

The Acorn Story

A Daughter of Head Start



El Brown
Age: 5

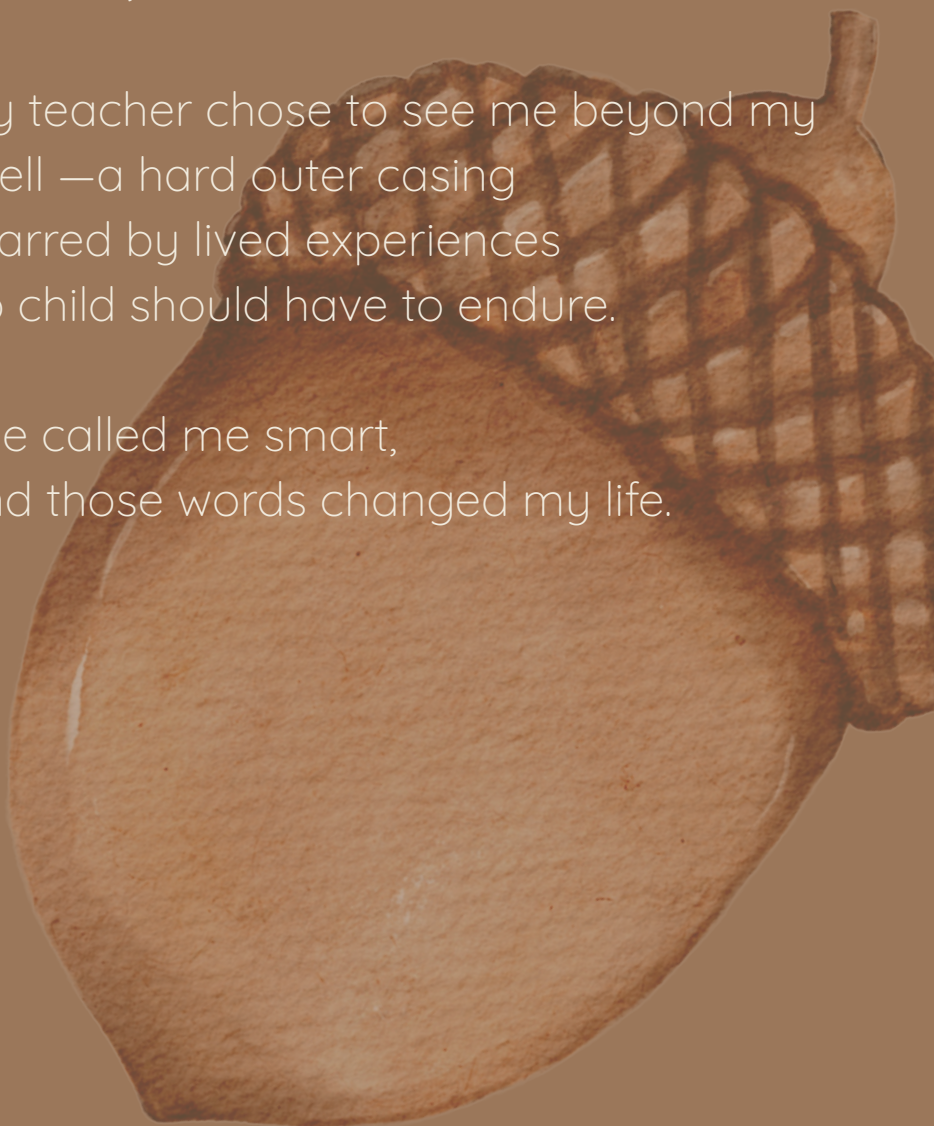
By: El Brown, Ph.D

The Acorn

My name is El Brown,
and I once was a little acorn
who rolled into Head Start classroom
in Ocala, Florida.

My teacher chose to see me beyond my
shell —a hard outer casing
scarred by lived experiences
no child should have to endure.

She called me smart,
and those words changed my life.



