

Valdosta- Lowndes County Family Man Story

Derrick Carter

As one of the first to graduate from college in my family it has been a quite an extreme journey over these past few years. While growing up in South GA, Hahira to be exact my parents taught me to be my own man in life no matter what people may say or do. They taught me to live life with expectancy but with God at the fore front and in my life the entire time. I am a firm believer that if it wasn't for the nurturing of my mother and the toughness of my father I wouldn't be the man I am today. It is because of their love and support I have become successful.

After going through elementary and middle school I faced challenges that I felt at that time set me apart from others. I struggled in reading comprehension and mathematics and had to have tutoring. In the beginning I viewed this as fun and an exciting way to learn but it quickly turned into depression because when most of the kids were in the classroom and outside playing on the playground I had to stay in and attend reading comprehension and mathematic sessions.

As those years passed then came highschool which quickly became my maturing stages. I learned how to adapt to my surroundings and learned how to make my inability to comprehend as fast as others work for my good with the help of God. While in highschool I began to play basketball and play drums in band and it seemed that my life immediately began to turn around too many that knew me.

However, for me I never focused on the fact that I was gifted in basketball or gifted as a musician because I understood that gifts come from God and they come without repentance as the scripture says in Romans 11:29. As I graduated highschool I had many aspirations of going to college just like many. I actually had many band scholarship offers to schools such as Bethune Cookman University, Daytona Beach, FL, Florida A&M University, Tallahassee, FL, Morris Brown College, Atlanta, GA as well as a basketball and jazz band scholarship to Andrew College located in Cuthbert, GA. Personally, I always wanted to attend Florida State University ever since I was around the age of 5 or 6 but during this time I was not able to attend either one of these schools due to other financial stipulations that hindered me to attend.

With this in mind I immediately began my college career at Valdosta Technical College which is now known as Wiregrass Georgia Technical College. I entered the Computer Information Systems program in hopes of becoming a great computer genius. I went through the entire program and completed by diploma as a Microcomputer Specialists with a concentration in Programming. It was exciting while going through the program but at the same time I didn't feel as if I accomplish anything. While at my graduation I was sitting in the midst of over 200-300 graduates and feeling as if I was back in highschool. Everyone was excited and I didn't try to rain on anyone's parade as they say but I just didn't feel it. It's like I knew at that moment that God had something better in store for me.

Over the next few years as I began my working career things began to line up for me from working at Publix Supermarket for over 4 years while in school as well as my transition to

working at American General Insurance Company and South Georgia Medical Center while I was attending Valdosta Technical College. I was always one who worked hard and worked at achieving excellence while I did it. I never like to half do anything and if I was a part of something or something that I was interested in I went all the way out for it.

As like many students I never had the whole traditional college experience where I could make friends and enjoy creating bonds and relationships with people I have never seen before. This was something that I had always desire. So compiled with not feeling accomplished after completing two years of college at Technical College as well as not having the whole as they say “traditional college experience” I was on the road to depression or redemption. I knew it was going to be either one of these and I had to figure this out fairly quickly.

By this time I had begun working as a Resource/Training Specialists at Coastal Plain Area E.O.A. Headstart, Inc. This by far was the turning point in my life to this very date. I was afforded the opportunity to work for such a great management team who genuinely cared about me not only from an employee/professional standpoint but from a personal standpoint. What I mean by personal is that my boss at that time was name Myrna Manantan. She encouraged me from start to finish completing my degree. I believe God had her there at that appointed time just for me to build character, leadership, integrity, and trustworthiness. She placed me on the path to success and guided me every step of the way while allowing me to mature and grow as a professional which was very huge in my life at that time.

Through her various teachings and very different style of management it taught me that I can become a great manager and excellent supervisor without the stereotypes of having to be act a certain way or be mean towards others who I think that may not be on my level. Her style of management taught me to just be myself and respect all others regardless of where they are in their careers because you never know when you may need a job from that individual one day. I could go on and on about the wonderful impact she has had on my career but I will save that for my own book one day.

