

# The Strength Instilled Within One's Name

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## Recommended Citation

Mable, Adrell (2018) "The Strength Instilled Within One's Name," *The Mall*: Vol. 2 , Article 17.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/the-mall/vol2/iss1/17>

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## **The Strength Instilled Within One's Name**

*Adrell Mable*

It was the first time that my name was not Adrell Mable, my given name. The name that was on my birth certificate. The name that my parents had so carefully crafted and derived from the name Darrell- my late uncle's name. Instead, my name was "Black Girl", "Dog Feces", or "Ugly Girl". Second grade was when it all started.

I was so elated to walk into my new second grade class. Even though the move from Gary to Crown Point brought me a lot of sadness and fear, I hoped to make new friends and start a new life. As Principal Carrningham walked me down the hall to my new classroom, I looked up to her, seeing that we both shared the same eager smile. It was a smile of happiness. We made a right turn down the wide hallway, which consisted of so many square windows on the right side that overlooked to the other side of the school. Although there were many rocks and plants in between the space, the clean, spotless windows clearly revealed my reflection and the morning activities that were happening in the classrooms across the way. I was literally looking straight into the room. It was a window and a mirror at the same time! How could this be? The sun only enhanced the students interactions even more, and surprisingly, the detailed reflection of my beautiful smile.

On November 26, 2006, the sun was shining so bright, almost as if it was a sign from God. I was so fascinated by the windows that I didn't realize Principal Carrningham had come to a stop. She informed me that we were finally in front of my new classroom.

"Okay Ad-rell, we are finally here. This is your new classroom and your teacher is Mrs. Baker," said Principal Carrningham with that huge smile on her face. Her smile gave me so much relief, because I was so nervous to see what was behind that door. As she opened the door, my

nervousness was completely noticeable through my hands. My parents described it as “Fussy’s (Fussy is the nickname my parents gave me when I was born) nervous triangle,” because I unconsciously made a big triangle with all the tips on both of my hands. Not only would I make a triangle, but I would separate the tips of my hands, then eventually bring them back together. Principal Carningham finally opened the door. Straight ahead I saw what appeared to be my new teacher. She was standing in the large space that separated the whiteboard from the desks, in which the students were assigned and grouped into by pairs. Immediately my eyes caught the whiteboard and how breathtaking it was. At my old school, we had chalkboards. Now I wouldn’t have to hear the screeching sound that was so commonly associated with the use of chalk, or have coughing spells when the teacher finally erased the lesson plans she had written on the board for the day. A new learning experience was in store and I was ready. I thought to myself, “this new school is amazing.”

“Hello students, as you all know, I am Principal Carningham. Today we have a new student with us and her name is A-drell,” she said with so much zeal. I bowed my head immediately, noticing that she had pronounced my name wrong. Her pronunciation was meaningless to me; A-drell and A-dri-ell weren’t the same individuals. I knew it wasn’t her fault, but she didn’t check or take the time to get her mistake right. My new teacher walked over to me, stuck out her hand to shake mine, and introduced herself. She was wearing long blue jean pants, tennis shoes, and a white t-shirt with the “Baker’s Fruit” logo on it. Her height was medium- not too tall and not too short. Her face was framed by her short, bob haircut and square-like, golden glasses. I immediately realized that she was Caucasian, but it was familiar territory since all my teachers had been Caucasian at my old school.

“Hello A-drell. My name is Mrs. Baker, and I am your teacher.” she said.

“Hello Mrs. Baker,” I replied. She too had pronounced my name wrong. I was too afraid to tell her the real pronunciation of my name. However, the mispronunciation of my name was a minor issued compared to everything that transpired after that day.

“We are so glad to have you in our class. Your assigned seat is in the back next to Leah,” she informed me. Since the moment I entered my new classroom, I hadn’t turned to look at my new classmates. As my teacher guided me to my seat, all I got was stares. No smiles. Just some dirty looks.

I was forced to play with a different group of girls everyday at recess, but sometimes I would still end up playing by myself. No one liked me and all they knew was my name- it wasn’t even the right pronunciation. I was often told “I can’t play with you because you’re Black.” Once the teacher talked with them, they would just make up more lies. I cried everyday at recess, and in class. Why was I getting discriminated against based on the color of my skin? What about my personality? What about A-dri-el, not A-drell? It had to have been something larger than me, I thought. I didn’t bring this upon myself. I was just born, like you.

