

Good Day and Welcome,

I am here today to let you ladies know how much your husband (my uncle), your spouse (my brother) your significant other (my friend) became a part of my extended family.

My name is Mary Dotson. I am a single parent of 6 -- 4 girls and 2 boys. I have been involved with the 100 since the 1999-2000 school years and have at least 3 more school years of active participation to go. I am currently the president of the MOYPA (Movement of Youth Parent Association) for the 100 Black Men of Greater Charlotte and have been for the past 3 years.

I moved here to Charlotte in July of '98, with no family, no friends. Moving 602 miles away from family and friends was extremely hard on my children. Attitudes multiplied. Peer pressure grew wings, and patience ran out the door.

Due to the changes in my children's attitude and my patience thinning fast, I decided to seek help by finding some sort of mentoring program in the area. First thing I did was ask God for direction, especially with raising my sons and He sent me a special book for single mothers, The Book of Proverbs, which I read over and over again, until I got it!

The verse that kept coming back was ***Proverbs 1:8: "Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching."*** As I was reading I was thinking, this does not make sense. What is God trying to tell me? What if there is no father to give instructions? I'm a woman. What do I know about teaching a young boy how to be a man? What is a man? It's been a long time since I've seen one of those.

I had so many questions that I had asked myself pertaining to raising a man in today's world.

How do I teach my boys to become a man when I am not one? Is there a how-to manual somewhere?

How do I get them to respect women other than me and other single mothers?

How do I get them to respect other males since they only know about biological sperm donors?

How do I teach them the difference between a boy and a man?

Life can get overwhelming as a single mother, especially frustrating around a topic that we can't touch even though we try so hard to. I was scared that I would fail at raising my sons and seeking help meant I was weak or needy. But I found that it didn't make me weak or needy -- it made me smart.

In September, 2000, the teachers at the middle school my son Terry attended saw something special in him. They wanted to make sure he stayed on that path so they mentioned to me about the 100 Black Men organization. A week later I received a letter in the mail from a Jacquelin Peters about attending the Saturday Academy.

Before I could accept assistance from anyone; I had to analyze what I was working with and focus on the needs of my boys. I studied their strengths and weakness. What I saw was that it takes observation, patience and prayer to be a good parent, and with God's guidance and the assistance of 100 Black Men of Greater Charlotte, it was possible.

After attending the first Saturday session, I decided to accept the assistance of the 100 and it was there that I found the answer to *Proverbs 1:8*. Listen, my sons (Terry and Quelontae) to Kraig Holt's, Aaron Means', Sam Belnavis', Jim Moore's and the other members of the 100's instructions, and do not forsake my teachings.

Terry was a very distant child. He was shy and had very low self esteem. See, Terry had a tracheostomy for 9 years. People would stare and laugh at the boy with the hole in his throat instead of asking him what it was, and why he had one. Terry focused on staying away from people because people caused pain. Terry spent the first 12 years of his life with family only. He went to school with either me or his nurse but he stayed in his shell always, never peeping out to see if any life was out there.

Now "Q", he's a piece of work. He is the total opposite. He is full of confidence. He is very outspoken. He is competitive. His ego reaches beyond the stars. If you haven't met him yet, believe me you will. Everyone has to know who he is.

Now having two young men with personalities at different ends of the rope, I needed to find some positive African American men to become a part of their lives. Terry needed to learn that you can have whatever you want, when you want it, if you work hard to get it. Then no one can take it away once you have it. Q needed to learn that you don't have to step on everyone in your path to get what you deserve; that there is enough success to go around.

What the 100 accomplished with my sons was a blessing. Terry graduated from the 100 in 2008. Q has 3 more years to go.

Terry came out of the program with:

- Perfect attendance from the academy and from school from 1999-2008
- Confidence because he had none when he started
- A man's perspective on ethics and values
- He learned to speak up for himself
- He now has confidence in public speaking
- a "believe it and achieve it" attitude
- and most importantly, friends.

Q is learning some very important things too, starting with how to:

- Keep me from killing him
- Not get his phone taken away on a weekly basis
- How to share the spotlight
- How to accept another man's instruction (this was very BIG accomplishment for Q)
- How to trust a man's word, understand that a man's word is his bond
- And you're never too young to start working on having your own.

I found my extended family here in Charlotte with the 100 and they helped me stop feeling guilty because there was no man in the house. I was dealt this life and I needed to embrace it and make the most of it.

They helped me to stop worrying and stop trying to be both, because I always felt that I had to be both mom and dad. I'm only one person and I had to take notice of that.

I need you to understand that this was a milestone for us, my asking for help and receiving it, rather than trying to teach my boys something that only a man can teach. It took Kraig asking them at every meeting, how was their week? It took John asking, how were their grades? It took their mentors calling/texting them regularly just to say, what's up? It took Aaron and Don making them speak up when talking because no one could hear them. It took others to say, it's okay, you did nothing wrong. It took your husband (my uncle), your spouse (my brother) your significant other (my friend) to make my boys into respectful young men. I'm here today because you needed know the difference your man has made with just my family.

Your men stepped in at the beginning of their lives in Charlotte. Q was 6; he was the youngest unofficial member of the 100. Your men loved my sons as theirs, and it was, and still is, genuine love. Genuine love was something that they never experienced from a real man at that time in their lives.

So when they leave the house to do some 100 stuff, do me a favor and think about what **Proverbs 1:8 means** to single mothers raising young men in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Because now I know where to find a father's instruction. I can find it in each of your hard to find, real men every other Saturday 9:30AM – noon EST.

Now Auntie, sister and BFF, I thank you for allowing your man to be there for those that lack even a piece of a man in their lives. I need you to do something for me. Make sure you when you go home tonight that you give your man a big hug to thank him for supporting the mentees. Tell him, "job well done", because he deserves it.