GROWING UP FLINT-STYLE
DINNER!!!

Mmmmm! Mac and cheese!

Ahhhh, I’m not very hungry. We have to do this big project for history class, and I have no idea what I’m going to do my report on. I’m kinda sick to my stomach.
Awww. C’mon, Marcus, you’ll be fine with the project.

All my grandkids are hard working and smart. Don’t be defeated before you even try.

Maybe you could stop texting and help me?! All right! Calm down.

I had Mr. Xavier, too, Marcus. And I had to do the very same project. We learned all about the history of Flint. Mom and Gram helped me with the family history part.
History just seems soooo big. I’m not even sure I know our family history.

I’m sure they will be happy to help you, too. So stop freaking out, and just ask them.

Mmmm. Better start with Gram, Marcus.

OK, Gram. Where do we start?

Oh my yes! Ha! I can talk all night! Better get comfortable everyone.

Oh I remember it like it was just yesterday. The 1950s, the struggle for civil rights was in full swing.
Your grandfather and I would go together and attend protests led by Dr. King, standing up peacefully for our civil rights.
We remained strong in our faith and sang “We Shall Overcome” in our churches and on the streets.

Some authorities were kind and supportive while some were not. Many protesters were beaten and thrown in jail. Still, we continued practicing nonviolent civil disobedience.
Gram, wait a minute. You and Grandpa just stood there? You didn't do anything?

Young man, may I remind you that your grandpa and Dr. King marched together, and we all stood up for our civil rights.

Nonviolent civil disobedience protesting was part of Dr. King's Christian beliefs. We were NOT doing nothing. We were standing up for our rights as human beings.

Nonviolent. Sheesh, give me a break.

Marcus! Show some respect! Grandpa was beaten and thrown in jail and Dr. King was assassinated. Their "nonviolent" civil disobedience won you the right to go to your school.

I'm sorry Grandma. It just seems like we are always struggling for rights.

I remember back in the 1980s when your Daddy and I would go out dancing.
We would go out dancing until the next morning. The walls of the clubs would vibrate with the music, and we all had our favorite Hip hop DJs who would be masters of the turntables scratching away to the beat.

Oh my yes! The clothes we wore back then. We thought we were just all that.
On our way home from the clubs we would be stopped by police in the streets. We weren’t causing any trouble but just stopped for being Black and out late at night.
Your Daddy and I and all our friends in the neighborhood were so afraid we might get shot.

They call it Racial Profiling, and it began in 1693, ironically, in the city of brotherly love, Philadelphia. The city had a law that let police stop any “Negro” they wanted to question. It didn’t matter if they were a free Negro or a Slave, they could just be stopped, questioned and thrown in jail.
Your mother and father were so happy in the beginning. Then along came your sister and then you. Your parents were so proud.

But then your dad lost his job as more and more businesses left Flint, and it was hard to find work. Your mom and dad started to argue more and more about money and putting food on the table. One day your dad left to go look for work, and he never came back.

Your mom went back to school and worked two part-time jobs to make ends meet. But she got her teacher's certificate and a good job teaching history at the high school.
It's OK Grandma. We miss Daddy, too.

Sooooo, what then? What's the point?

Young man! The point is you have a very proud family heritage of standing up for your rights, helping to build community and working hard to be successful.

And my grandkids are strong and smart enough to be anything they want in life.

Marcus, listen. Because of the work Gram and Grandpa did as well as mom and dad, you and I have the right to go to public school and college. You LOVE photography and writing stories and talking with people. You can do that and tell our family's story and other families in Flint and around the world. You can be a journalist or documentary filmmaker, or anything else you want to be.

Those are really, really cool jobs. And important jobs because we are still dealing with racial issues even today.
Marcus, you have history going on in this country. Once again, the Black Lives Matter movement is in the right place. Your family’s tradition of fighting for justice is important. Explain why it’s so important today.

Racial Profiling, incarceration, the importance of nonviolent protest, and Dr. King’s message. All of these things impact our lives. Help your classmates and public understand why it’s important to fight these things out on these issues.
right now here in front
protesting and the Black
news. You could talk about
for civil rights and

violent protesting and
s, and you can write
's important to speak
But it seems like such a huge story to tell. I'm not even sure where to start the report. Where do I start the story Gram?

Our family was brought as slaves from Africa to America. Start with that, Marcus.

Mom mentioned once that our ancestors escaped to the Northern states through the Underground Railroad. Should I put that in the report, too?

Oh my goodness, yes! My daddy, your great grandfather, taught his children the songs of the Railroad. Our family was helped by Ms. Harriet Tubman.

Wade in the water, wade in the water children, wade in the water, God's gonna trouble the water.

And of course there's...

When the sun comes back, And the first quail calls, Follow the drinking gourd, For the old man is a-waiting for to carry you to freedom If you follow the drinking gourd.
Of course those all had secret meanings to get them through the journey and not get caught.

Wait, I thought all those songs you sang around the house were just old-time songs. What do you mean? They were codes?!

“Wade in the water.” That was Ms. Tubman’s way of telling the slaves to get in the river so the search dogs wouldn’t pick up their scent. And “Follow the Drinking Groud” was code for the Big Dipper. They could follow that toward the North and get across the Mason-Dixon line to freedom.

Grandson, remember what President Obama said about the new African American Museum and the story inside: “It reaffirms that all of us are American, that African-American history is not somehow separate from our larger American story. It's not the underside of the American story. It is central to the American story.” And your family Marcus, right here in Flint, and before your Grandpa and I moved here are all part of that very proud story. That’s why we continue to stand up for our rights as American citizens. That's your legacy, Marcus. Own it grandson!
OMG that's soooo much to report about! What am I going to do? C'mon Rachel you need to help me!

Relax, Marcus. I have the perfect idea for you to finish the project, AND I think you're going to like it.

Mr. Xavier said you could use ANY form of media right? So why not tell your family story with what you love to do? Take pictures, Marcus, and then combine that with video made with your smartphone of interviews with mom and grandma and maybe different people in our neighborhood who knew our family growing up in Flint and the impact our family has made on the community?

You can do this, Marcus, and make it really, really cool!

YEA! Marcus Washington. Documentary filmmaker on the move. That's me! You guys get ready to stay up all night like Gram said. I want to hear ALL your stories about growing up in Flint!

I'm going to run upstairs and charge my camera and phone! This is going to be the best project Mr. Xavier has ever seen!
CREDITS

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