



AFFRO AMERICAN ME


Sherryl L. McCorkle

Afro-American Me

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Introduction

Afro-American Me is a literary collection of my poems and essays written while pursuing an associate's degree in mental health/chemical dependency at Sinclair Community College in Dayton, Ohio. I used to think writing papers about self-inventory and awareness was a way of inducing a severe headache. Boy, was I wrong! I learned so much more about myself than I could ever imagine. Attending college has been more than just a higher education; it's been a journey of discovering my true purpose and creative talents.

All my college instructors brought out the best in me. One instructor told me, "Always write what you know about." That advice grew with me, and it's never failed me. My poetry teacher always challenged me to go deeper with my poems. That advice motivated me to rewrite and revise my poems until they become masterpieces. I will never forget the last thing my poetry teacher said to me: "When you write your book, I'd like to have a copy." Every poem and essay I've written has a personal connection—something I know about, a personal experience, how I feel, or my opinion about something.

My Father

Master Tech Sergeant Adolphus Lovell McCorkle Sr.

Adolphus Lovett McCorkle was born February 12, 1930, in High Point, North Carolina. He hated his name, so he changed his name to Anthony Lovell McCorkle. I can honestly say that he lived his life to the fullest. Serving over twenty years in the military, he served in the US Coast Guard, the US Army, and the US Air Force. After retiring from military service in 1968, he made Dayton, Ohio, his place of residence. My father then became a business owner, a teacher in the public education system of Ohio, and was employed with the Regional Transit Authority. This person is so important to me because he was one of the brave who honored his country, was very smart, and family and friends say I'm the spitting image of him.

When I was a teenager, I remember my father telling me how he hated picking cotton every summer as a little boy. I laughed when he told me how he would run and hide when his grandmother would come to get him and his siblings to pick cotton. Every time he saw her coming, he would run and hide. She would call for him, "Come back here, Lovett!" At age thirteen, my dad ran away to join the army. The army didn't find out how old he was until he had served eight years. Most of his youth was spent in the military. I remember him saying, "I've been all over the world, Sherry!" I know that the air force was his favorite military branch. My mom used to say, "He loved to fly those planes!"

After retiring from the air force with an honorable discharge, my father still worked hard. Growing up in the military, he learned and became a certified welder. He opened up his own business called Echo Tool and Die. Whenever he wasn't running his business, he was a part-time math teacher at Garfield, a technical school. I remember asking him what his students were like. "They're recovering drug addicts, women on

welfare, or people just getting out of jail,” he would say. My father wasn’t very talkative at home. He simply said what he had to say and that was that. After retiring from running his business and teaching, he became a bus driver for the Regional Transit Authority. My friends would often tease me about my father being voted the meanest bus driver by them.

My family, my father’s friends, and my friends say I’m the spitting image of my father. I am shorter than he was. His height was five foot six; I am five foot two. We both have the same golden-brown complexion and light brown eyes. He always had a fit body, and I stay in shape just like he did. We both have the same birthday, February 12. A good friend of Dad’s named Charles Long, who my dad jokingly would call “long head boy” would say, “Sherryl, honey, your daddy spit you out!” He would always tell my brother and me about how smart my dad was and how my father could read blueprints when others couldn’t. That reminded me of how I was with my peers growing up. I could do things at school other girls couldn’t. I would show off skating backward in the neighborhood. I started my own cheerleading squad, and I was almost always the line leader in elementary school.

I never got to see my father in his military attire. The pictures I have and the pictures I have seen of him in his military attire are remarkable. He looks so distinguished and proud to serve his country. Whenever Dad wore a suit, work clothes, or casual clothes, he was always neat and handsome. I think his style and mannerisms came from being in the service for so many years. Dirt, filth, wrinkled clothes, unmade beds, dust, and anything out of order was not tolerated by Mr. McCorkle.

My father passed in 2009. I still think about his honorable service years, his hardworking background, and the stand he took for what he truly believed in—America! He will always be important to me because living and trying to apply his principles in my life make me a strong woman.

My Unforgivable Childhood Memory

I've heard and read many times we must let go and let God. Forgiveness is one of the most difficult obstacles I've ever had to overcome. The most heartbreaking memory took place when I was very young. It took place one fall morning outside of a courtroom door. My brother and I were seated on a long brown bench next to my father's brother, our uncle John. I was seven years old, and my brother was nine years old, so we were too young to go inside the courtroom.

Our uncle John was a short, stubby, dark-skinned man with a big round head. He wore big bifocals, which made him look funny to my brother and me, and we made fun of him whenever his back was turned. Every now and then my uncle would turn his head from the newspaper he was reading, look over his bifocals at us, and say, "Y'all two okay?"

And like an in-sync choir, we both nodded our heads and said, "Um-huh."

My legs were too short to touch the floor. I began to swing my legs back and forth as I started to think hard. Today was mysterious. I had to figure out why my mother woke us up so early in the morning. All she told us to do was get up and get dressed. She said nothing as we got dressed, nothing when we ate breakfast, and nothing on our mysterious drive to the courthouse. What was wrong with my mom?

As I started to fall asleep, leaning toward my uncle John, I was awakened by the courtroom door. As it opened, it slammed against the adjacent wall, and out walked my mother. She had a look of defeat and big tears were rolling down her face. Mother didn't even stop to say anything to my uncle, my brother, or me. She walked right past us at a fast pace; it was like she was power walking. I instantly took off after her. *Where is she going?* I thought. *Why is she leaving without my brother and me?*

“Momma!” I yelled. Maybe she didn’t hear me, so I yelled to her again. “Momma, wait!” She kept walking fast. She was getting too far away from me, so I started to run a little to catch up with her. As I got close to her, I grabbed her hand and said, “Momma, I want to go with you!” My eyes started to water, and my nose was burning.

She snatched her hand away and said, “No, go with your father!” She wouldn’t even look at me. She looked as if she was trying not to cry. With her voice slowly cracking and breaking up, she said, “Go with him. He can take care of you. I can’t—go!” My heart felt like it was in pieces.

“I don’t want to. Please, Mommy!” I begged. I watched in disbelief as my mother continued to walk down the sidewalk until I couldn’t see her anymore. Then I understood: It was a custody battle. My brother and I had to go live with my father. I didn’t want to live with him. I wanted my mom. My tears would not stop falling. How could she let this happen?

As I walked back to the courthouse, I straightened up my face. I had to be a big girl now.

My father had an evil smirk on his face, and my brother’s look was nonchalant. Uncle John waved goodbye, so my father, brother, and I went to my father’s house to start our lives together without Mom. I hated it. I cried myself to sleep at night. I couldn’t eat. I always wondered where she was and if she was safe. I missed her hugs, her smell, and her tucking me in bed at night. I missed her.

Time went on, and finally we started seeing Mom again. She began picking up my brother and me on the weekends and on her days off from work. Mom had been working two jobs, had moved into a nice house, and had two cars. I remembered hugging her so tight when she had to bring us back home to Dad’s house. She would always promise, “I’m going to get you and your brother back one day.”

I would cry and ask, “Why we just can’t stay now, Mommy?”

She would just hug me tightly and say, “I’ll be back to get y’all on my next day off.” I hated waiting. The time between her days off seemed so long. My heart would mend when she picked my brother and me up and break all over again when she brought us back. As I grew older, I learned to deal with it.

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