

BEGINNING ON THE RED ROAD

By Yvonne Walker-Keshick

Editor's note: Yvonne Walker-Keshick is an Archival Tech in the Gijigowi Bipskaabiimi Department and started On the Red Road back in 1978.

It's Monday morning. I woke up to the pounding on the front door. I tried to ignore it and go back to sleep. The knocking was persistent. Frights!!

I might as well peek to see who it is. I step out of my room and look.

Dang! It's my boss. I turn to crawl back into bed, but now he's yelling, "Come on, I know you're in there, get up! You have to come to work. I've come to give you a ride."

Silence. I pretended I wasn't home.

"Open the door or I'm going to kick it in."

Crap! I might as well open the door. As soon as I do, he comes barging in saying, "Come on, what are you doing? You have to work!! I'm depending on you! Where are your clothes?"

He's digging in my closet, grabs a skirt and blouse. "Here put these on. Where are your shoes? We're going to be late."

I'm just standing there groggy thinking, "What the heck?"

He looks around and spies the bathroom, goes in and grabs a toothbrush and puts toothpaste on it.

"Come on, brush your teeth, we don't have time to waste." He pushes me into the bathroom and says "Get dressed. You don't have time for a shower or to eat. I'll wait out here."

I go into the bathroom thinking, "Who does he think he is bossing me around like that? I don't have to go to work if I don't want to. He can even fire me if he wants. I just want to go back to sleep."

"Come on, I'm waiting."

Now, I'm getting mad, but I wash up and brush my teeth and hope the stink from drinking and smoking the night before is not so noticeable. This guy is not going to leave me alone unless I go to work. I might as well go. I enjoy a self-pitying sigh.

OK, I guess I'm going to work.

I come out of the bathroom, and he's standing around looking about my apartment. He gives me the "once over." "Good," he says. "Where's your purse? Ready to go?"

"No," I said, "but I will."

We walk to his car not talking. If I had walked to work as usual, I would have had to walk three miles, about an hour and fifteen minutes, as the crow flies across country.

On the way to work, he says, "I hate to sound like your big brother, but ... (Oh boy, here it comes) you're going to have to stop drinking on Sunday nights. If you don't, I'm going to be here every Monday morning just like this. I could tell you definitely weren't happy with me barging in, but I don't like being like this either. You're a good worker, and I don't want to see you fall into the drinking trap so many of us Indians get into. I care about you and want you to succeed in your life, but you have to cut down or stop drinking on Sundays."



What we just went through is what I had to do with my other family members, unfortunately, they are absolute alcoholics. I don't want this for you.

You're young, smart and can learn what is good for you. So, make up your mind you do not want me to come here pounding on your door and making you come to work. Any other boss wouldn't have given a 'rats ass' about firing you for a 'no show,' but I happen to care about all of you who are my employees."

I nodded.

"Promise me you'll stop drinking on Sundays at least. This is the third time I had to come and get you."

Er, ah, well, okay. (Alcoholics will promise anything to get someone off their back.) I promise.

So, I went to work and did actually stop drinking. It was embarrassing to have a person be so persistent about getting me to work sober. I knew jobs were hard to come by, and I needed

this one.

It felt good to know he felt I was a valuable person he could count on to work in his establishment.

I learned to trust this man and did what I thought was best and wanted to show my boss I could be trusted, respected and worth the time and honor he bestowed upon me.

Throughout the years since I have known this man, he has stepped into my life affairs when he believed I was headed off onto the wrong direction. He always started off with, "I hate to sound like your big brother but ..." and then, I would hear his spiel and opinion.

One time after years of working with him and the other employees, I asked him to consider a person I thought he should hire who had social, emotional and substance abuse problems, but he was a tremendous artist.

What do you think I am a rehabilitation center?

(In my mind, I thought yes!! You rehabbed me. You made me realize I was a worthwhile person. You hired me and helped me change my life for the better. You helped me stay sober. You helped me realize my self-worth.)

He taught me to have the good things in life, you had to give up the bad.

To be respected, you had to be respectful.

To be trusted, you had to be trustful.

You can't love someone unless you respect them totally first.

He always told me the truth, and I learned to be truthful.

I saw him take risks, and "fear of failure" was the biggest hurdle one had to overcome.

I owe much to this man who became my role model, mentor and friend.

True, he had his faults as all people do, but I learned to accept the good of what he had to offer and to ignore the not so good.

I am thankful for the changes I made in my life because of his guidance.

I am happy to be a sober person.

Now, when I see something going haywire in another person, I do not hesitate to say to them.

"Hey, I hate to sound like your mother, but"

Photo by Communications Coordinator Annette VanDeCar.