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My parents gave me a deeper understanding of why I was being treated the way I was at the time. I concluded that the children at my new school had no clear understanding of why they were treating me that way, just as I had no clear understanding as to why I was getting bullied for no reason. It was not them. They had no say in their beliefs or what they were taught. It was their parents. Their parents were the ones participating in the KKK, and some were even the leaders. They had killed and were possibly still killing people that looked just like me. Did the children watch? Although this questioned quickly popped into my head, I realized that I didn’t want to know the answer. Their parents had taught them to hate me before I even arrived, which is why I got discriminated against. I couldn’t blame them. It wasn’t their fault.

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Towards the end of the year, the school decided to put on a talent show. The theme of the talent show was “American Idol.” Upon finding out, I immediately ran home and told my parents the good news. I loved singing so much and I was so happy for the chance to get involved, even though I would have only been at the school for a total of six months. However, days after letting my parents know about the talent show, I had changed my mind due to another bad day at school. “Mom, Dad . . . .” I sobbed at the dinner table, not able to finish my sentence. Our dinner table was black at the time, and it seated six people. My mom had cooked her famous dish: spinach casserole. She always layered it with spinach, spanish rice, red sauce, and ground beef. It was my favorite. But I couldn’t enjoy it.

“Oh Fussy–,” said my mother in a high-pitched voice, as she saw the tears flowing down my face. It was the voice that she unconsciously used when she got super sympathetic. “Babydoll, what’s wrong?” my dad asked worriedly, but he and my mom knew something was unclear. Looking back now, my parents tell me that I came home crying everyday.

“Today... to-day at lunch (sniffles) ....Claire (sniffles).... said I look like poop and she...she... (sniffles) called me poop. I don’t want to.. to...to...(sniffles) do the talent show if I look like poop.” I confessed to my parents. Immediately my mom, dad, brother, and sister came over to the other side of the table and hugged me so tight in the midst of my tears. I felt so bad because I knew my tears were soaking their clothes. But we needed each other’s love. We all were going through something, but I didn’t want to make my problem seem bigger than theirs. My parents had decided to move to Crown Point in order for us to have a better life than they did. They wanted the best, but they didn’t realize how much happiness it would cost us.

My mom and dad were struggling with the idea of us going to a racist school, being that we were so young. They didn’t know it was going to be this bad. They also became immensely disgusted

with the expression “oh.” This was always the response when we were shopping in the grocery, entering the security gate of our subdivision, or telling our close friends and family where we lived. The expression “oh” meant jealousy and hatred, even from the ones that should have been happy about our growth. Did they want us to suffer? My sister wasn’t in school yet, but my brother was suffering more than I was. That’s his story to tell. The point is that we all needed that hug. We needed comfort.

“Fussy, you do not look like poop. You are beautiful. Don’t you DARE believe what they tell you,” said my dad in his strongest voice. This was the first time I saw his military side come out. “My sweet girl, they are jealous and they are practicing hatred. DON’T be like them! You fight with a smile and continue being the sweet little girl you are. We love you and God loves you. YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL.” said my mom. I had started thinking that I was ugly, because when you thought about it deeply, the comparison was true. My skin tone and the color of poop was brown, but I was NOT poop.

“Fussy, you love to sing and I love to hear you sing. You’re my little songbird. God has gifted you with a beautiful voice, use it! They will love your voice.” My dad said, trying his best to cheer me up. He did indeed cheer me up, but I wasn’t ready to formulate my decision just yet. I decided to ponder it more as I tackle my spinach casserole. There was no way I was going to let it go to waste. I don’t know if it was the sensation that the casserole gave me or the talk that my family had with me, but a light bulb suddenly flickered on in my head.

“Okay Daddy! I will sing in the talent show, but I don’t know what to sing.” I said, wiping the last few tears away. I finally had strength.

My mom suddenly chimed in and assured me, “Oh we’ll find one, you always sing to the songs on the radio,” she laughed. When we drove, I sang my heart out, sitting in the front seat of

our blue Dodge van. Sure enough, whenever we drove anywhere after that, we searched for songs that I could sing for the talent show. One day my mom and I were driving to Wise Way to pick up some groceries, and the perfect song came on. It was called “Mama’s Kitchen” by Cece Winans, and it was the perfect song for me.

