



ABC's Robin Roberts recalls the relationship that shaped her life

By Kimberly C. Roberts
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Robin Roberts, the personable and professional co-anchor of the ABC newsmagazine "Good Morning America" (along with Diane Sawyer), was recently in Philadelphia to deliver the keynote address to the 2007 graduating class of Peirce College. Roberts also received an honorary doctor of humane letters degree from the institution, as well as a warm welcome from Dr. Arthur J. Lendo, president and CEO of Peirce.

"A nationally known and accomplished journalist, Robin Roberts personifies the values our students embrace," Lendo said. "We were honored she shared her motivational story with our graduates on a very special day in their lives."

Relaxing in the "green room" of the Kimmel Center following the ceremony, Roberts, who recently released an inspiring book titled "From the Heart: Seven Rules to Live By," explained why personally delivering the day's motivating message was so important to her.

"I can remember how it was for me," she said. "I just love college grads because they sit there, they're wide-eyed – half of the auditorium, they're set. They know what they want to do. The other half hasn't a clue what they want to do, and I know how important it was for me to be able to glean a little something from people. I've walked the walk already and done some things. I just want to try to help them navigate their way a little bit."

Her high-profile occupation has placed Roberts in the position of being considered a role model for aspiring young women in particular, and she readily welcomes that responsibility.

"I am flattered by it. I don't run from it," she said. "You're in the public's eye and you have to embrace that. I welcome it, and I thank those like Trudy (pioneering broadcast journalist Trudy Haynes), and others. My father, being a Tuskegee Airman – good grief! What an example he set! So I don't think it's something to shy away from or run away from."

Roberts' personal role model, the late Lawrence Roberts, was in the class of 1944 at Tuskegee and rose to the rank of colonel. He taught his daughter and her siblings to live their lives without limitations.

"My father taught me that anything is possible," Roberts said. "When I really stop to think in the 1930s he had the nerve to take a broomstick handle, go down to his basement in New Jersey, and dream about flying when Blacks in this country had very little, if any rights...and for him to not only dream it, but make it a reality and be a part of the Tuskegee Airmen. So he instilled in me that if I wanted to be a nuclear physicist on the weekend, and split the atom on Monday – he would never flinch with any of us. We would say, 'I want to do this. I want to do that' – It was always steeped in reality. Don't get me wrong. But he never looked at us and said, 'You can't do that!' or 'That's

impossible!' He was like, 'If that's what you want to do, you have my full support.'"

Ironically, as a child, Roberts had no idea of the significance of her father's historic accomplishments. "I'm ashamed to say that as a child, I had no clue," she said. "He was just my daddy, and I loved him. I had no idea! And the shame is, had I read about it in the history books, I might have gone, 'Hey Daddy! Didn't you...?' But there was nothing. He was never the type to beat his chest and say what (he'd) done. It's when I got older and people started talking about it, and when HBO did the movie with Laurence Fishburne, I started to understand more. But as a child, he never talked about it. As we got older he did, but he just wanted us to look at him as 'Dad.'"

Lawrence Roberts died in October 2004, and on March 29 of this year, President Bush awarded the surviving Tuskegee Airmen the Congressional Gold Medal.

"I'm so appreciative," Roberts said. "My mother and I were there at the Capitol when they received the Gold Medal. It was beautiful! It was beautiful to be in there and look to the heavens, and wish 'woulda, coulda, shoulda.' – If it had only been earlier. Only about 300 of the 1,000 Airmen are still living. You know, that's a shame that this happened in World War II, and they could not have been recognized (earlier), but look at the positive side. They were, and for my mom and I to be there, and to witness it, really made it come full circle."

With Father's Day approaching, Roberts, a superb 5' 10" college athlete who graduated cum laude from Southeastern Louisiana University with a B.A. in communications, reflected on the profound impact that a father can have on his daughter's life.

"It's that pure love," she said. "So many of us struggle with finding that person, especially for women, that male figure in her life that is there, that we can trust, that wants nothing from us, other than to just lift us up. Especially as Black women, we sometimes struggle in finding that, and I don't know that feeling, bless the Lord. There's something so soothing and just so comforting with that type of love."

Once referred to affectionately as "Robinski" by her beloved father, Roberts also shared what she misses most about him. "I miss his voice," she said. "I miss his presence physically in my life. I mean, I'm a very spiritual person and he still is guiding me, and he's there, but I miss his voice. I felt like no harm could come to me. He would always say like, 'Do I need to go up there?' and I'd say 'Daddy!' I don't know if I have ever felt completely safe since he's been gone."