

My name is Denise Smith. I am a native Detroiter, a long-time early childhood advocate and educator and wonderfully proud mother of three amazing children. My life journey really began with two parents from the South, the sense of being Southern, I think is a part of who I am. I sense that I'm attracted to that kind of welcoming, nurturing spirit that I think they carry.

Young Denise was always in a book, her nose was always in a book. For me, it was a way of escaping into different worlds and learning about other languages, other journeys. So the field that I'm in, early childhood education, was definitely not by design, I mean not my design, I'm giving tribute to a higher plan, and I ended up becoming the assistant director for an early head-start program and then in doing that, we went to a conference. She was probably the most wretched boss you could have, I mean she really was just horrid and I can recall being in the shower one morning after this conference and saying, why am I doing this? Well, I just, I don't understand – and very clearly as if I'm talking to you right now, I heard, because I need you to save as many of my children as possible, and so I know that this is my life's passion.

I couldn't make the change on my own, and so I needed to be able to instill the same kind of energy and passion and knowledge that I've gained over these years, and others who are doing the work. So that for me is the ultimate goal to be able to get there so that the system itself is supporting children and families.