

Of all the people in my life, the one person who has inspired me the most is...

Vietnamese Monk Thich Nhat once said, "If you look deeply into the palm of your hand, you will see your parents and all generations of your ancestors...you are the continuation of these people." It's almost cliché, but completely admissible—the person who has inspired me the most is none other than my father, James L. Walker. Why does this man deserve my praise as "most inspirational figure?" It's not because we share half of the family's gene pool, nor is it because he gave me my devilish good looks. Ever since my birth, my father has been a role model and the prototype by which I have modeled my character and lifestyle.

When I think of my father, I think of a born leader and innovator. I'll never forget the stories my grandmother tells me about my father as a child. Born to a middle-class black family in the 1950s, my father lived on a farm in rural Virginia. At the age of 12, he and his cousin started a small grocery store near their farm, knowing the real store was too far of a walk to make often. He and his cousin ran the store for nearly a year before he allowed his cousin to buy his half of the store from him. After joining the Air Force, my father, who retired a decorated Master Sergeant, was the chair of a well-known modeling club in Germany. He is now a minister at the church we attend, and also serves as head of the multi-media ministry.

No one knows adversity better than my father. While my mother was in the hospital with a tumor in her skull, my father took the family's burden on his shoulders, running the household, taking care of me, despite continuing to work and visit my mother daily. He is also a two-time cancer survivor, overcoming bouts with both Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma and prostate cancer. He spent nearly a year in the hospital, yet his attitude remained positive, even when my mother and I struggled to do so. He is a man of God, and believes wholeheartedly that all of his strength comes from the Big Man upstairs.

I have met many people in my relatively short lifetime, and I've had the opportunity to meet some amazing people, from Dr. Ben Carson to Bishop T.D. Jakes. But personally, no man has lived a more exemplary life than my father. He is by no means perfect, but his wit, integrity and will to succeed have placed him where he is today. As my mother, pastor, or anyone who knows him can attest, he is dependable, hard-working and passionate. Much like myself, he may even have to shake off a couple women every now and then. James Leon Walker is my idol, father and friend. As I grow older, I continue to pattern myself to the mold he has provided, knowing if I am just a portion like my father, I have great things in store for me.