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June 24, 2005
Family Reunion

Oh How I Love My Black Family!

Good Evening

Introduction: For those who don't know me as well as others, my name is Keisha Brace, daughter of Vera S. Truesdale, grand daughter of Leo Samuel and the later Jerry Samuel. I'm a senior at the University of South Carolina, majoring in Elementary Education.

Oh How I Love My Black Family

I could have called the title of this paper by other names. I could have used the titles "Reconnecting," or "Reviving the Legacy," or "Finding the Rest of Me," –because that is what family reunions are all about. I chose "Oh How I Love My Black Family", because I want to talk about why family reunions are important. I felt like there must be something very important about a reunion that happens once a year. In doing some research to why I think a reunion is important is quite interesting. I hope you enjoy my speech.

What is the tradition that happens once a year? It is the love of family. A reunion. I think back to Africa, although it is a vast and diverse continent, one similarity at the center of the African tradition was the family, which was also the religious, economic, and political unit encompassing a wide circle of extended kinship. For Black people, slavery in this country disrupted this most essential structure, since slavery allowed for no legal marriage, no legal family, and no legal control over the children. Nevertheless, even during slavery, women took care of children not their own, and many slaves protected each other in spite of tribulations and language differences. And as soon as slavery ended, women and men went about trying to put the family back together. The stories of former slaves trying to locate their families is inspiring, to say the least. And many of these stories are told at reunions. **"Oh How I Love My Black Family."**

And so Black people became like other families. They reconnected, engaged in legal marriages, raised children like others and did all the things that were like the white families around them. **"Oh How I Love My Black Family"** The former slaves faced, of course, the worst kind of discrimination and racism when they were freed, but they managed to raise

families. They did a superb job, when one looks at all that they had to face and have since faced as African Americans. **“Oh How I Love My Black Family”**

That African Americans survived at all is glorious, but much of the survival is due to the fact that they helped each other, that they took care of each other, that they extended themselves not only to blood relatives but also to others. My grandmother Leo would be the perfect example. Raising others' within the family structure and community was not only a value carried over from the African legacy, but also a reaction to discrimination and the fact that many social and human services were not offered to the black community. **“Oh How I Love My Black Family”**

People who attend reunions have this to say about why they are important:

-You get to know your family. Many times you don't get to see family members and members of the family we didn't even know we had. It's such a joy and inspiration to me to meet my family members.

-Maybe it can help us learn who we are and how we can help ourselves better.

-From the very young to the very old, they come from far and wide. The reunion gives them a chance to get together and feed one another both physically and emotionally.

“Oh How I Love My Black Family”

But I come to share my insights on why Family Reunions are Important.

1. Values

-Social control and passing on social values have been a major function at a family reunion. The promotion of values, particularly to young people is a key aspect of reunions. Speakers at the banquet (which is by now another tradition of the reunion) will talk about what it means to be a family, what it meant to be a good parent. They discuss what it means to have cooperation in the family, the necessity of going to school to check up on the children, what it is to be thoughtful and supportive-what makes family. Unity, love, and support are key words used by participants and in themes. Values, though, are not only talked about. They can also be demonstrated.

When families recognize their graduates at the reunion, they are saying “we value education and achievement.” When families recognize the elders, and many do, they are showing respect. In the family, the elders played a special role in transmitting values. Now that families are scattered, the reunion offers a special opportunity for them to do so. Values are also

demonstrated by the way people talk to each other and by the love and concern that are shown.

“Oh How I Love My Black Family”

2. Identity:

An important aspect of reunions is that it gives the opportunity to strengthen identity. The importance of identity and how it leads to self-esteem cannot be overestimated. Every family seems to have a colorful background, and it is one that instills pride. My favorite story about identity came from a friend back at school, who wasn't the perfect child, until he went to his family reunion and after hearing about his ancestors and seeing the impressive achievements of members of his own family he decided he could no longer be involved in dangerous situations.

“Oh How I Love My Black Family”

3. Love, Concern, and Belonging

The love and caring that exists in the family is pervasive at the reunion. People greet each other with a great deal of joy. Some who are older talk about what it was like when they were young. Even closely knit families have “heartaches and headaches” and the chance to unburden, and at the same time reach out to someone else who may need help, offers the opportunity to be given to and to be the giver. Over and over, one hears that “you feel better just by being with your family.” Family members hope that the love and caring that is displayed between the family members will help to deter young ones from going into drugs, alcohol, and crime. **“Oh How I Love My Black Family”**

4. Communications:

Love, concern, and support are furthered by communication. As a result of meeting over the years, birthday cards or other messages to members of the family are being sent that might not have been prior to the reunion. And who knows how that love and support that has been extended to someone may help him or her. **“Oh How I Love My Black Family”**

5. Role Models:

The reunion offers an opportunity to display the talent in the family and to develop real and useful role models. My role model is my grandmother Leo, because of her grace and mercy, because of her passionate concern for others, and the number one reason is because she's a child of the man above. Instead of those far away sport figures, young people come upon persons in their own family who they can admire. **“Oh How I Love My Black Family”**

6. Giving Back:

And now families, through their reunions, are going even further. They are discussing giving to others. "Giving Back" is an old tradition among African Americans who frequently express their giving and serving through the idiom of kinship. Many of us give through church. **"Oh How I Love My Black Family"**

Closing:

So now you have the story as to why I think family reunions are important. But I haven't told you the most important reason why family reunions are important. If it wasn't for God, our lily of the valley, who's the head of our lives, this family reunion would not be possible. For he, is the one that kept our families together throughout the hardship of slavery. If it wasn't for the man above, there would not be any families taking care of other families, value, tradition, identity, love, concern, belonging, communication, role models, and giving back. But see I can sum it up for you, **Repeat after me... FOR HIS GRACE AND MERCY.** That's why we are very fortunate and are able to hold our heads up high, because he has brought us from a mighty long way. Because if you think about it..... what would this world be without Black people.

African American family reunions have become a part of the permanent fabric of this country's society. This has particular significance because individuals and families control the reunion as an institution. There is no dependence on government and little dependence on monies outside the family. Our family is willing; the goals are meaningful.

I will end by saying: "Such was the life of our earliest ancestor-a man who in a strange world and in even a strange time was able to make a place of respectability for himself and for his family"

Some say the African-American family is dying. I say it lives on! Black Family, Black Family...."Oh How I Love My Black Family"