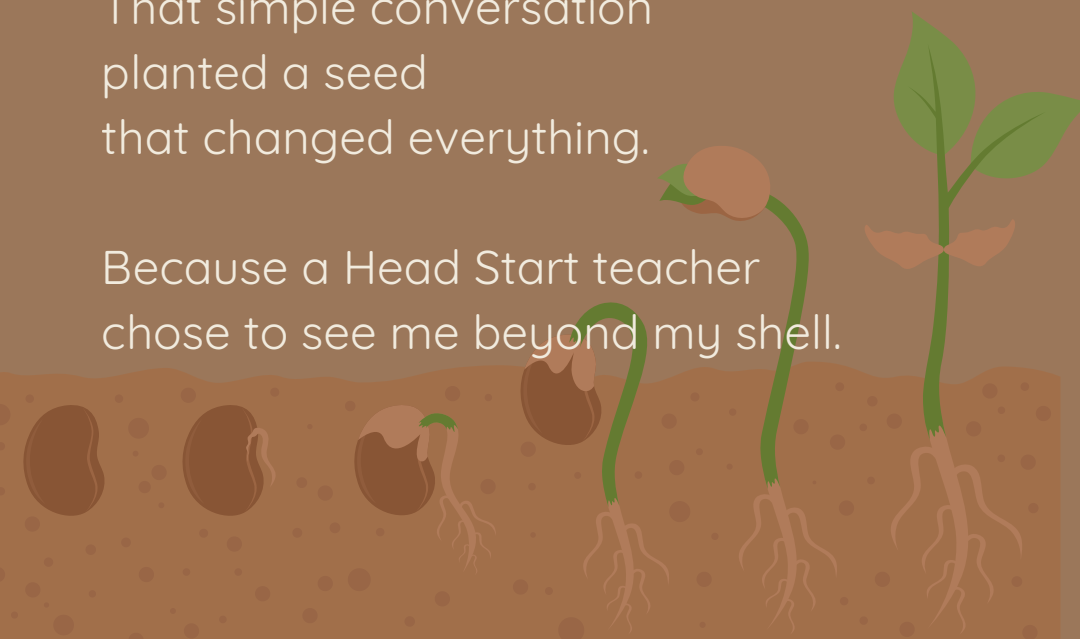
The Seedling

One caring teacher
looked past my chipped front tooth,
my unkempt hair, and my wrinkled shirt
to see the potential in the seed that
lived inside.

She told my mother,
“Your daughter is smart.
When she starts school,
make sure she is tested.”

That simple conversation
planted a seed
that changed everything.

Because a Head Start teacher
chose to see me beyond my shell.

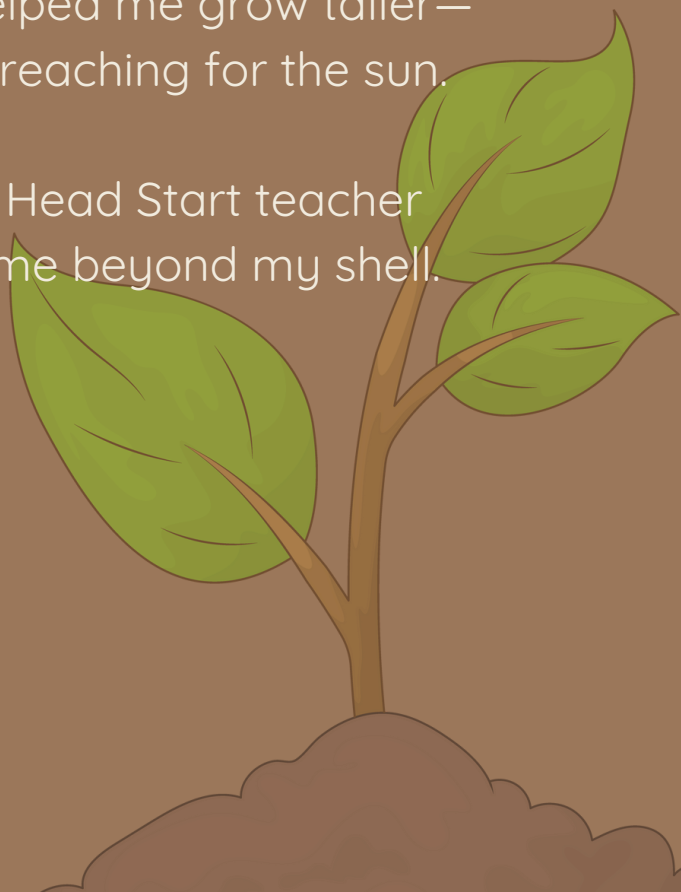


The Sapling

In kindergarten,
I told a story about a turtle.
That story opened a door.
I was tested and placed
in the talented and gifted program.

In every new classroom,
teachers called me smart,
and school helped me grow taller—
like a sapling reaching for the sun.

All because a Head Start teacher
chose to see me beyond my shell.



The Growing Tree

I moved from home to home,
often in the middle of the school year.

