

Stepping Out On Nothing

In light of the recent Catholic School closures in predominantly African American communities, this story reveals the impact of a catholic education on the future of black students.

“Stepping Out on Nothing” a memoir of an African American journalist and chief national correspondent Byron Pitts, tells of his many achievements along with the many obstacles he faced as a child. Raised by a single mother in east Baltimore, Byron was illiterate until the age of 12 and was a chronic stutterer until he was 20. He attended St. Katharine of Sienna Catholic Elementary School and is an alumnus of Archbishop Curley High School in Baltimore. I taught Byron in third grade at St. Katharine. He was a quiet, polite and reserved student very intent on reading each word correctly.

Clarice, his mother realized the value of education and insisted on Byron making B's or above in order to play football. She also knew the importance of faith. She had the faith of a mustard seed. In Matthew 17:20, we read “because you have so little faith, I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” A mustard seed is very small yet Jesus said if you have a little faith he will work with you if you trust in him and not just in your own abilities. Clarice, his mother, trusted that God had great plans for her son and she did all she could to find ways to fulfill that plan.

God has a plan for each of us. We have to discover what that plan is. He will use any means possible to help us fulfill it. He will put people in your path to help you just as he did for Clarice Pitts. Remember all things are possible to those who believe.

Byron said he was raised to believe that there are no stumbling blocks in life, only stepping stones. He speaks of his family's sacrifices to help him overcome his illiteracy. He also stated that his childhood illiteracy is not rare and that an estimated 20 million people in America are illiterate. You can help to prevent illiteracy by encouraging a young person in your life to read. The importance of reading to children cannot be overemphasized. In fact reading children's stories

aloud is one of the most important activities we as parents, grandparents, teachers and care givers can do for our kids.

Clarice and her family attended New Shiloh Baptist Church. Byron mentioned in his book that it was the most sacred place on earth for him. He felt safe and loved there. No matter what had occurred in the days prior in the outside world, the songs, the prayers, the sermons, even the smell of the place seemed to heal all that ailed him. His mom called church the “poor man’s therapy session.” Ninety minutes of music, song, prayer and sermon that sent you on your way encouraged and hopeful. Byron’s childhood pastor once described church to him as “a warm spiritual bath.”

The church is the hub of social life for those involved. Black women participate in the largest numbers in church worship and activities. Often the question is raised of how black women who are single can manage so well in raising their children alone. The answer is they are not alone. The church provides a kind of extended family fellowship that affords other significant adults to relate to the children. It also provides other material and human resources to the children. Many people stepped out on nothing to give Byron the support and encouragement he needed to accomplish his dream of becoming a journalist, a chief national correspondent and a “60 Minutes” contributor. He hopes his story and his leap of faith will inspire some young child, or even an adult who is illiterate to keep his or her dream alive.

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