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# I Am Proud: Roma's Story

Roma Stephens

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# *I Am Proud: Roma's Story*

STORYTELLER: Roma Stephens

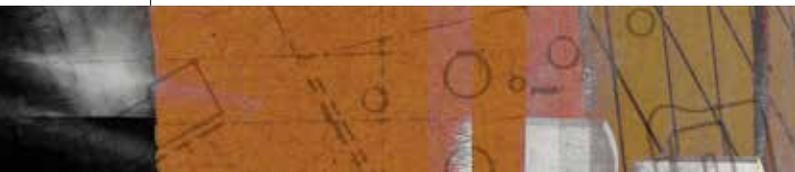
*I have been to hell and back.*  
I have seen the army tanks at the edge  
of my neighborhood in West Dayton.  
I have seen my friends be treated like animals.  
What I have witnessed has enhanced  
my blackness and womanhood to become  
an unyielding protector of my people.

**I AM PROUD.**

I have been removed from school  
for celebrating my blackness.  
After I took my walk of shame  
down Germantown Street, James Brown's voice  
rang in my head:

*"Say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud."*

**TROTWOOD**



It's not my fault the school couldn't handle an Afro.  
After MLK died the same school who kicked me out allowed us to write a book of comments sent to Coretta Scott King.

My comment was about how I pledged to go to Georgia and fight for my people's rights.

I went to high school feeling my race being expunged from my soul.

I learned that I sounded white, as an African princess, whenever I spoke.

I learned to be unapologetic for my semantics.

I also took a class on Black History and learned how my country, my home, was built on the backs of my people.

I was and still am a Black Panther sympathizer, silently fighting with and for my people.

**I AM PROUD.**

I experienced racism at work too.

I was more than qualified for the job.

They told me on the phone to come in for an interview.

When I walked in they said the job had already been filled.

*My blackness was shameful for them.*

**I PERSEVERED AND I AM PROUD.**

College wasn't any better for my blackness. The school was dominated by young white males, who were a far cry from my black self.

College didn't work out for me but I still treasure learning outside of the classroom.

**I AM STILL A LEARNER, AND I AM PROUD.**

The more I lived and worked with my people, the more I realized people were working against us.

I have witnessed authority pretend to support the youth of my people.

I have seen and felt what it is like to be an afterthought.

I sympathize with these youth because at heart I still am one.

I just want to give these children a shoulder to cry on and a hand to hold.

I want the world to see that my people's lives do matter.

**I NEVER HAVE NOR WILL I EVER GIVE UP, BECAUSE I AM PROUD.**

I was married.

*For a long time.*

He had his issues and I had mine too.

After the mental abuse was too much, I took my son and left.

*Our house was barely standing.*

I did not care.

For the first time in my life, I felt peace even though I couldn't afford to eat.

I left and I forgave him because of God's glory.

**I FORGAVE, I RETURNED, AND I AM PROUD.**

Some days are harder than others.

Some days it hurts to breathe; I am in so much pain.

My health is deteriorating.

I appreciate people helping me, but I just want to be independent.

I have seen the ends of the earth; I can handle my own pain.

*But it hurts so much.*

**I AM RESILIENT AND I AM PROUD.**

I try and try and no one listens to me.

I wish I could just scream "listen to me."

I want the young women of color to look at me and my story and learn.

I want everyone to look at me and the hell I have been through and learn from it.

I want people to learn that love is always the answer.

**I CAN STILL LOVE BECAUSE I AM PROUD.**

**I AM BLACK.**

**I AM A WOMAN.**

**I AM A MATRIARCH.**

**I AM A PROTECTOR.**

**I AM A DEFENDER.**

**I AM A LOVER.**

**I AM A CHILD OF GOD.**

**I AM PROUD.**