

OPINION

Opinion articles do not necessarily reflect or represent the views of The Portland Observer

'Titles' Never too late to change

The following essay by Portland State University student Carman Anderson earned her an award by Presidents Commission on the Status of Women:

BY CARMAN ANDERSON

I came into this world a baby branded with titles. I was called unfortunate, at risk, ward of the court and foster child.

I was born in Portland, Ore. in 1972 to a heroin addicted teenager and former professional boxer. My mother's challenges with the world led me to be raised by her oldest sister. I am certain that decision

my childhood being disrespected; nor am I bitter about my adult memories of childhood being polluted. Everything I experienced in my life has brought me here to Portland State University to be the first college graduate in my family.

As a teenager I was a stereo type; composed of many titles I was called troubled, runaway, High School drop-out, "high risk" emancipated minor, and eventually teenage mother.

I ran away from home when I was 16 years old. All those years of being treated like an adult

erty line.

My son was born in 1990 when I was 18 years old. I was still a typical teenager hanging out with my friends, I just had a baby boy in tow. I loved my son and was not sorry that I made the decision to have him alone. When I was pregnant with my son I saw a movie at the theater called "Rain Man." It was a popular movie about an autistic man. Following the movie there was a plethora of information about autism. Autism was all over the TV and I made sure I learned all I could because I was fascinated. My son's

personality began to change when he was a one-year old. I noticed he was very irrational and would shriek unexpectedly. I also noticed that he was not uttering a single word. His behavior progressed and he began to add odd repetitive motions. I started thinking of all the TV shows and articles about autism that grasped my attention. I was of course no expert, but by the time my son was two years old I was convinced that he was autistic.

After my son was diagnosed at age three with autism, I was prescribed more titles. I was called an

anomaly, special education parent, source of pity, and so strong.

I felt so lucky when my son was diagnosed with autism. I also felt like I was ready for the incredible journey I had to look forward to. I have been the source of admiration and curiosity. I have been asked how I handle it; being a single mother of a developmentally disabled child. I always thought I don't have a choice, he is my son. When I think back to the decisions my mother made in regards to raising me; I suppose I did have a choice. My son is my blessing and my gift;

I consider myself lucky to be his mother. I am majoring in the Child and Family Studies program here at Portland State. I am also working towards a minor in Black Studies. I want to be an advocate and educator for parents and foster parents raising children with developmental disabilities. I know what a challenge it can be, but I want to steer parents towards the blessings. I want to be a voice and an ear for families, so I can provide them with valuable counseling, information,

continued ▼ on page A5



Carman Anderson with her son

saved my life. Although I was given a stable home life complete with weekly piano lessons, a puppy and plenty of dysfunction, I was still troubled. I remember on Friday nights packing all of my belongings to go and spend the weekend with my "real mother." In her company I was subject to whatever her activities were. I did love my mother, but her lifestyle scared me. On one occasion my mother injected heroin in front of me resulting in an overdose. I was trained at 5 years of age to check to see if she was still breathing by holding a mirror to her mouth. I was not around to do that when she overdosed in 1996 and died at the age of 43. I am not bitter about

caught up with me. I felt I had an adult mind far beyond my years and rules did not and should not apply to me. I ended up dropping out of high school and getting my GED my junior year. After all, school was for children, not someone like me. Shortly after graduation I fulfilled all "high risk" teen stereotypes and became a pregnant unwed mother.

I am a statistic represented in many studies, polls, and surveys. The results have granted me even more titles. I am called a single mother, welfare recipient, housing project resident, low skill worker, and a person living below the pov-



Now Is The Time to ... Focus ... Forward ... Finish

Welcome!

21st Annual Conference
National Organization Of Black Elected Legislative Women

Portland, Oregon June 29-July 2, 2006

at the Doubletree Lloyd Center Hotel & Executive Meeting Center

Senator John Edwards
Keynote Speaker, Friday, June 30 at 9am

2004 candidate for Vice President of the United States and former U.S. Senator from North Carolina

Carlotta Walls LaNier
one of the "Little Rock Nine"
2006 National Honoree

Gustavus A. Aranda, Pharm.D., M.Sc.
University of Southern California

Dr. Andriette Ward, M. D., M.P.H.

Childrens Hospital, Los Angeles
Featured in O Magazine, February 2006

Other speakers & presenters include:

Dr. Titus D. Duncan, M. D., F.A.C.S.

Dr. Carolyn M. West, Ph.D.

Dr. Barbara Earl Ward, M.F.A.



Gustavus A. Aranda



Dr. Andriette Ward



Senator Margaret Carter
2006 Conference Chair



John Edwards



Carlotta Walls LaNier

To register please call 503.986.1722, State Capitol or 503.282.6846, Portland. A limited number of community scholarships is available. Educational CEUs can be available. Please call: 503.986.1655. Email: sen.margaretcarter@state.or.us

