



One Child's Dream

How Parents Change
the Lives They Created

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RISING AS ONE



Since September of last year, I have been actively working with [New Carolina](#) on the Parent Involvement in Education initiative, trying to spearhead a statewide collaborative effort that will bridge the gap between education and the economy. Our efforts have been well received thus far as our network has grown to include business leaders, parents, educators, faith leaders, community and non-profit organizations, and state agencies. All of these people have proven themselves to be equally committed as I am to creating the economic, social, educational and political infrastructure necessary to help South Carolina's children become prosperous and competitive in a growing global economy.

As the daughter and sister of teachers, and having been a classroom teacher myself, I know how important parent involvement is to academic performance and achievement, and how parent involvement can minimize the achievement gap, particularly among low-income and minority children. I know that the majority of parent involvement occurs outside of the schoolhouse, and that there are various strategies that one can employ to make certain their child is a successful student. Therefore, it would seem likely that knowing the importance of parent involvement, and doing countless presentations on "Parent Involvement for a New Generation," I would make a conscious effort to execute the many strategies for parent involvement I know work with my own child. That is not always the case.

Like most parents, I too, get bogged down in the responsibility of child rearing. Add to it that I am a single parent, and the task becomes even more challenging.

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But it is rewarding too. And it is even more rewarding when you realize how even the smallest gesture, the quality time and the regular activities of talking with your child can and will inspire them throughout their entire lives and stimulate their interest in education.

On Martin Luther King, Jr. Day this year, I took my daughter to the State House. It was her first time there and she was

as excited as you would expect any four-year-old to be.

When we approached the grounds, she looked at the building with an awe and wonder I have only seen her express at Christmas. But I could imagine that to her being only three feet tall, this massive building with its copper colored dome and steps that seem to go on for eternity was probably the most remarkable sight she had seen in her few years on this earth.

She stood for about five minutes just staring at the dome until I grew a bit impatient and motioned her to a nearby bench. We've driven past the State House hundreds of times, but I supposed sitting in the back of the car strapped in her car seat, she never really paid attention. As we sat, her gaze was still focused on the State House building.

"Mommy, who works in there?" She asked me very simply.

I casually told her about the members of the House and

Senate before she asked me what a senator does. I thought about it for a minute and how to explain it in terms a four-year-old would understand.

"They make laws," I replied.

She smiled and shook her head. "Oh, kind of like you make the laws in our house."

As the King Day program commenced, my daughter watched as Senators and House members on both the state and federal level took to the podium and delivered words of wisdom and encouragement. Also, being the drama queen she is, she was very much aware of the barrage of cameras and reporters that clamored the State House grounds. That was a Monday.

A day later, on Tuesday, as I was putting her to bed, I asked my daughter, as I always do on Tuesdays, what she wants

to be when she grows up. At age one it was “Elmo.” At age two it was “famous, I don’t know at what, just famous.” At age three it was “a princess,” and then “the queen because she has more power than a princess,” and finally “a woman that wears high heels and make-up and goes to work like you, Mommy.” But this day was different. I, without thinking much of it, exposed my daughter to something that will probably impact her for the rest of her life, or at least steer her future in a direction even I hadn’t imagined as her mother.

“Mommy, I want to be a Senator and help make laws, give speeches on T.V., and lobby for a new bed time.” Four months later, I hear the same thing. She now enjoys watching “[Meet the Press](#)” with me on Sunday mornings when before she used to dread it, asking me to turn to the [Backyardigans](#) instead. She can identify some U.S. Senators by sight, and [Representative Gilda Cobb-Hunter](#) is her hero.

As a mother, I am constantly amazed at how much my child learns daily. I am even more amazed by the things she learns from me with neither my intent nor concerted effort in teaching her. As parents it is so easy to focus on the day-to-day challenges of raising children. We make sure they are clothed, well fed and safe. We worry about their future, the economy and their spiritual well-being. We try to instill the value of getting an education and what they can achieve, but sometimes we put so much emphasis on getting a job, that we don’t emphasize how a quality education can empower them to change the world.

The New Carolina effort is just that, a progressive, grassroots movement that is aiming to change the climate of the state on many levels, most specifically the economic climate. With regards to parent involvement it is not a movement to steer responsibility for educational systems in the state away from state government. It is a movement of support. We all believe that the state has a fiscal responsibility to equitably fund public education. And pockets of inequity do exist throughout South Carolina. However, parents, communities, businesses, service organizations and the faith community have a responsibility

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to our children as well. We cannot expect the schools to do it all. We all have to be accountable and support parent involvement initiatives in and out of the schoolhouse.

I am so proud of the work I am doing with New Carolina on this front. But I am even more proud of the work I am doing as a parent. We launched this effort on November 10, 2006 and it has gone in a direction that has exceeded many of our expectations. But for me, my part

in this effort began four years prior on November 10, 2002. That is when my own personal parent involvement initiative began. She, too, is not what I expected, but will hopefully be more than I ever dreamed. And she can as long as I remain actively involved and continue exposing her to that which broadens her perspective of the world in which she lives. She may very well grow up to be a Senator someday, but as far as the lobbying for a new bedtime? Well, she can try, but for now, in my household, I still make the laws.

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