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In order to be in the talent show, everyone had to audition in front of the talent show coordinators. Since I had decided at the last minute that I wanted to do it again, I had missed all the audition slots. I was scared and sad that I wouldn’t be able to sing, but they made a special time for me to come in one day after school. I sung for them and I got in! Claire, the girl who had said I looked like poop, had also She was doing gymnastics as she always did on the playground.

“Hello A-drell, what are you doing here?” she questioned when she saw me and my mom walking into the gymnasium for rehearsal.

“I’m here to sing!!” I said with so much enthusiasm.

“Oh.” she replied, surprised.

“Yeah, good luck with your performance!” I said.

“Thanks,” she said, squinting her eyes to form a fake, petty smile. Why was she so mad? I was giving her accolades and she couldn’t say anything back? My mom immediately reached down and grabbed my hand, squeezing it tight to remind me that she was there. I looked up to her and smiled so big. She was the only one that liked and loved me in that whole entire room. “They are going to LOVE your voice.” she said, completely sure. She was right. Only the participants in the show heard my voice that night and they absolutely loved it. It went around the whole school, so all the students couldn’t wait to hear me.

Come performance day, I was really scared. My mom had dressed me up in my favorite outfit. It was a long pink suit with silver buttons that sparkled. I wore a blue jean skirt under and my

mom clipped my braids back with a silver hair clip. My dad had taken off work, because he was going to come hear his babydoll sing. They both drove me to school that day, treating me to breakfast at McDonalds- I know, not the healthiest option, but a treat. They then dropped me off in the waiting room and left to go find their seat in the audience.

“Okay students. Today is the big day. Go out there and shine!” The directors said in the most cheerful voice possible. I wasn’t even able to enjoy their happiness, because I was so surprised by what happened next.

“Good luck A-drell, you have a nice voice.” someone said from behind me. I turned and saw that it was Claire. She was smiling, and she was smiling at me. Was I dreaming?

“Thank you! Good luck to you too!” I replied, trying to contain my happiness. Soon afterwards, we entered into the gymnasium and sat in the brown, metal folding chairs. The operators had done a good job of making us feel as though we were actually on American Idol. They had the logo in the corner of the stage and the whole gymnasium was decorated in blue. When I got called to the stage, I looked out to see the big crowd. Chairs extended to both ends of the gym, but that wasn’t enough. All of the students had to sit on the ground and several parents stood against the wall. The pressure was on. Once the song started, I immediately froze up. All eyes were on me. I tried to escape the embarrassment, but I was challenged both ways. If I looked down, I had to stare at the many eyes of the students sitting on the floor. If I looked up, I was forced to stare at the intimidating adults that lined the walls. People began to whisper about why I hadn’t started singing and I suddenly felt a tear form in my eyelid. But it didn’t roll. The only place I could look was at the microphone. It reminded me of myself, how much I had practiced, and why I was there in the first place. The microphone saved me. They started the music up again and in the midst of the crowd I saw my mom and dad. They were diagonal of the stage, and my dad had his old, black video camera out. Before it was time for me to sing, my dad mouthed out, standing taller than almost anyone in

the room, “Sing Fussy.” This became his usual expression for every time that I would sing from that day forward. Seeing them gave me so much confidence and I opened my mouth and sang. Halfway into the song, almost everyone in the audience had stood up. Once I finished, everyone was clapping and yelling “Whoohoo,” my mom and dad being the loudest. There was never a day that I was so happy to be at Winfield Elementary. Especially in the bathroom.

“Omg! The talent show was awesome. Who was your favorite?” I heard a voice say.

“Mama’s Kitchen girl!!” Another said, and they started singing the lyrics. It only took a matter of seconds and everyone in the bathroom began singing the lyrics. My dad was right. They had loved me, but why did it have to take my voice just for them to love me? Did they love me or my voice?

