

FORUM

Children sure do know how to brighten your day



Nigel Alston
Motivational Moments

"The only thing that can possibly keep you from going after your dream is the person standing in your shoes, wearing your clothes, and thinking your negative thoughts."

— Les Brown

Life is full of surprises around my nieces, ages 6 and 8. Almost every conversation includes a big "I loooove you," which brightens my day and makes everything in the world seem a little less worrisome.

But then that's what happens when you deal with children. They haven't yet learned the art of cynicism — everything is as it seems, and every gift to a child is a treasure.

It reminds me of the young boy at an elementary school who caught me off guard by telling me that he was my "biggest fan" and asking for my autograph.

Children enjoy a different perspective of the world. And that often produces memorable moments.

Often after an experience with a child or a group of children, I am amazed at how even the simplest things can really make a kid's day — and inadvertently make mine too.

After a weekend off, I found two big pieces of paper on my desk waiting for my attention.

At first, I had a very adult reaction — I wondered who had been in my office while I was gone.

That suspicion faded quickly.

The two pieces of paper

contained messages created especially for me.

One was a drawing of a camel at an oasis, with a bright yellow sun and a giant brown and black tree with a green top.

The camel was brown, with a red nose, a green eye and yellow fuzz down his neck.

"Isn't this something," I said to myself.

Above the camel's head was this message: "We were here but you weren't. Sincerely, Lindsay, Madison, and Justin."

The notes were from the children of my co-workers. The kids were at the office and they expected me to be there too. Had I been there, I probably would have gotten a hug instead of drawings and notes.

I was equally surprised by the reaction from the students in Ernestine Swift's second-grade class at Jefferson Davis Diggs Elementary School. They were full of enthusiasm and surrounded me as I read a book to them.

They were acting out the story as I read it.

When I challenged them to read a book, all of the children raised their hands to accept my challenge to read and send me a report.

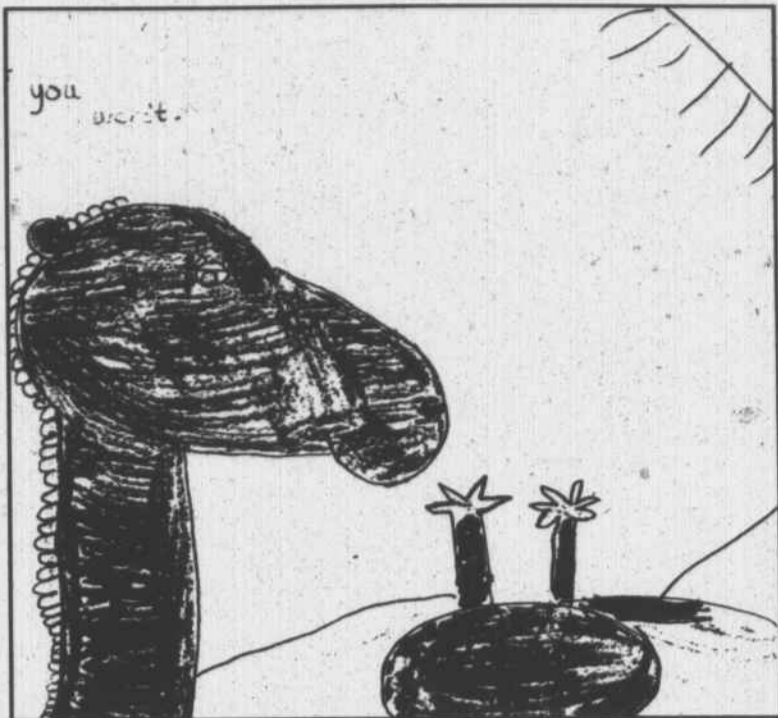
It was agreed the group would read about the exploits of Clifford, the legendary "big, red dog."

The group sent me their hand-written reports on that familiar blue-and-red-lined paper with a dotted line through the middle of the two solid lines, used to guide their writing.

I excitedly read the reports out loud as my wife and I sat down at a restaurant.

The notes were astounding.

"Dear Mr. Alston," one read. "Thank you for my book



Children's artwork can really brighten your day.

'Clifford's Riddles.' I also thank you for giving all us books. I liked the part when Clifford was dressed up as a Zebra. I do not like the part when Clifford was thinking of a vampire. My book was fun. Love, Kenneth Richards."

