

The Cards of Life: Volume 1

PREMADONNA BRADDICK

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*Dedicated to
Nadia Brianne Matthews,
Phoebe Prince, and Amanda Todd.
These beautiful, teenage ladies
tragically lost their lives to suicide.
Although I didn't know them,
I knew firsthand, when I was a teen,
the feelings of abject loneliness,
and the sense of utter hopelessness.
I only wish I had this anthology available
to give to them and tell them,
"Your life matters!!"*

Foreword

Dr. Vanessa Weatherspoon

When I reflect on my initial encounter with Premadonna in Oakland, California, over fifteen years ago and see her today as a matured, confident, very talented, beautiful, and considerate woman of God, her journey is simply nothing short of amazing.

I first met Premadonna when I was the pastor of the young adult's ministry, of which she was a part. Premadonna grew up in predominantly troubled family environments, exposed to way too many hardships and broken family relations than any young person should ever experience. I quickly saw in her a determination and deep resolve to accomplish great things in life, *no matter what!* Her love for God and trust in Him enabled her to continually pick herself back up and persevere after many major disappointments and broken family relationships consistently occurring in her life. It became my honor to mentor Premadonna and encourage her to believe in herself more. I wanted to foster an environment where she would trust her discernment and judgment. Premadonna purposefully surrounded herself with people who would 'celebrate her and not just tolerate her.'

Trusting others was a major challenge for Premadonna. Yet over time, she experienced unconditional love and encouragement from several of us in her inner circle. It was so rewarding to see Premadonna truly blossom and shine brightly. I encouraged Premadonna to completely step out in faith and leave Oakland to pursue a master's program in Christian counseling at Oral Roberts University. Her joy grew by sharing

her journey with others, especially young girls. Her passion to help others achieve a place of emotional healing just like she did is now her mandate and destiny. Now her mission and mandate with young girls is to share the love and support she received as she gives her living testimony that they can take the emotional setback, let it perfect them, and create a platform to achieve their God-ordained purpose.

I truly believe Premadonna is in the center of her purpose, fulfilling her mission. It has been an honor to serve on the board of her ministry, Soaring Eagle's Youth and Family Service's. And her annual Girls' Teen Summit is an event with the culmination and celebration of great mentoring and exposure to activities and inspiration most of these young girls are not exposed to. Her passion is deep and authentic because of her life journey, which helps her not just empathize with diamonds in the rough but use this platform to empower them for greatness.

This book is another powerful example and signpost to help direct young lives as well as to encourage and remind them that if she can make it, they can too! As you can easily assess, I am so proud of the many accomplishments Premadonna has achieved . . . And I have no doubt that the best is still yet to come out of this awesome vessel of God!

Dr. Vanessa Weatherspoon
Gathering Of The Eagles Ministries
Prairie View, Texas



PREMADONNA BRADDICK



Introduction

“Success in Life comes not from holding a good hand,
but it’s playing a poor hand well.”

-Denis Waitley

Hello there....thank you for purchasing my first anthology, *Cards of Life: Finding Your Winning Hand*. This has been an epic journey fraught with several challenges and setbacks. Nevertheless, the motto I live by is, “When you have a setback, don’t take a step back because God is already preparing your comeback!!” *Cards of Life* is a culmination of a labor of love from myself and my co-authors.

What moved me to embark on this project, getting many teens and young adult ladies to share their stories, is when I read an article about Nadia Brienne Matthews, a beautiful sixteen-year-old girl, who tragically lost her life to suicide. Following her story, I read about two teen girls, Phoebe Prince and Amanda Todd, who also lost their lives to suicide. I was immediately crushed. No, I didn’t know them, but when I was a teen, I was familiar with the internal, silent pain they endured. Growing up, I deeply wish I had

someone to turn to or a book of stories I could've read relating to my internal pain; instead, I felt like I was navigating life alone in the dark.

Suicide is a silent killer. Tormenting thoughts and dark voices told me how I could commit suicide, and no one would know. They taunted me like the bully on the playground and bombarded my mind with suicide options like a torrential rain during a storm. One time, on my way to church, a train was approaching, and I desperately wanted to drive in front of it. Every day was a struggle to take a breath because death was at my doorstep. The enemy told me I didn't have a winning chance.

My story is an unfortunate one of being born to parents who had a drug-addicted and crime-infested life; thus, this war against death started when I was in the womb. When my mother was pregnant with me, she almost lost me because of the excessive cocktail of drugs in her system. She said that one night, I was kicking so much, she thought she was miscarrying me.

