

“Now, Kenneth, I’m Your Mother...”

This, I’m sure, is a familiar refrain that we’ve all heard before, so I’d like to share my story with you. As one of seven children, and the one who lived out of town for 24 years before my parents’ passing in 2005, I had many spirited conversations with my parents, both through my weekly telephone calls back home and while always staying with them during my frequent visits. They offered better room and board rates than my siblings, as well as the best home-cooked meals ever... :v)

Our weekly telephone calls usually comprised of my father answering the telephone, speaking briefly with me (about sports) and quickly handing it over to my mother. Per my inquiring, she’d then bring me up to speed on everyone in the family, which I greatly appreciated – my own personal ‘4-1-1’. Like most mothers of that era, she loved to talk about her children, her two brothers, her church, her many good friends (and their children), and her passions (traveling and the piano).

When my mother asked me how I was doing, it was always “Great!”, which it usually was. The one thing I never wanted to do was to worry my parents or give them any additional stress, especially living so many miles away (Maryland, New Jersey, California). Parents always want the best for their children, no matter how old or how far away. And I always figured that they’d already done their job and paid their dues raising seven kids; the rest of their lives should be smooth sailing! My biggest joy was to host my parents when they visited me several times over the years, so that I can have the opportunity to treat them like a king and a queen, and wear them out from doing so many fun activities – my special way of repaying them for all they’d done for us.

As most children are aware, conversations with parents are somewhat different than with friends, peers, and contemporaries. Parents represent age, wisdom, knowledge, experience, education, authority, sacrifice, love, ancestors, lineage, survivors, world-traveled, been-there-done-that, and lives lived to the fullest. Thereby, parents automatically cast a large shadow over you. More specifically, Black parents of “The Greatest Generation,” those born in the 1920, have ‘survived’ the Great Depression, World War II, Jim Crow, segregation, lynchings, the KKK, red-lining, cross-burnings, second-class citizenship, voter suppression, civil rights marches, gerrymandering, the assassinations of JFK, MLK, RFK, and Malcolm X. Oh my, what their eyes have seen. And those who passed on before 2008 never saw the first Black president.

Hence, as children get older and become adults, while they may see their parents as somewhat peers (which they’ll NEVER be!!!), parents will continue to offer unsolicited advice, impart wisdom, share knowledge, proffer opinions, and volunteer solutions. That’s a fact! After all, they know from whence they speak.

I recall a few face-to-face conversations with my mother during which we’d have some very interesting and lively discussions/debates, usually having to do with me. I’d say my piece, then she’d respond, and we’d go back and forth. “But, Mom, I really think that ...” or “Mom, I strongly believe that ...” or “Mom, you should consider...” Don’t worry, the conversations were never heated because I knew better...

Plus, I didn’t wish to run the risk of waking up from a coma a few days later trying to explain to the fellas, “Well, to the best of my recollection, this is what had happened...” My mother still had a quick left jab and could throw with any Cy Young Award winner!

What’s funny about this is that I don’t quite recall having many of these conversations with my father. Perhaps that’s because sons

knew better than to argue with their fathers. And we’ve all heard Richard Pryor’s “What, you a man now, n%#@! ?” on record, or saw Bill Cosby’s Dr. Huxtable telling his son Theo, “Theo, that’s the dumbest thing I’ve every heard in my life!” or “I brought you in this world, and I’ll take you out!!!” After a hard day’s work, fathers didn’t want to hear any nonsense from their children.

On the other hand, mothers, because of their nurturing nature, tended to be more patient and understanding, that is, up to a point...

In any event, at some point in the conversations with my mother, she’d unexpectedly, out of the clear blue, come up with, “Now, Kenneth, I’m your mother...” First of all, when your parents call you by your whole name (e.g., James Allen Washington), or by your full first name after calling you by your nick name (‘Kenny’) as far back as you can remember, you know you’re in deep trouble.

Having my mother say “Now, Kenneth, ...” was akin to playing bid whist when you’re just about to pick up that seventh and final book, and the someone from the other team plays the trump card – BAM!!! How do you respond to that? There is NO comeback. Game, Set, Point!!! It’s as if she was growing impatient with me, or just getting tired of the dumb stuff. My mother has just played the ‘Mommy’ card... with all of its inherent qualities: wisdom, knowledge, experience, ... and vested powers from griots, truth tellers, Queen Nefertiti, and Mother Africa.

And the worse thing of it all was that she was always right! Oh well, I still miss those wonderful conversations.

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