# New Outlook on an Old Relationship

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**By Margarette Purvis**

**"Resting. We are Resting Now.**
**Eyes Closed. Feet Together.**
**Our Hands are STILL.**
**Resting. We are Resting Now."**

These were the words said everyday at naptime by one of my kindergarten teachers, Miss Williams. There I lay during that hour on my red and blue mat. It was my favorite time of the day. Not because I EVER went to sleep…I didn't. It was my favorite because of Miss William's little speech said to us over and over again. She would often walk over to me and rub my back as if to say, It's time to rest, Maggie. But even that thrilled me too much to be able to sleep. You see, to me Miss Williams was the first brown fairy princess…way before Tiana in "The Princess and the Frog." In my 6-year-old mind, Miss Williams was Cinderella and teaching in Jackson, Mississippi was merely her day job. She was as pretty as the women in my family, but still different. Her voice was light. She was incredibly sweet, almost like a little girl herself. Being from a family of alpha females, I'll admit that I was mildly obsessed with this figure and style that I'd never known, yet deeply adored.

Since learning of the horrific events in Newtown, Connecticut I have thought of Miss Williams and my other kindergarten teacher, Miss Wall, constantly. They were the first two women that I recall spending great time with who didn't share my last name. I remember the safety and comfort my classmates and I felt whenever we saw their faces. I also remember that on my first day Miss Wall complimented the braids my aunt had double twisted for me. I was so proud of those braids. All these years later, to still remember the moment a person noticed the detail that made up a 6-year-old's world is proof positive of how special teachers are.

Our country is reeling at the great devastation that has rocked Newtown, Connecticut. Across the country people are grappling with the discovery of teachers being on the front lines and what that means. Should they be outfitted with guns? Bulletproof vests? Is the answer bulletproof backpacks? So many questions for a problem that baffles the core of all of us. I won't pretend to know the answer, but I know what the reality involves.

Teachers have always been on the front lines. They are the primary witnesses to crimes against children every day. They see the reality of poverty and hurt in the form of hunger, no coats during winter, and a lack of book bags, school supplies and so many other items that most of us take for granted. The teachers who unfortunately lost their lives in the tragic events in Newtown are heroes. They're being called heroes because they ran toward harm, attempting to shield children from the wretched ugliness that entered their world. Where I will disagree with the majority is when their heroism began. I believe that well before last Friday they, like teachers doing a yeoman's job in Bedford Stuyvesant and the South Bronx, were already heroes. Teachers in the poorest communities of our city commit their lives to shielding and protecting children from the ugliness that too often makes up their worlds.  The strength of the Food Bank's CookShop program, which serves 40,000 children, relies completely on the resilience and commitment of teachers. It's their creativity that enables them to find ways to incorporate nutrition education into their curricula, ensuring that our city's neediest children get more of what they need.

We certainly wouldn't have our 11 campus pantries in schools today without the commitment and dedication of teachers and school administrators.

My heart and mind have been fixated on the sense of peace and safety that's been robbed from children, parents and teachers in classrooms across our country. I wonder if teachers know how much they mean to all of us and how much we owe them for the work they've put towards our past and future.  If I could find Miss Williams or Miss Wall I would first thank them and then assure them with the following:

**"Acting. We are ACTING now.**
**Eyes OPEN. Feet Positioned.**
**Our hands are READY.**
**ACTING. We are ACTING now."**

*Margarette Purvis is the President and CEO of Food Bank For New York City. Follow her on Twitter at* ***@Fo***
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