

THE THREE

I walked very methodically down the aisle. Attempting to hold back the tears while trying to make sure every step was timed perfectly with the last of the three, the three I know about very well, three women who have made a direct impact on my life. You see, I am a son to first, a husband to the second and a father to the third. Each woman has fought to overcome her own problems while each has achieved goals one higher step on the ladder than the previous.

Kerosene lamps and the glow from the wood that was burning in the open fireplace lighted the room. It was cold; the warmth released by the fire being instantly sucked up the chimney. This suction created a vacuum in which cold air rushed into the room through the gaps between the worn planks that were considered a floor. The child that was born that cold March night I did not know. Dorothy was a stranger to me then, knowing her would come later. First she had to grow, grow in a family of eight children, raised with the love her parents could give along with the food they could grow or buy with the little money raised from growing tobacco. The child grew quickly, learning the mysteries of growing up in the after effects of the Great Depression. All things were normal to her, things such as walking to school and back home in the dark while avoiding wild animals such as bobcats, keeping the chickens locked up under the house for safekeeping along with making quilts, blankets and clothes to keep warm. Even so she had known a different life than the women in the generation before her. The women before her had only recently acquired the right to vote through the passage of the nineteenth amendment.

Dorothy married at fourteen, after all that was expected for that age in those times. She did not get to finish high school, although she was very good in her lessons. Sixth grade was about the limit for schooling when you grew up on a farm. It was after giving birth to a son and a few years after that, a daughter that I knew her, I being born the third of the four children she would carry and deliver. Things would be better for Dorothy now. She had married a good man, my father who was taking good care of her. She now lived in the suburbs; farming was a thing of the past. All her children were born in the hospital, not next to a fire somewhere on a makeshift bed. She had proudly watched as each child in his or her own time walked across the stage of the high school graduation ceremony and received a diploma. She knew their struggles would be somewhat less than those she had endured.

I thought Karen was the most beautiful person I had ever seen, as she stepped up asking if I had any change. Meeting her changed my life instantly. Marrying her changed my life forever. Karen was born to a family that was pretty much raised in the same situation as my mother. They had done fairly well, not rich but far from dirt poor. The days were long gone of Karen being laid in a playpen in the tobacco field, a blanket over her head as protection from the sun, while her parents struggled to earn a living. Hard work had paid off. The norm to Karen as a teenager was to have new fancy clothes that she was rewarded with on the weekends by keeping the house cleaned during the week while both parents worked. The values instilled in her were great and anchored in her love of God. Karen had finished high school and graduated, she had earned good grades, could have been better had she not been so interested in flirting with the boys. I consider this an asset that she not had, I may never have met and married her. Karen completed a secretarial program at Rutledge College in preparation for a career. She saw

her share of struggles though. She was not there in person, but she witnessed the after effects of a little old lady refusing to sit in the back of a bus. The racial tensions were tough during high school, fights and riots, but not as bad as some places. The upbringing she received had taught her not to judge people on the color of their skin.

Things changed for Karen after marrying and giving birth to my daughter. The routine back in the 70's was, graduate from high school, get married and start a family. That was what was expected of good little girls, only the wealthy even dreamed of going off to college. Times were changing from when women were only expected to only raise the children and keep the home for a husband. Karen was entering into a new generation, one where women were beginning to work fulltime, being stay-at-home mothers like Dorothy was not an option for most.

Karen worked for a while. Then her mother got sick, then her father. She was deemed to be the major caregiver. Her career plans had to be put on hold due to her caring nature while she attended to a failing mother, one whose illness lasted for years. This situation however bleak, allowed Karen to be there for our daughter, Whitney.

Whitney got all the good traits. She had the looks, a loving personality, always for the underdog along with being very intelligent. She ran with the nerdy crowd; always a little mature for those her age. Whitney growing up taught us both new things, things that only a person can learn by being a parent. Whitney loved to read, we had to put her to bed at night with a book and a night-light. Reading opened up new worlds and adventures that only she could imagine. She learned to read at an early age, reading on a 12th grade level by about grade 6.

Whitney had her share of struggles also, sometimes being at the top brought criticism by peers. She never gave in to peer pressure and tried her best to follow the straight and narrow. She also saw the health of her grandparents decline and also the health of her mother, which had declined from the effects caring for her ailing parents. Whitney was determined to succeed and succeed she has. She graduated from Methodist College with over a 4.0 GPA. Determined not to complete just one step more than the generation before, Whitney went on to earn a Masters Degree in record time from Fayetteville State University. She is now working on a doctoral degree from East Carolina University while working full time as an instructor at Methodist University. So much for the high school principle for which she briefly worked that stated, "If you leave here you will not amount to anything."

So we have come full circle, from not having a high school diploma to a PHD for these women that have influenced me. The three have each been a source of inspiration in their role as a mother, a wife, and a daughter. I am now working on my own college degree, something I never would have done without the encouragement and support of my wife and daughter. The women of this great nation have made terrific strides in what can be accomplished. As I proudly walk my daughter down the aisle I can only marvel at what the future may hold for her children and other women of the future, women that build on the accomplishments of the past, achievements like those of the three.