

“Going through Marion”

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MMI Class of 1982HS

When I was a little girl, growing up in Faunsdale with my passel of siblings, my parents would often drive us through Marion to go to Birmingham to visit my maternal grandmother. My grandmother was a strong nurturing force in our lives. She worked as a legal secretary to single-handedly raise and educate her three daughters, and inspired me to become a professional woman (specifically, a lawyer) when I grew up. I wanted to be like her, and be able to take care of myself and my family. She loved me and challenged me, making me want to achieve big things. And I got to see her, and get a dose of inspiration several times a year, by going through Marion.

In eighth grade, during Christmas break, I announced to my parents that I was not learning anything in the Marengo County public school I attended. My mother told me that that was fine, that I did not have to go to school there anymore. Next thing I knew, I was standing in Col. James Jackson’s office with a No. 2 pencil in my hand, preparing to take an examination to see if I had enough schooling and sense to be admitted into the 9th grade at MMI. I must have passed the test because minutes later, was sitting in Susan Wilbourne’s algebra class, wondering what the hell had just happened. Three and a half years later, I was walking out of the old gymnasium with a diploma in my hand, raring to go on to the next thing – college at Birmingham-Southern. Having a great high school education, a little more maturity than my sixteen years might have predicted, and the self-discipline that JROTC had demanded, I even had a little scholarship money. No question that I got to ‘Southern by going through Marion.

After graduation from ‘Southern, I started law school at Vanderbilt. Leaving home with no real clue about what to expect, other than what I had gleaned from watching “The Paper Chase” on television as a child (a favorite I shared with Col. Tommy Murfee’s wife, Ann), I packed up my worldly possessions and moved to Nashville. Law school forced me to stand on my feet and articulate a position in front of an often hostile crowd, and there I remembered that the only speech class I ever had was at MMI, taught by Maj. Frank Marshall. I never once prepared for an oral argument without thinking of him. I got to Vanderbilt Law School, and I owe whatever success I had there, to going through Marion.

At the end of my first year of law school, I took a job with a law firm in Birmingham. My choice of where to spend this time was made easier because I met a “Black Belt” boy, Roy Crawford, who had grown up near Marion and had also attended MMI. Roy was a partner at Cabaniss, Johnston, and I met him on my initial interview with the firm. We bonded nearly instantly over our shared heritage and experience. I guess you could say that I got my first professional job, at least in part, by going through Marion.

Years passed. I kept lawyering and working, and in due course was made partner in the firm. I sent the partnership announcement to MMI (this being the biggest professional news of my life!), and Col. Jackson invited me to come to speak to the cadet corps during chapel. I was happy to think that I might

have something to offer the next generation accepted. A few weeks after my talk, former MMI board chairman and fellow lawyer Alva Caine came over to my office to invite me to serve as a Trustee for my beloved alma mater. At the urging of Roy Crawford, I accepted. Again, another opportunity was opened to me, because I went through Marion.

Now, when I go home to see my daddy, I leave Birmingham on 1-20/59, get off at the West Blocton exit, taking Highway 5 through Centreville and on down to the intersection of Highway 183, then right towards Uniontown. As it seems I have eternally done, I go through Marion to see a person I love and admire more than I can ever express. I fondly recall all the opportunities that have been afforded me, and the adventures that life held and still holds for me, by going through Marion.

My story is not unique. I am certainly nobody special. Cadres of us Black Belt kids benefitted from the foundational education we got in the high school department at MMI. (Some of those kids are even kin to me!) I regret that the high school is no longer there. I have classmates all over this country, indeed all over this globe, who are doing important things—productive things, world-altering things. And they, just like me, got to do these things because they went through Marion. MMI matters because of the positive impact the education provided to us by its amazing faculty and military department had on our young, impressionable lives.