

'Mama, what would I do without you?'

Written by Hazel Trice Edney and Akua Aboagye
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America celebrates Mother's Day this Sunday

(TriceEdneyWire.com) - As young as 5 years old, Twan Woods would wake up at night and hear his mother having a seizure. He would know exactly what to do. He would run into her bedroom, hold her, put a cold rag in her mouth, comfort her and keep her from falling until it was over, he recalls.

"My Mom, she's a sick lady. She's like, handicapped, she's been like that all her life," said the 37-year-old who grew up in Ward 8, a crime-ridden section of South East Washington, D.C.

Despite the hardships, his mother, whom he identified as Francine Ward, raised him and his younger brother the best she could - with love and wisdom.

"She couldn't come out and chase behind me as I was growing up...She couldn't even teach me how to go to school and how to become a man, but one thing she did teach me was to depend on the Lord. She put the Bible scriptures in me. When I was younger I didn't want to hear it. But it was in me; so when I got older I had that to fall back on. She gave me the Word."

In part, because of his mother's heroic influence on his life, Woods and a few of his friends have pulled together a singing group called Ward 8 Entertainment. Their inspirational CD that he gives to anyone for a small donation is called, "Waiting for Better Days". One of his prize singles on the CD is fittingly titled, "Mama, What Would I Do Without You?"

This week, millions of men, women, boys and girls, are asking that same question and preparing to pay respects to their mothers and the motherly figures in their lives. In various interviews, some discussed their most touching memories and most important lessons.

When Kiona Daniels was only 16 years old, her mother was killed in a car accident. Her grandmother, Ella, took over the mothering. But, having been raised until the age of 16 in a household with three matriarchs - her mother, grandmother and great grandmother, she had a triple dose of love that most people have not experienced.

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"In retrospect, I think it had a huge impact on just developing me with a foundational basis of who I have become as a woman; especially as it pertains to relationships," said Daniels, who was set to receive an executive Master's Degree in public administration from American University this weekend. "Oddly enough, you wouldn't think that two very older women would have an impact on me from a relationship standpoint," but they taught by example, she said.

"My grandmother, Ella, she was just a loving, caring wife and had her own independence and had her own identity. And, so, just having my own identity in a relationship and having my own independence financially without any reliance or dependence on a dating partner was something that I took from my grandmother a great deal. That was one of her main things: 'Never depend on anyone. Always have your own,'" she quotes her grandmother, now 98 years old.

Mother's Day, like many holidays, is overshadowed by consumer-driven advertisement. Therefore, some struggle to enjoy the real meaning of the day set aside to honor the one who gave words of wisdom, nursed injuries, wiped away tears, cooked favorite meals and often sacrificed her own desires for her family's. Yet, this Sunday, many mother's hearts will be touched with the simplicity of love demonstrated by macaroni art projects from elementary schools and oversized cups with huge lettering designating her as the "World's Greatest Mom".

Patricia Dillard eloquently recalls the love of her mother during a time when African-Americans still struggled amidst Jim Crow and racial segregation.

"I was about my granddaughter's age (3-4 years old) and it was the late 1940's in Sweetbriar, Virginia, where my father worked as a cook and my mother did domestic housework at Sweetbriar College, an all girls' college," she recalls. "The people she worked for gave her a porcelain doll as a gift. When my mother came home from work that day she said to me there was something in the car for me.

"It was raining and I ran to the back seat of the car out in the garage and there it was, this big beautiful baby porcelain doll. I felt so special that she gave something so precious that was meant for her to me. And I still have it. I think of the sacrifices my parents made to make sure I was happy, and how I appreciated this doll."

Connie Danquah 23, a physical therapy student at Howard University, giggles as she recalls her Mom's dedication to her after leaving a job working long hours in New York City.

"I was about 6," Danquah recalls. "She quit her job and relocated to a position closer to home that was less demanding because she wanted to be around. She picked me up from school and took me to all my extracurricular activities. We got to do all the girly stuff together; she dressed me up in big flowery dresses and enrolled me in tap and ballet. I felt like she was more excited than I was. I think it was something she always wanted to do when she was little but due to family finances probably never got the chance."

The veil of innocence causes most children to be oblivious to the love and caregiving received from their parents. It isn't until later in life, most commonly after people have children of their

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own, that they really understand the strength and selflessness necessary to raise a child.

But, most people agree that regardless of who anyone considers Mom, there is nothing like a mother's love.

"Mama, Mama, I know you're really not a father figure," says Twan Woods' song, "But I want to take this time and thank you for giving me life."