



**Title:** A Change of Plans  
**Storyteller:** Tim King  
**Episode:** A Wrestler, an Exoneree, and a Nurse  
**Originally Aired:** January 14, 2014

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I had this really, really, really great childhood. I grew up in a wonderful home with both my parents and they gave me every single thing I could ever imagine. It was, you know, really elaborate holidays and great vacations, and just everything. They wanted to expose me to the world. I mean, they had me out there showing horses, you know, riding - horseback riding. I was the only brother at the stable, out there riding a horse. That's what I was doing when I was 10 years old.

They wanted to make sure that I knew the world was my oyster and I could be or do anything I wanted. It was a really, really nice, perfect upbringing and, you know, they had a plan in mind when they gave me this upbringing, and that plan was for me to go to college, then go to law school, and go off and get a really good job. And the really good job in my parents' mind was for me to be president of the United States.

That's right! The guy who was Barack Obama before he was Barack Obama is standing here before you right now. I was supposed to be the first black president of the United States. That was the plan. And so I bought in this plan, it was a good plan, right, who doesn't want to be president?

So, I went off to college, majored in international affairs, went off to law school after that and graduated from law school and then had this opportunity to run an inner city school in the city of Chicago. And while being an educator or taking that role wasn't really part of the plan, I realized that it could really help me when I started pursuing this political career. I mean, who's not going to vote for the guy who stands there in the ad with his hands on his hips looking like Superman in front of a classroom of kids?

You know: "Vote Tim King! He changes the world. He educates kids."

So I figured, "Okay. I'll take this job and, you know, maybe it'll, you know, lead me to some other things that follow along with the plan."

One day I was walking into the school, it was pretty early, around 7:30 in the morning and I unlocked the door and there was a kid sitting outside waiting to get in. His name was Keith.

I said, you know, "What are you doing?"

He's like, "Oh, I'm, you know, working here painting during the summer."

"Okay, so, come on in."

And Keith certainly was painting with a bunch of the other students at the school that summer. He would stay really late. The next day he showed up very early, stayed really late. And the summer eventually melted into the school year and Keith was still coming to school really, really early and staying at school really, really late. And I just figured, "Okay, this guy just, you know, likes school." Although I didn't understand how anyone could like school that much. But I started kind of



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keeping an eye on him, you know, because there was something up with this young man.

And eventually he started talking to me and having conversation. Throughout the course of the day, he'd stop by my office and say what was up. You know, he talked to me after school and then he started doing things like asking me if he could borrow a couple bucks and I'd give him the money. I really didn't pay much attention to the reasons why he needed the money. In fact, I really wasn't all that interested in knowing – because I didn't really want to know that much, right? I just, “Here's the money. You know, you stay in your world. It's cool. I'm in mine. You go right ahead with your business.”

Step by step though, you know, he started asking for more money, more frequently. He started hanging out in my office a bit more, he started talking to me more, coming out of his shell. And I was coming out of my shell a bit with him.

And one day I asked him, you know, what did he need this money for? And he said, “Oh, I've gotta go do my laundry. “

And I thought, this kid's lying. I mean, what, you know, 15-year-old has to go and do his laundry, needs money to go and do his laundry? But I gave him the money anyway and, you know, just said, “Okay, go do what you have to do.”

One night I got a call from Keith and he was in hysterics. And he asked me if I would help him, if I'd get him from his house.

And I said, “Sure, what's going on? What's wrong?”

And he said, “My mom just died.”

So I go over to his house, and it's not a house, it's an apartment over a liquor store. And I walk in and it's pitch black in the apartment, just the light from the street lamps coming in the window.

And I see, from that light I see garbage bags. Some bags with garbage in them and other bags with his stuff, and no lights, not because he had turned off the lights, because the electricity was off. There was no power in this apartment and it was cold.

And he was just in hysterics because his mother had just died. She had been battling, unbeknownst to me, drug addiction. And she lost that battle. And the drugs won and she died.

So, we grabbed Keith's stuff in the garbage bags, put them in my car and then I was faced with, well, where do we go?

So I said to him, you know, “You got a friend you can stay with?”

And he said, “Sure.”

We drop him off at a friend's house and I went back home to my house. The next day, Keith was at school. And we talked and tried to work through where he was going to live and we found another place for him to stay. Temporarily.



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And then, you know, I started getting closer to Keith. We started talking more. Obviously this kind of experience, you know, brings people together. And so, you know, we would go out. I'd take him out to eat after school, or we would go to the movies or we'd go to a basketball game or something, you know, like that. And every time after we'd, you know, go to dinner or go to the game, I would drop him off at someone else's house and I would go home to mine.

One day Keith and I were sitting in the car after we had gone out or something and we were trying to work through where he was going to go and, you know, he just looked at me and he said, "Why can't I just live with you? Why can't you be my Dad?"

At that moment I thought, "Are you crazy? Of course you can't live with me! Of course I can't be your Dad. You don't fit into this plan. I'm going to be the first black president of the United States! You can't move in with me."

I had put Keith in this box. This box that said, "Poor Black Boy Inside - Handle With Care." And I'd put that box far away from me. I didn't allow myself to get close to that box, to get close to Keith. All of that went through my head in a matter of seconds, quite literally.

And when I came out of this kind of fog and he was still sitting there in the car looking at me, asking if he could live with me, asking if I could be his Dad. And I looked at him. And I said, "Yes. Yes, you can live with me. Yes, I will be your Dad."

And at that moment, I changed. I felt right. I just felt right.

Now, what I should have felt was terrified. Because when Keith moved into my house, it wasn't like, you know, one elephant coming through. It was a herd of elephants. He took over. As a matter of fact, when I met Keith and he moved in I had a full head of hair. We're talking giant afro, from the sixties/seventies afro, you know what I'm saying? He ran it all away. It was really, really, really hard living with him.

He had been used to living by himself, living on his own. I had been used to living by myself, living on my own. He, while living a life that was like an adult as a child, he all of a sudden had an opportunity to be a kid again. And I had lived this life like a kid with a bank account, and all of a sudden I had to be an adult.

Keith and I managed to make it through our time living together. He calls me Dad. I refer to him as my son. He graduated from high school and he went on to Georgetown University, my alma mater. He graduated from Georgetown, moved back home to Chicago and right now, at this very moment, he works with me in a network of charter public high schools that I started called Urban Prep. He's a teacher.



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I started Urban Prep because I wanted to make sure that all the Keiths in the world were taken care of. He works at Urban Prep because he wants to be a part of changing lives like his life was changed.

When Keith and I lived together, to this very day, what I wanted to do was make sure that he had a life that was filled with love. The life I had when I was growing up.

People always say to me, "Oh, Tim, you changed Keith's life."

And I say to them, "He changed mine."

As we walked down that road of him going from being a boy to becoming a man, while I was helping him grow from boyhood to manhood, he was helping me grow. He was helping me become a better man.

A little while ago I got a text message from Keith. And the text message read, "Our family's at the basketball game. Where are you? You should be here."

And I smiled because Keith was berating me.

And then I got a little teary because as I looked down at that text message I realized that Keith written "Our family." Our family.

Thank you.