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A Grandfather's Destinee

STORYTELLER: Les Hamilton

MIAMI CHAPEL

I'M GONNA GIVE YOU SOME HOMEWORK. WHEN YOU GET HOME, I WANT YOU TO GO ON YOUR COMPUTER AND PULL UP SWIM-TO-ROW. S-w-i-m, t-o, r-o-w. Just like it sounds. My granddaughter, Destinee, always laughs at me for being an old fart, but I learned how to do this technology thing all by myself. I spent hours working on the website and adding all the pictures and videos. I think you're going to be really impressed. Destinee founded the program. It's a program that will work to teach young girls from ages eleven to thirteen how to swim, and after their completion of level five swimming, they will be taught to row through the Greater Dayton Rowing Association, coached by Destinee. This program can also get some of the youth of our community to



want to come back and support the things that helped them grow.

Raising Destinee was how it all started. It was the best thing that could have happened to an old guy like me. I am so ... *proud*. Proud of everything that she has accomplished in her life, and I know that there is more in store.

I spent decades in the Air Force, so for years, everything I did came with instructions. Somebody else was always telling me what to do and how to do it. Now raising a kid don't come with a manual, but she was such a good girl that it really was a pleasure.

I am a native Daytonian, born and raised, but I never realized how few opportunities for young girls there are in my community until I saw it first hand while raising Destinee. **WE REALIZED THAT WE OFTEN DO TOO MUCH FOR THE BOYS AND NOT ENOUGH FOR THE GIRLS.**

But way back before all this started I had nothing on my mind but being a kid. It all started with my own father, who taught me how to swim and first brought me to the water.

When I was a boy, I loved swimming. My friends and I used to always go down to the river and play and swim in the water. Now some of the stuff we did was dangerous, I won't lie, but we didn't care. We spent hours down in that river, and it's a memory that I won't ever forget.

BUT NOW, KIDS DON'T GO DOWN TO THE RIVER TO

SWIM. HECK, KIDS THESE DAYS DON'T EVEN GO TO THE COMMUNITY POOL. THOSE THINGS ARE GETTING HARDER AND HARDER TO KEEP OPEN. That's one of the problems in this community too. Kids don't have anything to do after school, and they get into trouble. A lot of the smarter kids get out of town and never look back. They go somewhere else where they can prosper. They don't give anything back to the place they grew up in. That's what we are trying to fix.

I remember when Destinee was on the swim team, and when I would take her to practice, I noticed that there were always older kids that came back to visit or help out their old swim club. They loved participating so much in the sport that they wanted to share that same experience with the younger generation.

A program like this is so important to have in this community, trust me. It will make the kids put down the Flamin' Hot Cheetos and go get some exercise. Now I'm not an idiot, I know I'd get some looks if I showed up on the docks with twenty inner city girls. Rowing is a pretty prestigious sport, but we're trying to break that barrier. We have been blessed with having a wonderful natural resource right in our backyards. The Great Miami River was once called the Great Divide, but it can also be something that brings us all together. It can only reach its full potential if our community learns how to

safely participate in the programs that it has to offer. This program really is the answer, and I am positive that it can make a difference in our struggling community.

I am so proud of my granddaughter. She has worked hard her entire life, and now she's in college. Despite being so young, she is working so hard to make a difference already.

RAISING MY GRANDDAUGHTER MADE ME THE MAN I AM TODAY. If it weren't for Destinee, I'd probably just be sitting around, being an old man. But instead, she opened my eyes to the problems our young people face. I have become passionate about a cause, and I feel like if we want to see positive change, we have to do something about it. I have very high hopes for the future of Miami Chapel and the little girls that live here. I will continue to support swim to row with everything that I have, and I hope that others in the community will follow.