

Profile of Leatha B. Hayes, D.O.
to be titled by the Triad editor

It may seem out of the ordinary, in an article outlining the education of a physician, to emphasize the primary school years. Then again, the education of Leatha B. Hayes, D.O., is far from ordinary. It is a triumph of human spirit.

Hayes was just 13 years old when her mother died, leaving behind nine children. Yet even before the added responsibility of caring for her younger siblings, Hayes was accustomed to hard work on behalf of her family. Her father was a sharecropper on a plantation called Plenty Hell, in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, and his children were expected to work.

Work, by necessity, came first and Hayes was one of a legion of "rainy day" children -- students who attended school only on days the weather prohibited the picking of endless fields of cotton. When her father's fields were clean, the children hired out to neighboring fields.

Hayes had a passion for learning that caused her to sometimes defy her father. Ordered to stay home and pick, she plotted a way to sneak off to school for an important test. She smuggled books home from school. Her father threatened to burn her books if he caught her reading again before the end of cotton picking season.

Saturdays, the Hayes children were given the choice to work as

hired laborers. In her autobiography, *Blossom Bit by Bit*, she wrote:

Daddy never requested any portion of the money we earned on Saturdays. I needed the money for personal items, but I had to study to pass biology. I decided to do both. I could earn three dollars per hundred pounds of cotton picked, and if I worked hard, I could easily pick two hundred pounds on a Saturday.

The first Saturday after Daddy fussed at me I put my biology book ... in a plastic bag [and] put the bag in my cotton sack. At the field, I got between two rows of cotton bushes, where I removed the plastic bag and tossed it about six feet ahead of me because I needed both hands to pick

cotton. I picked until I reached the bag, then I kicked it about six feet further down the row. [After about an hour of picking] I took my book from the bag, sat on my sack, and studied for an hour. After I studied, I started the sequence again of picking, kicking and studying.

Hayes did not view her actions as defying her father. Rather, she was fulfilling a promise to her mother, who saw in her oldest daughter an ability that would take her beyond the cotton fields and the Jim Crow laws of the deep South. And so, despite attending school only about five months of each year, Leatha B. Hayes became

Blossoming

Blossom Bit by Bit is the autobiography of Leatha B. Hayes, D.O., who decided to publish the book when she realized her story inspired others to reach for their dreams.

At an extremely low point in her teaching career, her entire class at a community college signed a petition to have her removed from the classroom, believing she talked down to them and expected them to do work that was beyond them. During an emotional hearing before administrators who had already decided to fire her, Hayes successfully demonstrated that she was teaching her students to work up to their abilities -- offering herself as proof.

"Ignorance inspires me; stupidity offends me," Hayes has been quoted as saying. She explains that she sees stupidity as a refusal to learn, while ignorance is simply not having yet learned.

Her book is a testament to the adversity she overcame, and which she inspires others to overcome.

Blossom Bit by Bit, by Dr. Leatha B. Hayes
311 pages
Copyright 1998 by Autarkee Press
P.O. Box 496, Flushing MI 48433

er-
ake
to
er
of

has
nÕt
she
w
ee
o