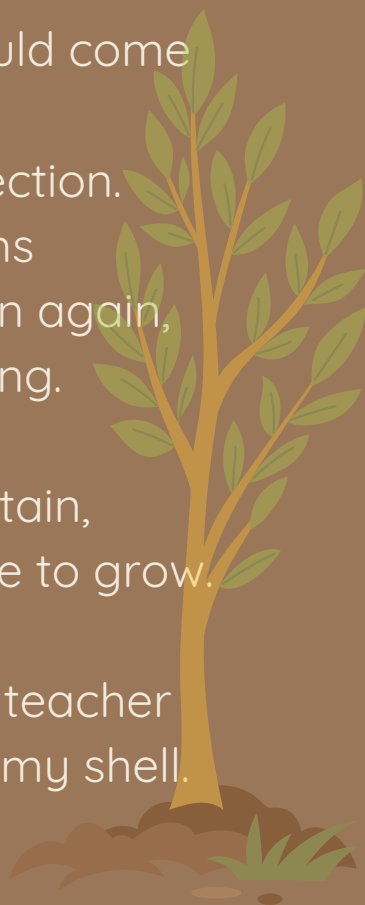
Sometimes I sat in classrooms
that didn't make sense—
paper footballs, broken pencils,
chaos all around.

But soon a counselor would come
with a folder in her hand.

That folder was my protection.
It placed me in classrooms
where learning felt certain again,
where I could keep growing.

Even when life was uncertain,
school made room for me to grow.

All because a Head Start teacher
chose to see me beyond my shell.



The Oak Tree

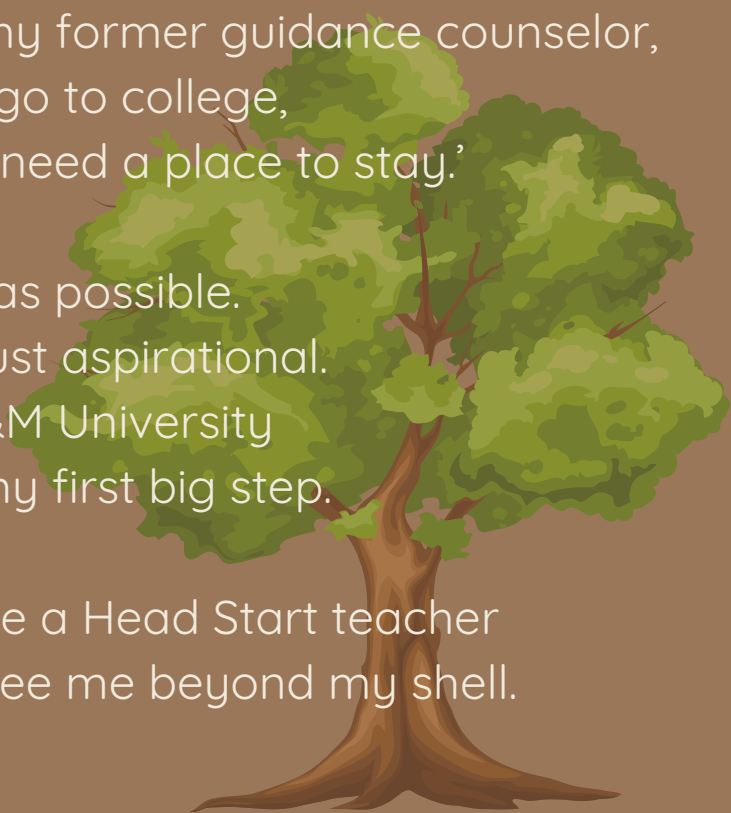
After graduation,
I worked in a grocery store.

At eighteen,
I was about to find myself
without a home again.

So I went back to my high school—
the place that made sense—
and told my former guidance counselor,
'I need to go to college,
because I need a place to stay.'

College was possible.
It wasn't just aspirational.
Florida A&M University
became my first big step.

All because a Head Start teacher
chose to see me beyond my shell.



The Mighty Oak Tree

I gave birth to my greatest gift,
Ricky II—
a brilliant individual
on the autism spectrum.

