

JACQUELINE “JACKEE” PRUITT

I'm from the [Wild, Wild West](#)

By the roots of the [South](#)

Texas bred and Cornbread fed

I'm from [the 60's](#)

I'm from Kennedy, [King](#), and Malcolm.

James Brown's "[Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud](#)"

I'm from Marvin Gaye's "[What's Goin on?](#)"

[Michael Jackson's ABC](#)

Diana Ross's [Wild Child Hair](#)

And Sam's Cooke's "[Twistin the Night Away.](#)"

I'm from Shirley Ann and John Edwards, Annie and Clarence

Church all day Sunday

Peach Cobbler and Collard Greens

[Downtown popcorn](#) if you are good

I'm from the Last of the Mohicans

And the first of the new generation

I'm from the same place I started from

And the last place I plan to be...

I was born February 6 in Chicago. To this day I live and have raised a family in the same house in the Austin Community of Chicago. My Godmother was born on the Stovall plantation in the city of Clarksdale, Mississippi. Clarksdale is a large acre with little water surrounding it, the perfect area for picking cotton. But my mom always said it was not her destiny to pick cotton. [She had a really cute boyfriend that she followed to Chicago, which was not lady like in any manner.](#) His name was McKinley Morganfield, but everyone knows his musical blues name of Muddy Waters. She was not interested in the traveling part of the musical life so she married

Clarence, a tall country man from Dallas, Texas, who was the baby of 15 kids and was called *The Last of the Mohicans* due to the fact that his mother was Cherokee.

We were the second Black family to move across Cicero Ave. The homes in the Austin community were beautiful, with lawns that went from the house to the curb without the interruption of gates; a stark contrast to my neighborhood today. It was the 60's. A wild and crazy time. During that time Malcolm X, Dr. King, and both Kennedy brothers were assassinated. I remember parts of my neighborhood going up in flames. Sundays were definitely spent in church and attending was not an option nor open for discussion. The only exception was leaving in the afternoon to journey into downtown Chicago where you had the opportunity to get a super transfer and go to Garrett's for a small bag of Cheese and Carmel. The one thing that was consistent in my community was music. My neighbor, Judy, who had these super large speakers on the outside of her house in the backyard, would play James Brown over and over. On hot summer days she was the one who played music that set the tempo of the neighborhood. She used every opportunity to let everyone know you should be proud to be Black. Music informed us the community was headed in a new direction and we need to be prepared to fix it before it gets worse, which was the 70's.

I have seen my neighborhood at its highs and now its lows. In my community the young men and women have given up on school with most of them not finishing eighth grade. I have talked with them often, about what or who made them leave school. They all state the same thing—the teacher. She did not look like them, think like them, or live in their neighborhood. I am proud to be a graduate of the Grow Your Own Teacher Program, and live next door to these awesome young people. They are parent to one or more children attending a neighborhood school. I understand firsthand what the teacher is going through when these youngsters appear in the classroom on any school day hungry, angry, and sleepy.

Although I am thankful I never had to go through those situations, my mother and father were the original activists because they worked in the K-Town area of the Westside where they owned a restaurant called Annie's grill. [K-Town](#) is a stretch of streets where all the letters start with K from Karlov to Kilpatrick. Even though these streets cover a large part of Chicago, when you say K-Town to others they know you live somewhere between Madison and 16th Street, in the communities from West Garfield to North Lawndale. They also knew that you did not take any mess from anyone. These original activists started a group called the Egyptian Cobras and the girls were called the Cobraetts, which was modeled after the Black Panthers.

As I got older and my parents thought the neighborhood was changing I was sent from my neighborhood to a school that was 97% White so I could get a ["quality"](#) education. My mom told me daily that while you are in class you will learn exactly what everyone else is learning. The teacher cannot put you out of class while she teaches the other students. So you need to get this to have a successful future, but never forget where you are from. I remembered this while reading an article on [W.E.B. Dubois](#), where he indicated a Negro Woman has, but three careers open to her: domestic service, sewing, or being married. My mom always let the young women know there was more to life than cooking and cleaning. If you get an education in your head no one can take that from you. There were a few days that she went to the school to intervene on my behalf. Now I can say intervene but it was really to flex her power as a Black woman by letting various teachers know that her daughter is here to get an education and it is in their interest to make sure I get this education and her interest is to make sure I am here.

