

A Balancing Act  
*By Sheila Johnson*

Growing up in a household headed by two parents who had individually and collectively survived: fighting WWII in a segregated army, giving birth to three still born babies, the Great Depression, witnessing and experiencing bigotry and racism on many levels, and falling victim to a myriad of other social injustices, my two siblings and I had no other choice but to live by the rules set down by two Goliaths of adversity. We were expected to honor diversity of other cultures, to forgive, to love God first, to hate wrongdoing, to keep our virginity (even the boys), to honor our elders, and of course to be divinely perfect. And like the characters in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, we were shy by a wide margin of meeting our parents' expectations throughout our lives. Although we could recite their hopes for us at the drop of a dime, the voice of that little devil that sat on our shoulders whispered far more attractive alternatives for maneuvering our way through life.

Our family expected my oldest brother to be the first family member to finish college. Instead, he joined the Navy right out of high school, and while serving his tour in the Philippines, his fiancé lost her battle with cancer and he later committed suicide. No one expected his journey to end that way.

My parents hoped that I would become the world's greatest teacher in the world. I snubbed that idea, and went on a hot pursuit of becoming a medical doctor. We could not afford medical school, and my expectations of becoming a healer of the flesh vanished; yet God called me to be a teacher of the Gospel—truly beyond any expectations held by anyone for my life—including me.

And we all had high expectations of my younger brother becoming an engineer to match his accelerated IQ. He finished high school with a GED, joined the army and later became a truck driver—a very decent career, but he threw our expectations to the wind.

It has been found that students, especially at young ages, do far better in academics when their parents or members of their village hold high expectations of them. Raising the bar oftentimes increases self-esteem in others. On the other hand, expectations from other people sometimes have a sly way of defeating our natural, innermost desires of accomplishment. Our American culture gives greater value to behaving as others think we should than to following our God-given blueprint for our lives.

It is my hope and great expectation that as humanity matures from infancy into adulthood, it will discover a balanced solution of how to define, respect, and accept expectations for mankind—whether personal or from others.