After being guided over the next few years with my career and the encouragement to go back to school to obtain my Bachelor’s degree from her and my wife, I began looking into the various opportunities to choose a school that would fit my lifestyle. What I mean by lifestyle is that I was married and my wife and I had already had our first child and I had to figure out how to balance everyday life of being a husband, father, full-time employee and now full-time student. This was definitely a challenge because I couldn’t afford to work part-time I had to put together a plan that would help me balance life. So with the encouragement of my lovely wife whom I have been married to for over 10 years now she encouraged me to go back to school online which would allow me the opportunity to continue to work during the day and I could go to school online at night. This was by far the best decision and I am grateful to her and will forever be grateful to her for this decision.

By this point in my life and I had just begun working at the Valdosta Lowndes Chamber of Commerce under the leadership of Myrna Ballard. This was such an awesome experience words can’t even express the values and professionalism I gained from this experience. Myrna is one of those past, present, and future leaders who just has an eye and ear for professionals. She

challenged my thought process and created a brand new way of professionalism in my life. After only being there for 3 months I was promoted to Business Development Associate in which I was responsible for assisting clients in the Valdosta-Lowndes County area and surrounding counties with start-up businesses. I also, coordinated Valdosta's largest business plan competition in which created business such as Code 3 Response Security Systems, Inc., Azalea Health Innovations, Inc., and many, many more. Myrna then helped me transition into my next level of business and professionalism not allowing me to get complacent in this position. She would often times ask if I have seen any other interests in other Chamber member companies. I thought it was strange at first but quickly realized that she was all about growth and not about being satisfied with just a job but pushed me to develop a career. After nearly two years I then landed at Valdosta State University in the Office of Social Equity as an Administrative Secretary. Wow!! What a blessing this was.

Dr. Maggie Viverette took a chance on me when I didn't even feel like taking a chance on myself. She took me under her wings and cultivated me in ways that have stuck with me to this day. She pushed me to finish my degree as well by telling me in a tough and soothing way. She would always say "When you get your degree you command respect for people to listen to you speak". "Until you do this you place yourself in a position to not speak unless spoken to or asked". I didn't understand it in the beginning to be honest but as the years went by it began to make more sense. I often remind myself of this while speaking with other VSU students when they ask me about my life journey.

After working with Dr. Viverette for two years she then sort of released me into the wilderness so to speak and what I mean by that is that she basically pushed me out in a great of course. She wouldn't let me get settled as a secretary and began discussing with me my short term and long term goals and again God blessed me to fall into the hands of another great Director/supervisor who didn't settle in life but pushed her cohorts out into life and teaching them to grab life with full of expectancy.

After working there two years then the greatest opportunity I could ever imagine opened up for me in the Department of African Studies working for Dr. Shirley Hardin. This was the best decision I could have ever imagined that boosted my career to the next level in Higher Education. She has been like a mother, mentor, spiritual advisor and so much more during my time in the Department of African American Studies. She has provided a Segway of opportunities to advise students which opened the door way for me to share my experiences with students and encourage them that staying in college is not an option. Tears come to my eyes when I think of what she has meant to me professionally and personally. She has leaded and guided me through some of my toughest times in my career. I will never forget this.

Over the years with all the encouragement from my parents, brothers, and my wife it has pushed me to develop a magazine beginning Fall 2012 as well as work on my first book as well coming Spring 2013. The main individual I have to say a special thanks to is Elder John Isom, the author of this book. He has been my best friend and spiritual advisor when I felt I had no other person to turn to. He was as they say a "Ram in the Bush" spiritually for me when I encountered spiritual warfare here on campus. I love him like a brother for this.

In my closing in my life there have been many ups and downs and I can definitely say I've had more ups than downs because I am still alive and well and have a personal relationship with God as my savior. I'm thankful and forever grateful to my gorgeous wife Michelle Carter of over 10 years and counting and to my handsome son Derrick Laron Carter, Jr. & beautiful daughter Autumn Alexis Carter. They are the reason that I have continued to work hard to be able to provide and give them a better lifestyle than what I had. I am a living testimony of the scripture (*Habakkuk 2:3*) For the vision *is* yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Amen!

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