

June 2015

Ferguson Roots, Columbia Radiance



Tiana with the Crosby family

Tiana Gray grew up around the corner from the Quik Trip, which became a focal point for the nation after the Michael Brown shooting. She frequented shops now destroyed in the protest aftermath. Although Tiana was 125 miles away attending college in Columbia when things erupted in Ferguson, her two brothers and other family members kept her connection strong.

Tiana graduated from River Garden High School in Ferguson-Florissant in 2012 and became the first member of her extended family to attend college. Her

initial plan to become a journalist has morphed into zeal to teach high school English and help students express themselves through writing. Tiana, a poet and writer herself, has found solace, self-discovery, and faith through written expression and longs to open this door to others.

The road has not been easy. Tiana lost her father to cancer in 2009 and her mother to the same disease in 2013. At that time, at age 19, she found herself essentially alone to find her way through grief and the pressures of life. During the spring of 2014, a campus ministry friend brought her to Love INC. Through her connections at Love INC, Tiana found a better job, changed colleges to save money, and received a donated car. She was also introduced to the Crosbys, a local family, who invited her to live with them. “Dee and Dee Dee Crosby have become parents to me.” Tiana and the Crosbys have recently decided to extend her stay for a second year.

Tiana completed Love INC’s *Extra Mile* program and says it gave her the structure she needed to learn how to manage money and make sound decisions. “I learned the difference between needs and wants, and how to say ‘no’ to things.” Tiana has maintained ongoing contact with her coach, Bernie Hereth. “Bernie helps me stay on track and make tough decisions.”

How was Love INC able to invest so much in Tiana? Tiana embraced the Love INC principle for moving forward: *Learn new things, Try new things, Meet new people*. It has been exciting to watch her grow and become more independent. She has been promoted at her job and mentors others through her campus ministry.

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Tiana loves to talk about Love INC, but will find a way in every conversation to tell you about her greatest source of strength and support – her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. “My brothers want me to be angry over the loss we have experienced in our family and community, but I can’t live in anger. Jesus has given me too much joy and purpose.” And, with tears in her eyes, she will flash you the biggest smile you have ever seen. Radiance is the only word for it.



Bernie Hereth and Tiana Gray