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Advancing to the third grade at Jerry Ross Elementary didn’t really change anything for me. Instead, I had a new bully: my teacher. Winfield Elementary only had grades kindergarten through second, so we had to continue third through fifth grade at Jerry Ross Elementary. By that time, I had gotten used to my peers bullying me, but not my teacher. Wasn’t she supposed to support all the children in the class? In order for you to understand what I mean, we need to backtrack to second grade. In second grade, my teacher, Mrs. Baker knew that I was getting bullied and she tried her best to help me. By contrast, Ms. Horan believed every lie the girls in the classroom told her, and she never took the time to help me. I would constantly tell her that the girls in the class were rolling their eyes, sticking out their tongues, and gossiping about me. I would often look up from the in- class assignment I was doing at the time and see a group of girls laughing at me. Tears started rolling down my face as I again realized that I still didn’t fit in.

New school, more children, but the same attitude on an even larger scale. What was I doing wrong? What was so funny about me? In addition to that, I still wasn’t allowed to play with anyone

at recess, because of my skin color. I eventually went to talk to the principal, Ms. Johanson, about the bullying that was being done to me. I was very surprised because she didn't say anything. She was the first person that just simply listened to me. She gave me her undivided attention, so I took advantage of that and told her everything. After talking with her, she thought it would be best to have a meeting with all of the girls in my class, and Ms. Horan. I was so happy because someone was going to finally take control of the situation. Later on that week during recess, we traveled down the winding, brick hallway from our classroom to her office. Ms. Johanson's office was embedded behind the administrative desk and the inside could only be seen through the beige blinds that she opened quite frequently. As we entered the main office, we immediately received alarming looks from the students waiting to be helped by the office ladies. Of course, because everyone that came to the principal's office was always in trouble.

"Hello ladies," Ms. Johanson said as she walked around the assistant desk. She always wore beautiful dresses that ranged from all possible colors of the rainbow, and heels to match. On this day, she wore a bright yellow sundress and beige heels. She shook our hands and we immediately walked into her office. It wasn't like anything I had imagined. It was a small, welcoming environment with multiple inspirational quotes on the walls and music in the background. Her color scheme was beige and blue, and the room smelled of flowers. She instructed us to sit on the multi-colored carpet in front of her desk.

"So I hear that you ladies are going through some issues in your classroom," she said as she passed out bright colored orange sheets. All of the girls looked at each other confusedly, as if she had spoken a lie. She had noticed.

"Okay well, let's hear what you all have to say," she said. She looked over at me and motioned for me to talk first. At that very moment, I had everyone's attention. I talked about how I was getting bullied in the class and how I felt being there at the school overall. While I was talking,

almost all of the girls had raised their eyebrows at least once. Again, they thought they were innocent little angels.

“Okay well, I’m sure you all heard A-drell. What do you all think? Is this behavior going on?” she asked. All of the girls shook their heads side-to-side, denying everything I had said. They were all against me. The Caucasian girls against the only Black girl. There was no way I was winning this battle.

“Okay well it doesn’t seem as though there are many issues in the classroom. We all need to just be friendly to each other,” she said. What about me? So, it was okay for them to bully me, because majority rules? She too had become my enemy and I couldn’t hold it in any longer. What started off as a small tear soon turned into a big tear. It hit the bright orange sheet so hard, making an astonishing sound. The tear landed in the bottom corner of the paper, but it’s circular circumference was almost the size of a quarter. Upon hearing the teardrop, everyone turned around, giving surprised looks that soon turned into dirty looks, as if to say, “what are you crying for?” But she didn’t see that. In the midst of the silence, the lyrics “Trying hard to reach out. But when I tried to speak out. Felt like no one could hear me. Wanted to belong here. But something felt so wrong here. So I pray. I could breakaway” soon played over the sound system in her office (Clarkson 2010). It was Breakaway by Kelly Clarkson. There was no song that could better describe that particular moment. Because I too felt like Kelly Clarkson.

Fourth grade was the best year I had at Jerry Ross Elementary. In fourth grade; I had so much help. My teacher, Mrs. Rose, loved me so much and put me in leadership. I was in charge of making sure that students marked down the homework in their agenda books. In addition to that, I was assigned to help one student out during class everyday, depending on what he was struggling in. I don’t know if it was because she was older or if she was a Christian, but she was the first person who saw me as “A-dri-ell,” not “Black Girl.” At that time, more black families had begun to move to

Crown Point, so things were getting better. However, in the fifth grade, I just happen to be placed with almost all the same students from my third grade class. I was very positive about it and prepared. Once again they lied when their evil behavior towards me was brought up to the teacher and principal. Unfortunately, they flipped the situation and blamed it on me. I was excluded from all of the holiday parties and social outings that occurred throughout the year. What was the point of me saying anything? They ruined my reputation. But I didn't cry. I just took it. Because when I spoke up, I only made the situation worse. But how else would change come about? I had hopes that things would be better, because things were always better in fourth grade.

