



Squeeze sweet success out of life's lemons

By Jim Waters

A vicious cyber attack shut down the Bluegrass Institute's Web site a couple of weeks ago. Getting it back online remains a work in progress. It's back up now.

The whole situation has been a bummer. But the attack has given us the opportunity to improve the site and its security.

Sometimes when life hands you lemons, you make lemonade.

This adage bears repeating during the current election cycle, when many "new" voters search for candidates who help them escape problems rather than solve, or overcome, the challenges themselves. This holds especially true for minorities, who have felt disenfranchised by the political process and eagerly seek "change."

But the best change comes when you – not some self-serving politician – make it happen.

That describes the life story of Madame C.J. Walker. Life handed Walker lots of lemons. She made lots of lemonade.

Walker, born to emancipated slaves two years after the Civil War ended, became America's first black female millionaire. She did it without a government handout and long before discussion of reparations for the awful institution of slavery showed up on the political radar.

In fact, if anyone deserved reparations, she and her family did.

But Walker didn't sit around waiting on alms from Washington in order to achieve fulfillment in her life. They didn't have free-lunch programs back then. It was the era of Jim Crow; women couldn't even vote, much less run for office.

Bad things happened in our country back then, just as they do now. But at least Walker escaped today's rant from "educrats" about how "poor black children can't learn."

If the "educrats" ranted back then, Walker didn't listen. Instead, she busied herself by helping women keep their hair – and dignity.

Those who succeed often do so by discovering the unseen – and doing that which gives their lives meaning and purpose – not by waiting by the mailbox for a government check to arrive.

In Walker's day, most Americans didn't have indoor plumbing, running water or electricity. As a result, women suffered from scalp diseases that often caused them to lose hair. This happened to Walker, too.

Rather than just accept it, she developed a line of hair-care products especially for black women.

Her business flourished, despite some critics who thought black women should wear their hair in “natural styles” rather than attempt to change its texture.

Walker ignored her detractors and became so successful that she provided thousands of jobs and countless opportunities for black entrepreneurs. Walker’s Agents,” as they became known, went door to door demonstrating – and selling – her products.

Eventually, her success led to a posh estate in Irvington, N.Y., in Westchester County, sometimes called Irvington-on-Hudson. She lived among the Goulds and Rockefellers. Not bad.

And Walker succeeded while maintaining her heritage. She supported many charitable and social causes, including giving the largest donation to the NAACP that the organization had ever received. It supported the group’s anti-lynching campaign.

She learned her interpersonal, social and speaking skills while attending St. Paul’s African Methodist Episcopal Church in St. Louis. Hers was a true American success story.

But Walker’s story likely rankles some in Kentucky today, where a culture of entitlement and welfare has developed to a point where many voters won’t look beyond the promises of a pittance from Frankfort or Washington.

At least for now, our country embodies a place where new ideas, hard work and self-reliance still lead to great success. Yet too many Americans – especially younger citizens – get more revved about candidates’ promises to take bread from the mouths of those who earn it and give it to those who won’t than they do about the prospects living in freedom offers them.

They only see the lemons. Madame Walker saw lemonade.

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