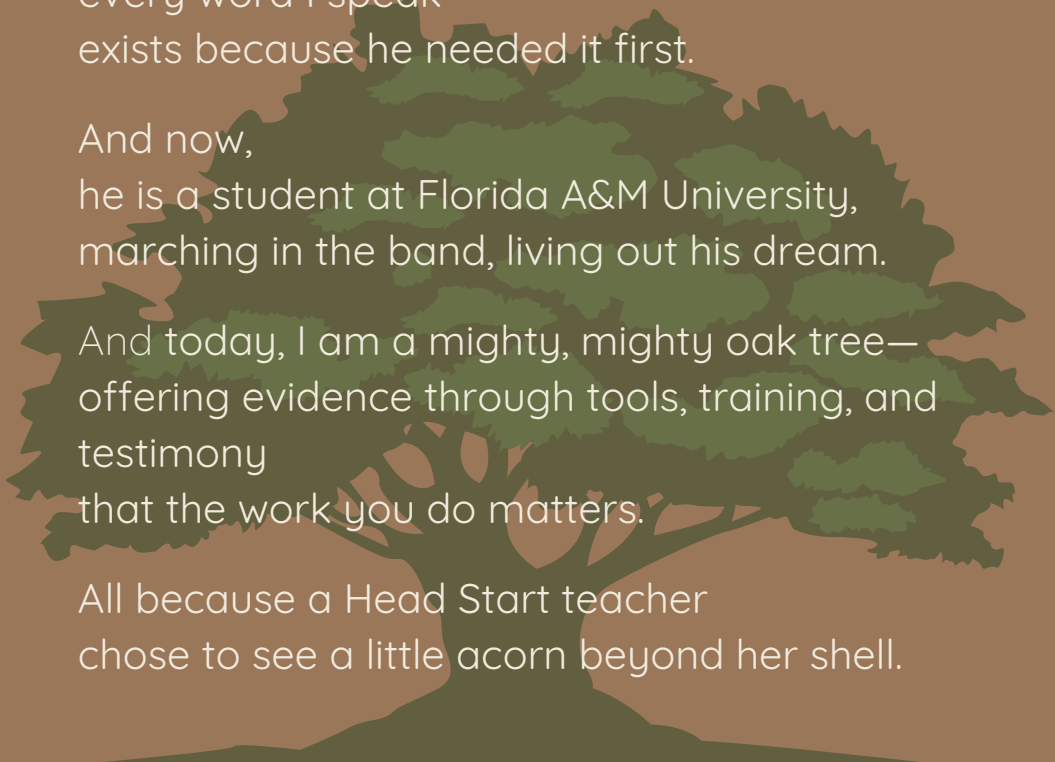
Because of him, I created KinderJam.
Because of him, I earned a PhD.
Because of him, I learned the power of a
Top Notch Village.

Every tool I build,
every training I lead,
every word I speak—
exists because he needed it first.

And now,
he is a student at Florida A&M University,
marching in the band, living out his dream.

And today, I am a mighty, mighty oak tree—
offering evidence through tools, training, and
testimony
that the work you do matters.

All because a Head Start teacher
chose to see a little acorn beyond her shell.





I am Dr. El Brown, a proud daughter of Head Start, who grew up, earned a Ph.D., and came back home to serve the community that first invested in me. This story is my evidence that what you do matters. Every choice you make plants seeds that have the potential to grow into mighty, mighty oak trees.

From my journey, I've created professional learning experiences that affirm, equip, and encourage Head Start teams:

The Signature Keynote Experience: The Gift That Keeps on Giving

A dynamic, story-driven keynote that celebrates and affirms the life-changing impact of a child's ecosystem. Through my journey from an acorn to a mighty, mighty oak tree, I show how the choices of service providers a child's ecosystem create generational change that strengthens families and transforms the future.

This keynote experience inspires transformation. Participants emerge empowered — feeling the dignity of their work, connected to a deeper sense of mission, and carrying clear evidence they can hold onto when the work feels heavy.

The Top Notch Villages™ Training System

A six-module professional learning experience rooted in the Village Engagement Matrix — the framework at the heart of my most recent book, *Raising Superman*, where I demonstrate how engaging with a mission-aligned village curated a journey that transformed my son — from a five-year-old who was nonverbal to a college student at the #1 public HBCU in the nation.

The Top Notch Villages™ Training System brings this framework to life with practical strategies and a shared language that empower village members with tools to:

- **Strengthen** family engagement
- **Build** mission alignment across roles and services
- **Foster** resilience and retention
- **Center** children as the evidence of the work

Village members emerge stronger and more connected —equipped with tools, affirmed in their purpose

Let's Work Together

I would love to connect with you and partner with your Head Start village members. as we choose every day to see beyond the shell and move children forward.

To start the conversation, visit www.kinderjam.com or email me directly at elbrown@kinderjam.com.