"Ahhh, that's precious," my wife said. She was smiling too.

Another report included a drawing of a big red dog walking across a field of bright green grass. The sun — which was blue with green rays — hangs in a Technicolor sky.

Tywnda Bristow wrote: "I thank you for My book Clifford Manners. I like the part when Clifford crosses The Street and when Clifford Says 'please' to get some food."

Timothy Duncan, not the basketball player, wrote: "I thank you for giving me this

book and I thank you for helping me learn how to read. We all thank you for telling my teacher to give us the Clifford book's so we could read them. We also thank you for coming to the 'Reading Is Fun Day!'"

The notes won me over and made my day. But my blessings weren't done yet.

I had a note waiting on me Monday morning.

"Dear Nigel," it read, "how's it going? Hey Do you like me? I like you! P.S. Wright back!! Send it to my moms office. Love, Lindsay Peele."

Kids really do know how to brighten your day.

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Val Atkinson is a reporter for the Triangle Tribune.

Joyner and Smiley: New millennium — new strategy



Val Atkinson
Jones Street

With the South Carolina tourism boycott, Kweisi Mfume and Julian Bond may have stoked a new fire for progress in the new millennium.

But media personalities Tom Joyner and Tavis Smiley are definitely bringing in more wood.

Smiley and Joyner led a drive to get CompUSA to advertise in traditional black media outlets. CompUSA's CEO, Jim Halpin, had been advised that African Americans weren't purchasing very many computer or other hardware products and therefore selective advertising in the black media market was not necessary.

Smiley and Joyner decided to show Mr. Halpin how wrong he was. The duo used their outlets — "The Tom Joyner Morning Show" and the "Tavis Smiley Show on BET" — to ask African Americans to send copies of their receipts of purchase to Halpin.

The response was staggering. Receipts flooded Halpin's office and eventually forced him to reconsider his ad policy. He has since admitted that he received "bad advice" from his

staff and that he intends to make restitution by hiring a minority ad agency to help him advertise and to give a 10 percent discount to those who have already purchased his products.

Joyner's use of the airwaves to get Halpin's attention was remarkable. There were tons of black folks all over the world who had purchased Halpin's equipment. Halpin's reply was a striking reason why diversity in hiring and placement are so crucial to fair treatment and progress in America.

Joyner and Smiley's CompUSA campaign was a notice of the highest order.

The notice didn't beg for free computers. Joyner and Smiley didn't ask for free training, there was no rally on the courthouse steps, and they didn't threaten to call the elected official they helped put in office.

They asked that African Americans speak with their dollars by proving that we indeed purchase items that advertising executives, for all their wisdom, say we don't.

Could this be the new strategy for the new millennium? Could this be the ticket for

African Americans' final freedom? We began the Civil Rights Movement with the economic success of the Montgomery bus boycott. We later moved to protest, sit-ins and rallies, followed by the political strategy for voter registration, and voter turn-out. Many think that we've played our political card too strong to the exclusion of other strategies — like economic leveraging.

African Americans have made great strides in the political arena. Many major cities in America have had black mayors, and there are scores of black holding municipal and county offices throughout the nation.

But the dollar gap between blacks and whites continues to widen. There seems to be no positive correlation between the number of black elected officials and meaningful improvement of the quality of life for the neediest among us. Some African Americans are beginning to come around to understand the real motivation of America's dominant group, and that simply is M-O-N-E-Y.

The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks understood this in Montgomery, Ala., in the late '50s when they boycotted the Montgomery bus system. Pan Africa's Randall Robinson understood this in his battle to dismantle apartheid in South Africa and Jesse Jackson

has used the power of the dollar several times against the likes of Texaco and Denny's.

African Americans have spending power. We will spend almost \$500 billion this year alone. That's more than the total gross domestic product of more than 95 percent of the world's nations.

What we do with it and how we use it will have a greater impact on our quality of life in the next millennium than electing officials who promise to appoint black faces to ceremonial positions.

What does all this mean? Should we boycott every state, corporation, company or store that doesn't adhere to our every whim?

The answer is a resounding "no."

African Americans should, however, become more selective consumers.

We ought not financially support those who choose to disrespect and denigrate us. We ought not financially contribute to insensitive companies who "just didn't know" that we would be offended by their actions or inactions. We ought to get off the courthouse steps.

The feet of an incentive-driven politician or businessperson is no place for the new African American of the 21st century.

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