The Power of Family

DEAN BRIDGET TERRY LONG TALKS ANCESTORS, OPPORTUNITY, AND CONCRETE PAYCHECKS

STORY BY LORY HOUGH

“I was definitely a ‘why’ child,” says Dean Bridget Terry Long. “I asked a lot of questions, especially about my family and our history.”

It’s how she learned about family land in rural Virginia where she spent summers as a kid and connections to the tobacco fields. It’s how she discovered that her great-grandmother on her mother’s side was born into slavery, emancipated at 6, and able to amass property after becoming a midwife. Asking questions was how Long learned that her grandparents on her father’s side had the same last name, Terry, because they both worked as sharecroppers on the same plantation, the Terry Plantation. It’s how she learned that her father, the eldest son, got pulled into the fields to work but yearned to leave.

“He should have been valedictorian of his high school class,” she says of her father, “but he missed so much school because of farming. He basically escaped to the Air Force. He didn’t want to be a farmer.”

What her father wanted was opportunity — for himself and eventually for his two daughters. He got married and moved from the segregated South to Baltimore and later to the Midwest. He got a job at Xerox and worked his way up to a management position while also going to college, two kids in tow. It was looking back at pictures of his graduation when he was 30 and seeing herself in the photos, plus knowing that her mom worked her way through college to become a high school teacher, that made Long realize that there wasn’t just one way to be a student. “I grew
“It’s definitely the case that my family has affected my work,” she says. “All researchers study themselves.”

**WISE WORDS**

_It’s going to take a while before it fully penetrates into high schools._

Senior Research Fellow **BOB SCHWARTZ, C.A.S.’68**, on rethinking the gold standard four-year degree in favor of two years of college plus work credentials. *(Education Week)*

Very little has been written about how love impacts teaching and learning, which is why **JOHN MILLER, M.A.T.’67**, recently published *Love and Compassion: Exploring Their Role in Education*. Love, he writes in his new book, is a powerful, motivating force for many teachers and students. And by love Miller doesn’t mean only romantic love, but self-love, love of beauty, compassion, and a love for learning. Miller, a professor at the University of Toronto, recently talked to *Ed.* about compassion, seeing students as individuals, and why, at the age of 74, he still loves teaching.

**Why don’t educators talk more about love or beauty?**

We live in a materialistic society that prizes consumerism and individual achievement. Education reflects this with its focus on accountability and measurement. Love and beauty cannot be evaluated in the traditional manner, so educators shy away from them. The work of Gandhi and King has had a strong influence on my writing as they saw love as the basis for living and social change. When you look at their lives, they had tremendous impact on the world, which for me is evidence of the power of love. They also wrote about how love and compassion require real strength and courage.

**Do teachers need to love teaching to be effective?**

To be effective in the deepest sense, yes. One can teach basic skills without love, but to truly make a difference in a student’s life, there needs to be love. Love sees teaching as an art where we explore different ways of connecting to subject matter and to students. Love brings patience and understanding, which are so important in teaching.

**Do they need to love kids?**

Here I would use the word “compassion.” Compassion allows us to see our students as individuals who are struggling and sometimes suffering. Compassion allows us to see ourselves in the student, even the student whom we find is hard to relate to. Nel Noddings [Stanford emeritus professor] has written about the importance of care, and if our...