


# MICA STANDS UP-AND PAYS THE PRICE

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Spring has come slowly to northern Oklahoma, and the cardinals and chickadees are busily working the bird feeder outside Kay England`s picture window.

But she hasn`t noticed them. Just for these few moments, sitting amid boxes of old photographs of her children, she is lost in her memories, gazing outside to see her daughter as she used to be-the 8-year-old Mica running across the far meadow, the 12-year-old Mica riding bareback on her chestnut colt, the young woman prom-dressed and radiant.

"When we first heard about Mica being gay and all, it was like a death in the family," Kay England says. "And every time she crops up on the news, it`s that same feeling."

The feeling comes often these days because Michaela Marie England, Mica, the former Basketball Queen of Oologah High, has now become a Symbol, a Crusader, an Activist, a Cause Celebre.

"I`m just standing up for myself, for what`s right," Mica says.

"Nobody, nobody, is going to tell me I`m not good enough to be a police officer."

In 1989, the Dallas Police Department refused to hire her because she said she engaged in homosexual sex, which the Texas Penal Code says is

"deviant" and a misdemeanor. She sued the state, the city and then-Chief Mack Vines. Attorneys expect the case to be settled this summer.

She couldn`t know it at the time, but Mica England`s life would change forever the moment she ripped that poster off the wall, the one explaining about equal opportunity in the Dallas Police Department.

In that moment of anger, "bawling and upset," Mica England would let slip perhaps any chance of ever being a cop on the beat in Dallas.

The three years since then have not been pleasant for her. The lawsuit has worn on her energy and torn at her emotions. She continues to endure the anonymous hate mail, the bolt-upright nightmares, the maddening drip-drip of the legal process.

"I`ve gone through hell," England says softly, forlorn, calm. "I know I`m doing a lot of good for others, but for myself I feel like I`ve wasted some years. I need to get on with my life."

She remains estranged from her parents. Her older brother, Guy, whom she says was unable to come to grips with a drug problem and his own

homosexuality, committed suicide in 1988. Her long relationship with a prominent Dallas lawyer recently ended. She has had her car repossessed and her morality attacked.

"A woman actually called me a pervert! To compare me to a child molester!

Meanwhile, as a cop-in-waiting, England struggles financially. She says she barely scrapes by on her small salary from The Mansion on Turtle Creek restaurant in Dallas, where she is the Promenade chef.

Why is she putting herself through all this?

Why not just go to another city in Texas-Fort Worth, for example-that doesn't care and doesn't ask about its officers' sexual preferences?

"I like Dallas, the city, the gay community," she says. "My brother lived here. This is where I want to do my public service."

Mica England has talked about being a police officer since high school, her mother says, and she took college courses in sociology and psychology to bolster her major in criminal justice.

She sold her horse to pay the tuition at Rogers State College in Claremore, then transferred to Northeastern State University in Tahlequah.

She worked her way through college - she was a fry cook and a security guard, and she even sold shoes - and when she was 20 she applied to join the police force in Mukogee. But the minimum age was 21.

She then failed the written exam for the Broken Arrow Police Department. And when she applied to the Tulsa P.D., she was told that she didn't have enough college credits. Then in 1987, she tried Dallas.

When the female recruiting officer asked her Question 14 - "Have you ever engaged in deviant sex?" - Mica England said no.

Even though she believed that being a lesbian was not "deviant," on some level she knew she was lying. And when she answered the question on a follow-up lie-detector test, the needle on the polygraph went haywire. She was rejected.

Two years later, on a recruiting trip in May, the same Dallas recruiter again interviewed England in Tulsa. And even though England told her that she was a lesbian and that she wouldn't lie about it again, the recruiter encouraged her to come to Dallas for a formal

interview.

But three months later, when England walked into the police building, the recruiter was waiting for her with a copy of the departmental hiring policy:

Sorry, no gays or lesbians need apply.

Enraged, frightened, humiliated, she went through the phone book and eventually got connected to the Dallas Gay Alliance.

Mica England got a lawyer, packed her stuff into a U-Haul and moved to Dallas.

Kay England always wondered if she let her daughter be too much of a tomboy. She tried to coax her down from her tree forts. She enrolled Mica and younger daughter Denita in ballet, tap and baton classes.

"Mother had us in all those girly things," Mica says, "but I never stuck with them. I liked playing Army."

She liked playing sports, too-soccer, basketball and softball for the Oologah Mustangs. She had lots of friends, even a steady boyfriend for a while.

"But we`d go to dances," she recalls, "and all my friends would be looking at boys. I`d be looking at the girls." Those feelings blossomed fully during her junior year in high school.

"People think you must have done something wrong to your kids-that you beat them or raised them wrong or something. But I don`t think so," said Mica`s mother.

The distance between Mica England and her family is far greater than the 400 miles from Dallas to Oologah. She has not been home in a year and a half, nor have her parents visited her in Dallas in more than two years. The tension, the silences, the confusion continue.

"She probably does need our support," Kay England says quietly.

"Everybody needs their family when they go through something hard. But I don`t want to help her in this. She has been real insensitive to the family, getting us in the public eye."

Kay England is not so sure about all the lawyers and advisers who have surrounded her daughter. Nor is she sure about all the hoopla, the talk shows, the upcoming segment on "60 Minutes."

"I kind of think they`re all exploiting her, especially this Gay Alliance," she says. "She`s lost her car. She could be going to school or making money. This is mostly for their benefit."

Everyone agrees, especially John Thomas, Waybourn`s successor at the Dallas Gay and Lesbian Alliance.

"Mica never expected all this, and she certainly never wanted it," says Thomas, who frequently escorts her to social and political functions. "All of this pain and trauma and visibility and publicity, she hasn't gotten anything out of it."

Meanwhile, Kay England worries about Mica's "getting in too deep," and Mica England knows her struggles are hardly over. If she ever does make it to the police force, her reputation won't make being a cop any easier. She doesn't expect much backing from the blue.

"I'd be ignorant not to expect some harassment," she says. "On the force, I'll need to keep speaking out. If I get quiet, it will make the harassment that much worse."

Waybourn, who has moved to Washington but remains one of England's closest advisers, has no illusions about her future:

"She will never be a Dallas police officer. If she wins the case, she would never be able to serve effectively because of the scrutiny from her peers, the command staff and the media. No human being could withstand that sort of pressure. It will be awful. She could very well come out of this with no money and no job."

Which is exactly what Kay England fears. But under the worry, behind the anguish, she knows that her daughter, an ordinary Oklahoma farm girl, has grown into an extraordinary woman.

"I'm real proud," she says, "that she can stand up for herself. I just wish it was about something else. I'm glad she's got the courage. We always tried to teach her right from wrong. I think she'd be a good police officer."