

The Greatest Story Never Told

Stories from the Black experience to help you live your best life.



Hello beloved.

As Mother's Day approaches, I have a few stories for you that deal with a concept called **Mothering While Black**.

It's based on a book by Dawn Marie Dow.

While Dawn's book focuses on middle class mothers, it makes one think about the **unique challenges** of black mothering in all social classes.

Because they do so much and have so many stressors... one of the challenges Black mothers face is **outright exhaustion**.

Tiffanie Drayton's mom was a nurse. In the excerpt below, she describes the heavy load her mom had to carry... and the coma-like exhaustion it brought on.

She also talks about how her mother had to **"fight the power"** and protect her children at the same time.



Words About a Black Mother from Tiffanie Drayton...

Fights at school were a regular part of my life.

When I tried to neutralize one threat to my safety,
others erupted like weeds tormenting a perfectly manicured
lawn.

A wrong look.

An accusation of desiring another girl's man.

Refusing to change seats for friends to sit down beside one another on the bus.

And even refusing to loan my family's plastic pool.

All led to verbal or physical altercations.

The worst of the abuse occurred before or after school.

Skipping School and Hiding Out

After two girls jumped me while walking home from the bus one afternoon, I skipped school as frequently as possible hoping to stay off my tormentors' radar.

And that's when I had my first run-in with the law.

Working Day and Night

Mom was working day and night.

She was barely ever home to take note of the fact that I wasn't going to school.

At first, I begged her permission to stay home... claiming that I felt ill.

She allowed me to miss a few days but sent me back after it was clear there wasn't anything wrong with me.

I never even turned in the handwritten excuses she tucked into the front pocket of my school bag.

The Pattern

During mom's sanctioned absenteeism, I noticed a pattern.

There was really no way she'd notice if I skipped every day.

In her tired stupor, she wasn't tuned into who was, or was not, at home.

In the early hours of the morning, Mom would stagger back from work.

Drunk with exhaustion, she'd collapse into bed.

It wouldn't be hard to just hide out upstairs until school let out.

Life In a Closet

So instead of adding my being bullied to her exhausting list of stressors, I escaped into the world of American entertainment while hidden in the walk-in closet I shared with my sister.

I plugged our little TV into the closet socket and watched the movie **The Matrix** at least two dozen times.

I was enthralled by the artistry of its storytelling and amazing graphics.

I spent hours trying to bend my back, flailing my arms like the movie's main character Neo... as he evaded the flurry of bullets shot at him by agent Smith.

Afternoon Routine

When afternoon came, I would creep downstairs to open and close the front door, as if I had just come home from school.

Then I'd start my after-school routine.

I knew it would be only moments before the phone rang.

So, I would quickly position myself near it on the living room floor... waiting to intercept the call so the noise wouldn't wake Mom.

I always answered on the first ring and a heavily accented voice would erupt through the receiver.

Hello... Diane?

Catherine

Before I could even reply, the voice would bark a command.

Diane, this is Catherine! You have to work for me today!

Mom was employed by the city's medical center.

But she also worked part-time for a Nigerian woman named Catherine.

Catherine owned a nursing agency that helped staff hospitals, nursing homes, and home care providers when they were short staffed.

She called almost every day to try to convince my mother to work for her.

And Mom, who was usually too nice to say no, and couldn't turn down the additional income, barely ever rebuffed the request.

Even if this was her only time off from her main job.

Forsaking Sleep for Her Children

Mom wanted to be awake to greet us upon our return from school and make dinner.

Then she would retire back to bed to get another couple hours of rest before she had to get up and do it all over again.

It was my self-appointed job to act as mom's personal clock.

That's because the beep of an alarm often failed to shake Mom out of her slumber.

I also took responsibility for relaying Catherine's messages to mom as she awoke in the afternoon from the coma-like sleep that followed working the night shift.

Get Up!

Time to get up, I would announce at about 8:00 PM every night.

All right, all right, she'd sleepily respond.

She'd say that while slowly rolling from left to right and pretending to remove the covers from her body... as if she intended to rise.

A few times, I caught her still in bed after my wake-up call.

Mom tried to divert my attention from her bedroom by turning on the light in the bathroom and closing the door.

She was pretending like she was getting showered and dressed for work.

Get up, I'd scream when I'd find her still lying in bed more than 45 minutes later... and with the water cascading in the shower.

You're going to be late!

I refused to burden my already exhausted mother by bringing all the difficulties I faced to her attention, because I knew she was struggling to juggle the demands of working and paying the bills.

From Mother to Grizzly Bear

Despite my best effort to manage my situation alone, the cover I'd constructed came crashing down.

Not too long after I started hiding out all day at home, a letter came in the mail.

It bore a bright red stamp and header that read... **Office of the District Attorney.**

Inside was a summons addressed to my mom from the state's Family Court.

It contained a hearing date and an explanation that my continued absence from school could result in criminal charges, or her children being taken away by the state.

The **Texas Family Court** was threatening my mom with legal action because I had racked up too many unexcused absences.

She immediately got on the phone with the principal of my school.

How could you do this to a hard-working parent, she spit through the mouthpiece.

The principal explained that it was Texas law, and absences were reported to the court by an automated system.

He also told my mom there was nothing he could do to stop the court from having its hearing once they deemed it necessary.

I don't give a damn... I heard my mom scream.

She's an A student and this is absolutely disgusting.

I had never heard my mom speak so forcefully.

It was as if someone had poked a mother bear and sent her into a prowling and snarling rage.

I was terrified that my behavior had evoked such an intense response, and I cowered in my room... unsure if she would turn her anger toward me.

Eventually, the school offered to intervene on our behalf and tell the Court to back down.

I was fortunate that my mom took that strong stance because only a few years later, a study revealed that more than 115,000 cases of failure to attend school were filed against students in Adult Criminal Court in Texas in the 2000's.



Reflections

Tiffanie's mother mirrors the experience of many black mothers.

They're exhausted from working, nurturing a family, and trying to keep their household afloat.

While it's incredibly tough... somehow, they manage to do it.

But despite their heroic sacrifices, Black mothers are not superhuman.

They're normal humans who are simply giving their families every ounce of love and energy they have.

Energy is finite. No one possesses an unlimited amount of it.

So, **whenever** you can... and **wherever** you can... support Black mothers.

Why?

Because it takes a village to raise a child.



Are You a Sharer?

*It ain't no fun if the homies can't have none.
~ Snoop Dog*

If you are and **would like to share "Mothering While Black" with a friend**, you can by copying and pasting the URL to this page and putting it into an email.

Once again, thank you for taking this journey with your fellow readers.

It's just one lesson from the greatest story never told.

If you have a story of your own that you'd like to share, send it to me at the email address below. I'd love to hear it.

Or, if you have comments, expressions, or feedback... feel free to hit me up at b.johnson@ethnicexpressions.com

Until next time,

Brian