My mother gave birth to me at the county hospital, but she was incarcerated at the Alameda county jail and couldn't take me home because she had to finish her sentence. The next place they should've sent me home to, was with my maternal grandmother, but she too was serving time at the same county jail as my mother. Once released, my mother, still suffering from a severe drug addiction, found it too difficult to care for a toddler. According to my father, she left me in a Jack in the Box restaurant where, at age two, I became a ward of the state until aging out at eighteen years old. My social worker explained since I had endured severe trauma as a young child, I inherited a speech impediment, emotional instability, and delayed learning ability where I fell behind academically from my peers, mainly because of all the drugs my mother used when pregnant with me. Professionals assessed I'd likely be unsuccessful in life because of my difficulty to comprehend schoolwork.

I felt rejected not only from my birth mother, but my foster mother as well. When I came to her home at the tender age of five, she immediately told me I was there to be a playmate for her daughter. Instead of nurturing or affirming words, I heard daily that I was too dumb to graduate from high school or attend college, and I'd follow in my bio mother's footsteps. An addict, on welfare, a high school dropout, and a mother of five kids by five different men. I questioned God, "How can I ever overcome or find my winning hand in life when so many odds are stacked against me?"

As a teen and young adult, I wore a mask in public to disguise the pain of rejection, betrayal, and abuse. I was twice voted Best Smile in junior high, but behind closed doors, I cried, nurturing my pain as I felt alone and many times, misunderstood. Everyone else's life seems idyllic, but you feel you're the only one who's tormented, so you're cloaked in shame. This was a destructive cycle because the shame only drove me further into isolation, reinforcing my habit of wearing my mask and hiding my pain. Feeling like I'd never break this cycle, I felt alone, ashamed, and absorbed into an abysmal black hole.

This concise version of my story is only a glimpse into what has shaped me into the resilient *woman* I am today. The devil worked hard to convince me it was impossible to win in life because he didn't want God's redemptive end to materialize. He saw how many young ladies would get free from my testimony, but he overplayed his hand. Instead of allowing these experiences to make me bitter, they only made me better.

Now, I am fiercely determined to help uplift others who've endured the same experiences. God revealed that every person is born with a purpose and a solution to a problem. My testimony became a testament as a suicide survivor. Psalms 30:5b (NKJV) says, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."

I'm honored God gave me grace to endure until the morning; my story didn't end with death but life. Growing up, I didn't foresee this day happening; yet through it all, I'm still standing and standing up for girls who can't stand up for themselves. The reason why I experienced what I did was I needed to get this book into these young ladies' hands, where they will read it and say, "My life matters!" The second reason is, I wanted to give ladies relatable stories where they may see themselves or someone they know on these pages. Creating this anthology of narratives of ladies from all walks of life, I'm able to have a broader reach to share my story, along with my co-authors' stories, all over the world. The title *Cards of Life* was my chronicle of a bad hand dealt to me.

In junior high, I loved to play the card game, *UNO*. Every lunch period, my peers and I would sit around the cafeteria table and play. To say the least, I was a pro at this game, and word spread at school that no one could beat me. Well, one of my friends, I'll call her Regina, wasn't having that I was beating everyone at this game.

She approached me and said, "Let me deal the cards, and let's see if you will win."

"Sure," I said, but was puzzled, uncertain if she thought I was winning all the time because I dealt the cards and cheated. I didn't feel intimidated having her deal, but when I received my cards, I was completely shocked! I was dealt a poor hand, so I thought, *how in the heck will I win holding this bad hand?* I looked at Regina, grinning from ear to ear, and I blurted out, "You cheated!! You purposely gave me a bad hand so I could lose."

Regina responded, "What do you mean? I didn't give you a bad hand. What, are you afraid you're going to lose?" Needless to say, in my head I thought, *Yes, I'm going to lose with this crappy hand*, but of course, I didn't want her to know that. So, I sucked it up and started playing the game. As you know, Regina was

winning. She'd laugh every time she skipped me, make me draw two or draw four. I'd look at her as she grinned from ear to ear as she enjoyed beating me in *UNO* because she knew she had dealt me a bad hand, and there was no way I could win.

In my life, despite all the setbacks, I was determined to receive my emotional healing and find meaning in all the hardships I had endured. My quest to receive emotional healing finally came when the Lord allowed me to enroll in Oral Roberts University's graduate program, where I received two masters' degrees in counseling. In my training, I could understand how my broken family system had infiltrated my life in adverse ways. I wasn't crazy, and the feelings of years of depression, low self-worth, and low self-esteem were more than normal considering what I had endured.

