in my life." Brinson's mother, Marie Brinson, is extremely proud of her daughter's achievements.

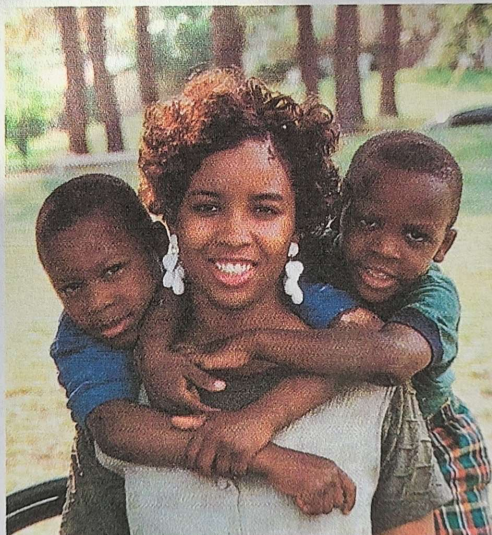
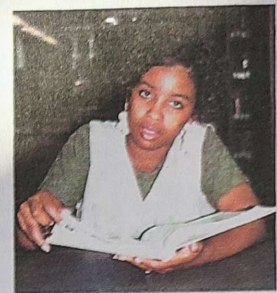
"We all are proud of her," Marie Brinson said. "Her little sisters are as happy as they can

be about her. She can show others that just because she lived in public housing that that doesn't keep you from making it."

Brinson realizes what could have been. "I knew I was a statistic," she said. "I didn't want to continue being one. Everyone has strength in them to move on. I know that I'm not Superwoman, but with God behind me, and I believe in that spirituality, you can do it. My boys are my motivation. I don't call my boys mistakes. I had unplanned pregnancies. I don't want to think if it wasn't for them I could be doing this or that."

"I want to say, despite them I'm doing it. People have said that I'm smart because I have done well in school. I'm intelligent, but I'm not smart. You have to discipline yourself." Brinson relaxes by writing and spending time with her sons. She likes to read. Her ultimate goal is to become a law professor and eventually write a book.

"In being a single mother, it's a tough job raising young black boys. They don't interact frequently with their father, and that's his choice. It's scary. I have to be strong for them. I have to be their mother and their father. I have to let them see through me and have some impact on their lives early. The odds are already stacked against them, but I let them know they can do what they want to do. You control your mind, and you can do what you want to do."



Source:

Macon - Middle Georgia  
Black Pages + Resource Guide

5th Anniversary Edition  
1995-96