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Beginning middle school brought forth the chance to meet new people from incorporated Crown Point. In middle school, I got involved with so many extra-curricular activities and I was loved by all my teachers. I had made my first set of friends in the sixth grade, and they accepted me no matter what. I thought to myself, "this journey is finally over," until the end of eighth grade. One day I was riding the school bus home, and the Lake County Sheriff's son kept touching my shoulder on purpose. I asked him to stop multiple times and after the third time, he spat on me and told me "I'll hang you from a tree." That was the first time anyone had threatened me that way, and it was the last. The following day, my dad took me to the Lake County Special Victims Unit. I told my story to the detective three times and he told us that he would take care of the problem. After six months, he obtained a Misdemeanor offense on his record. Prior to that, he had stopped riding the bus and eventually moved out of the subdivision.

My parents were extremely satisfied, as this was the first time someone had dealt with our problems. Today, Crown Point has accumulated more Black people and other minorities since we moved there, many people still consider it a racist city, and others don't. During my senior year of high school, I did an informal interview with my best friend, Emma. I explained my long journey of

living in Crown Point to her, and she disagreed with everything I said. I tell you, I never felt so hurt in my entire life! I asked her if she thought Crown Point was and still is a racist city. Her explanation was “I never noticed any of that going on, are you sure you went through that? I just don’t believe it. Crown Point has never been racist” (E. Philbin, Personal Communication, 2017). There was nothing else that I needed to ask her. I realized then that some people are just so ashamed that they can’t face the truth. Emma and I had become really close friends, but she just proved to be another example of how racism continued in my life, indirectly. Her comments and mentality showed me that she wasn’t my true friend, so our friendship ended after high school graduation.

By the time I left Middle School, I had learned that no matter how nice or good of a person you may be, people will always look on the outside before even considering the inside. I also learned that not everyone is the same and that there are a handful of those out there that look on the inside. Overall, I learned that not everyone is full of love and capable of embracing change. For example, I couldn’t make any friends because they thought that there was something wrong with me. Being emotionally shattered caused me to distance myself from those around me and resort to being “quiet.” Therefore, it was hard to develop new friends that I could trust. But I still tried to be friendly to others. I was constantly reminded of the lies and false rumors expressed about me. After telling my story to the detective, my dad had severe intentions of getting our stories out for others to hear. He wanted people to know what my brother and I were going through and how no one in the school system did anything about it. My brother was the main reason, because his story is worse than mine. My dad had two news reporters who were eager to hear our stories. But it never happened. I recently found out this year why it hadn’t happened.

My family took a road trip to Michigan for spring break, and our move to Crown Point came up in one of the conversations. I was half asleep, but I clearly heard, “No- Dakota (my brother) didn’t want to share his story with the news reporters. It told him that they were ready to hear, but

he begged me not to. He said he didn't want to ruin the path that his sisters would have to follow and he wanted to protect the family" (C. Mable, Personal Communication, March 2018). I looked over to my brother and saw that he was sleeping, but I sent him a smile in spite of. He is so courageous. My dad then went on to say how we only got through that hard time in our life because of our relationship with God. Listening to him forced me to reflect on how God brought me through individually.

Throughout the years, I started to develop a closer relationship with God and I realized the concept of forgiveness for everyone. For God has forgiven us for all our sins, so why can't we forgive others? That was going to be the only way I could get past it and show the world a better way. I wasn't going to shut down and show them weakness, but I still showed them sincere love, in spite of all the bullying. Now if they took my kindness for weakness, that was on them, but it stood for the power of God and humanity that is within me. During my transition to high school I saw many blacks moving in and moving right back out, because they couldn't handle it. But in reality, without the strength I gained within myself, through God, I might not have made it either. I have learned to be strong and look on the positive side and not dwell on the situation I'm in, which could result in giving up. When you look to the heights you are able to fight with the strength that was established deep down at birth. You can look through your situation with a smile. I smile because I know I will never give up if I am faced with a hard challenge. I smile because my name is A-dri-el.