

Begin At The Beginning: Don't Embarrass The Family

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The narrative highlights the family's solid moral ethos and collective journey of resilience and leadership, reflecting their deep commitment to maintaining their family's honor and standards despite personal challenges.



Rooted in Resilience: A portrait of strength and unity, this family embodies the enduring spirit of their heritage, reflecting the profound ties to their possible Mande ancestry

The Mande people are from West Africa. From what I have learned about them, it is possible that the Madkins family could be part of that tribe. "In Mande societies, all matters involving family, clan, and ethnic kinship are of supreme importance. People are identified by their jamu, which is the family name..." (Puchner, 1514)

The Madkins family begins with a little country boy. My father was born in a small country town in West Texas. One day, my grandfather caught my father's mother holding him upside down over a hot sink of water. I do not think she was trying to drown him. She had a mental illness and did not know what she was doing. My grandfather took my father from the situation and had my father's mother committed to a hospital. My grandfather was struggling trying to raise my father. My father's other siblings were older than 17, so my grandfather had no wife and was trying to raise a baby. He could not do it. One day, a neighbor, Ruby Broadnax, came by the house and told my grandfather that she would raise the boy as her own if he gave her my father. Ms. Ruby, as she was called, took my father home with her, and he became her son. As far as I know, no adoption papers were ever signed, no one ever went to court, and nothing official was ever done. He was the pride and joy of my Memama until the day she died.

My family has a saying, "Don't embarrass the family." It has been said for as long as I can remember, at graduation parties, upon entering college, when having a speaking engagement, when going to perform on a stage or on a field, or when going on an outing with other people.

My father grew up in an old, run-down house with holes in the roof. He lived with a mother who was over 60 years old when he went to live with her. She was on social security and worked odd jobs. She rarely had enough money to care for herself, much less two small children, my father and her granddaughter, whom she was also raising. He had a life filled with love and filled with struggle and hardship, but he went to school and worked hard to get his education, and my father graduated Summa Cum Laude with a Bachelor's and Master's in Math. He was also a military man, leaving the Army with the rank of Major. He instilled in us a work ethic and a love of education.

My family has a saying, "Don't embarrass the family." It has been said for as long as I can remember, at graduation parties, upon entering college, when having a speaking engagement, performing on a stage or a field, or going on an outing with others. I have had it said to me, and I have said it to others. I am still determining where it came from and how it got started. I know how to say it.

When we, the Madkins family, say that to a loved one, we mean don't do anything that will put the Madkins family to shame. No one has ever told me what would put the Madkins family name to shame. No one has ever said what would happen if I put the Madkins" family name to shame. I am not even told what putting the Madkins family name to shame means. It is just one of those things I have figured out what it means. It means do not get arrested, pregnant before marriage, caught in a sin, or caught in a web of lies. Did I forget that the Madkins family is Christian, filled with pastors, preachers, and church workers? We are expected to uphold a standard of moral living. We are to hold up a standard of good Christian qualities. We are to be looked upon as one of those Madkins who is worthy to be emulated.

My father always told us, "You all are Madkins, and you must be better than everyone else. You all have to act better than everyone else. You all have to be examples to others. Madkins' a'e intelligent and successful. Never forget that." O"ce, I asked my father why he told us that. He said, "I "ant you all to be the best you can be and be an example for others. You all are leaders, and I expect you all to be that."

M" father is a pastor. He holds two doctorate degrees, one in Theology and one in Divinity, from the top theological school in the country, and he graduated with honors. His first wife is a devout Pentecostal church mother, a prayer warrior who can be called upon at any given moment to pray down fire from Heaven. She can cry at the drop of a dime to get her way in whatever situation. His second wife is an ordained preacher, a singer who can sing the devil out of anyone. She once told my cousin, who was living with them because his grandmother had died and his mother was on drugs, not to be "in"ignant" a"I your life. I am his oldest daughter and from his first marriage. I am a minister, singer, teacher, and encourager who can lift the downtrodden with a sweet phrase and a gentle hug. I tend to be sullen, withdrawn, and have little patience. His firstborn son from his first marriage is a dynamic fire and brimstone preacher who can preach the hell out of the greatest sinner. He is opinionated, obstinate, and always right, no matter what the facts say. My father's son, from his second marriage, is a former high school and college football star who lacked luster grades in college and needs help finding his way in the world. He went from wanting to be an NFL star to trying to be a model to now working at a 9 to 5. My father's daughter, who is from his second marriage, is a solid-willed, self-proclaimed gold-digger who lives in Boston a few blocks from the area where the Boston bombing occurred. At one point, she was shacking up with a guy and had convinced herself that her parents, both ministers of the Gospel, were okay with it.

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and you have to be better than everyone else.'*

All of us, from my father down, have embarrassed the family. My father, who preaches the sanctity of marriage, has been divorced. My mother, who prays for people to succeed in marriage, could not hold her marriage together. My stepmother, who speaks of herself as a good mother, has alienated two stepchildren and a heartbroken cousin. My brother, who was once a successful star on the football field, is now a guy who did not live out his dream. My sister has declared that she will marry a rich white man and does not care who knows it. Yes, we have embarrassed the family.

But, we have not embarrassed the family. We are all leaders. My father is a well-known teacher and orator who has had students not required to enroll in his courses because they wanted to be in his class. My mother is an influential teacher; other teachers ask for advice and prayer. My stepmother is a magnet for college-age students who seek advice and kind words. I am the spiritual compass and encourager at my school. If there is a problem, the people at my school tell me, and the principals listen to what I say because they know that people talk to me. My big little brother has droves of young men who look up to him as a mentor. Parents even ask for his help with issues involving their children. My little brother has friends who seek his advice and counsel. My little sister is famous with her peers, co-workers, and the world. She is a fashionista, blogger, and rock star. My father's children have the Ministryfather'sence; things seem more fun, brighter, and better whenever we are around, and people love to hang around us.

We have lived up to our family mantra of not embarrassing the family. We have never been arrested and have no children outside of marriage. We have not been caught in sin. My father always told everyone what sin he had committed so that it was not hidden and could not be found out later. We have not been caught in a web of lies. Along the way, we have made some mistakes. We continue to grow and get better. We continue to be leaders. I am unsure if the Madkins family is from the Mande tribe, but our jamu identifies us and we are proud of our family name. We continue in the tradition of my father, being the best we can be. We even continue to tell the ones we love, "Don't embarrass the family."

Works Cited

Puchner, Martin. "Sunjata: A West African Epic of the Mande People." *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*. Martin Puchner, et al. 3rd ed. Vol. 1. New York: Norton, 2013. 1514-1517. Print.