

On Father's Day: These Super Dads Defy the Statistics

Written by Hazel Trice Edney
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We hear the statistics all too often. Currently, “only 28 percent of Black youth have their fathers in the home. In 1920, it was 90 percent and in 1960 it was 80 percent.”

Those are the stats recently quoted by Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu, a foremost expert on the rearing of African-American children, especially boys. He boldly asserts: “I believe one of the greatest problems facing the Black community is fatherlessness.”

Plenty of other national experts back him up, pointing to multiple social ills as evidence of the dire need for fathers in the home. Even President Obama has focused on this issue when speaking to Black audiences. But, that’s not what this story is about.

On Father’s Day, June 16, 2013, millions of Black fathers, stepfathers, uncles, mentors, big brothers, relatives and father figures will be celebrated and appreciated because of their powerful and positive influence on their children every day. Some will even be given, well, super dad status.

Meet Martin Smith, a wealth planner and investment advisor who resides in Bowie, Md. He gives his view on the most important aspect of fatherhood:

“I think legacy and having the privilege and the honor to raise children and to have them develop into who God has called them uniquely to be,” he says. “All of them are totally different from one another. And so it really stretches you to see how you have to nurture them.”

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Smith should know. He and his wife, Walida, have seven children - six girls ages 18, 16, 11, 9, 8, and 5 and one boy, 13.

“In my case – seven different personalities,” he chuckles, speaking from a cell phone as the entire family enjoys a road trip from Bowie to the San Diego, California area to visit family and tour colleges. “We’re trying to get them exposed now, start them thinking about it early.”

Along the way, they stopped in to visit long-time friends, Marlon and Rosalind Brooks of Houston, Texas. The Brooks also have a large family – five children - including four boys ages 14, 10, 8, and 4, and one girl, 12.

Marlon Brooks tells his strategy for fatherhood:

“It’s hard to give them equal attention, but you have to give them attention as if you were wanting attention yourself,” he says. “You’ve got to manage the kids; you’ve got to manage time with your wife; you’ve got to manage taking care of the house; you’ve got to manage making sure that you’re going to provide for them and sometimes in the midst of all of that you just don’t want to be bothered,” he chuckled. “But, even then, I’ve got to make sure that I’m a good steward over the emotions of all of the kids.”

The owners of a 4-year-old food service operation, Brooks Family Barbecue, the Brooks are about to take on yet another venture in Houston. They are opening a full service restaurant in July. That’s coupled with Mrs. Brooks’ full time job as an ROTC instructor.

They say balancing their careers and caring for the children can only be done as a team.

“Even on a daily basis we pretty much divide everything up,” she said, with a special emphasis on their education. “He and I spend equal time at the school. They know him just like they know me as far as the teachers and the administrators.”

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When it comes to discipline, the retired U. S. Navy Commander says she is the strict one. "I'm kind of hard-nosed when it comes to certain things." She recalls how the children think, "Mom says we can't do this, but Dad might find a way for us to be able to work it out.' I think when God called us together, he just knew these different temperaments we had. And we're just a good balance."

Walida Smith, a working mother of seven children, says she admires her husband's "commitment to their spiritual growth above anything else. That's like the first and foremost concern," she said.

In that regard, Martin Smith says one of his favorite family group activities is Bible Study. He has temporarily set aside his pursuit of a Master of Divinity degree while completing a Masters of Real Estate Finance at Georgetown University, which he says will enhance his services at Wealth Care Financial Group Inc. of which he is owner, president and chief executive officer.

Despite their jam-packed schedules, both couples say finding time for each other and nurturing their own relationships are keys to good parenting.

"You make time," says Mrs. Smith, who works as director of Publications and Resources for the Skinner Leadership Institute based in Tracy's Landing, Md. "We have teenagers. The older ones are taught how to take care of the younger ones so that [we] are able to do that. And then we live near family and have family available so that makes a difference."

The main ingredient is sacrificing for each other even if it's a constant struggle, says Marlon Brooks.

"We date. That's very important. We spend time as husband and wife, but sometimes we need to spend time together as friends. And when we spend time together as friends we kind of talk about the needs of the kids and each other's needs," he says. "Every time we do that for each other I feel like the Lord meets our needs."