Growing up on the Westside of Chicago, I was the kid that had the [Crissy doll](#) and teddy bears lined up on the steps while I gave out classroom assignments. If you were the lucky kid who had a chance to visit, you knew we were always going to play school, whether you wanted to or not. I always wanted a blackboard and books for any celebration. At the age of 13, I had

my second taste of the teaching bug, at Horatio May Elementary School in a summer school program. I had a class of 15 third graders who had to pass a summer reading exam to get to fourth grade. All the teachers reminded me that they probably would not pass so I should just follow the instructions in the workbooks and keep them in the classroom. I knew all of these students because they lived in my neighborhood and I was in class with their sisters and brothers. This is when I discovered my joy of reading. I would work with them to finish up the SRA kits we were assigned and afterwards I would let them “play” with the *Ebony Jr.* and *Right On* magazines that I always kept in my purse. We would also listen to a little *Sly and the Family Stones* for [background music](#). I am proud to say that my students in that summer school program passed and made it to fourth grade that school year.

My heart for the community continued to grow and I ended up working as a Case Manager with pregnant and parenting young people in various community schools for close to 25 years. Some of these teen parents resided in my Austin/Garfield and North Lawndale community. Some were first time parents and others were parents more than three or four times. During the time I worked with them they were not allowed, according to the rules of their public school at that time, to remain a student until after delivery and after that time they could return. They were sent to alternative schools that were located on the South, North, and Westside of the city. This was a challenge to those young people because they lost contact with the school resources and some teachers did not want to do home visits to provide missed work.

While counseling these young people I worked with them on their parenting skills and school assignments. We completed math assignments using everyday items that were available such as baby formula, diapers, and sleeping patterns. We also worked on reading by using their children’s books. Getting my young people back on track during their homebound time was great for both of us. They were able to transition back into their homeschool and complete a successful

school year. Helping them get that part of their lives in order changed my standing with them from problem person to helpful teacher. I had the opportunity to work with some of them until their babies started Pre-K. During this time I still had the chance to watch and interact with the school system on their behalf.

After I finished working with teen parents, I transitioned to working as a Family and Community Development Specialist where I worked closely with 35 families who were in need of educational, social, health, and family stabilizing. Some of the families were referred to me from schools systems within Cook County. Working with these families I understood some of what they were facing, from community resources that were almost nonexistent, to having disconnected utilities, unable to pay rent or mortgage, and some of them falling into substance abuse. During that time I was promoted to Director of Supportive Services where I supervised a staff of 14 people while overseeing the day-to-day activities of 10 programs.

When the opportunity to become a candidate within the Grow Your Own Teacher program presented itself I could not hesitate to say, “Yes, sign me up!” It was the destiny to my calling of being a teacher. How could I not give back to the generations of students and families that had come across my path? How could I not look forward to the generation of students I was destined to teach? As I participated within the Grow Your Own Teacher program I had the support of some awesome coordinators, fellow classmates, and teachers. Coordinators who gave me support when I worked over 50 hours a week and attended school full time. They made sure when I thought I was in over my head to encourage me to believe I could still make it through. They made me laugh when the only thing I was trying to do was finish Math 122 without breaking down in tears. Classmates who shared in my joy each time we made it through a semester after writing a 25-page paper and a ten-day lesson unit that we never thought we would

finish. I had teachers who gave me list of books that only a student in the teaching field could read and relate to.

Teachers from the community our children live know the hardship of life they face on a daily basis. I believe it is my duty as an educator to provide assistance, guidance, and respect to each student in the community I am blessed to meet. I see my students as knowledgeable beings who can provide me assistance, guidance and leadership because students come with knowledge and understanding of their own culture and community. Children are able to comprehend when adults do not care for them and some students bring that baggage to school. In her book chapter, "Lessons Learned on the Bus," Sandra B. Loughran describes how she was honored to drive the school bus as well as teach in a classroom. She was amazed by the conversations of students on the bus ride home. She was also surprised by the limited interactions of the parents who picked up the students at the drop off points. The limited conversations and angry faces from these parents were also reflected daily in the classroom and throughout the school building. Having served a great deal of those angry faces I understand the reason for limited conversation. As a GYO teacher I want to make a difference on those faces in our community. I believe my journey in the classroom will not be the end of my journey to serve the community, but rather the beginning chapter of a long saga of a teacher's love for teaching and learning on behalf of her students.