Knowing the poor hand dealt to me, I could take better control of my life and no longer accept the narrative handed to me. To find my winning hand, I was on a mission to intentionally surround myself with mentors offering guidance, wisdom, and inspiration to pursue my purpose in life.

I am forever grateful to one of my mentors Dr. Vanessa Weatherspoon, who took my hand and never let it go. During the years of her mentoring me, she taught me about emotional intelligence and allowing wisdom and the Holy Spirit to guide me before speaking out of emotions and making significant decisions. Her teachings helped me to develop and grow in my career and personal relationships. Learning new techniques and practicing reflective thinking wasn't enough; I also needed insights into the brokenness lodged in my spirit. I like to call this an "orphan's heart." I've discovered meaningful success comes from a healed orphan's heart, requiring intervention of a great mentor, someone able to create a safe environment where people like myself have the opportunity to grow. Every lesson and knowledge I learned from my mentors, professors, and books, I

placed in my toolbox and applied to every defective area causing me to lose in life. With my newly discovered tools, I could start finally winning.

Back to *UNO*. Remember when I said Regina had me draw several cards, and she was enjoying seeing me lose? Well, what she failed to realize is, I had played the game so much, I developed a technique to win. The times she had me draw cards, I was drawing a better hand, putting me in the position to win. Just when she was about to call “Uno,” I slapped a “Draw Four” on Regina. Later, I’d slap a “Skip” and “Reverse” and to her surprise, I won the game. She was shocked and said, “How in the world did you win with the bad cards I dealt to you?” My response was classic, “I learned how to strategize and play my poor hand well.”

My story had layers of trauma and serves as a testament of how my pain transcended to my purpose of paying it forward to young ladies I’ve mentored through my nonprofit program, Soaring Eagle’s Youth and Family Service’s. I taught them to not allow people’s labels to deter them from shining brightly and walking in their identity and divine calling. It warms my heart to hear testimonies of how my nonprofit helped changed the trajectory of their life. One lady said, if it wasn’t for my program, she could see how her anger might’ve overtaken her and unfortunately, landed her in jail. At one of my Girls’ Teen Summit Conferences, another young lady asked how I could find so many women who cared. She had lived in a shelter and felt a sense of hopelessness. But at the conference, where she attended the workshops and heard the facilitators’ stories of resilience, she gained a sense of meaning and purpose for her life and discovered there were women who truly cared about her well-being and future.

The devil tries to declare your future as whatever society predicts it will be, and somehow, we join in alliance with that story, sadly creating an environment that stifles us from moving

beyond our circumstances. But my dear daughter and sister, God has a preferred future for you where you're radiating, growing, and most of all, living abundantly, not just existing.

The Cards Of Life

Welcome to the *Cards of Life: Finding Your Winning Hand* anthology. Our team has collaborated in this project to provide an effective resource to help and encourage you. Our goal is to help you embrace your worth in God, share your voice with the world, and walk in your divine destiny.

In the card game, *Spades*, each hand you win is a book. Applying our own twist on this concept, the first segment of this anthology is composed of real stories from our authors and divided into three books.

Book One: written by teenage girls.

Book Two: written by young women.

Book Three: written by women in their mid-to-late twenties and thirties.

We recommend reading every book, no matter your age since the authors span from all walks of life. Like a prism, each story radiates light and beauty in a unique way.

BOOK I

"Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world."

Harriet Tubman



DELASHAY LAWRENCE



1

From The Hood To Harvard University



"The Rose that grew from the concrete."

-Tupac Shakur

Bam! The door slammed in my face. I was six years old. This was the start of a challenge I'd face for the next ten years. That incident was just one of the many times I was punished for something I hadn't done. Growing up, I lived with my father after he and my mother broke up.

Flash back to when the two people who loved me and that I loved the most went their separate ways. I was four years old. I thought, *What does this mean for me and my siblings? How will my life change?* They decided I'd be living with my dad for the time being. I was very confused about what and why it was happening.

My six siblings, Dad, and I lived in a two-bedroom house. My dad

worked very hard every day to provide for his children and made sure we had everything we needed in life, mentally and physically. At six years old, my father introduced me to his new girlfriend, who later became his wife. She had four children of her own, and my siblings and I had a hard time accepting these new members to the family. Later, though, we became the closest sisters and brothers.

At the beginning, my dad's new wife seemed very genuine. But after a year of their marriage, my stepmom and I had a lot of tension. After a couple of years, I noticed substantially adverse changes in her, especially mentally. She accused me of things I didn't do, and she told my dad. And she lied about me to others who didn't know me. She basically painted me as this horrible child to everyone, even to my dad. Over the years, she continued to reject me, tell lies about me, talk negatively about me, and treat me as if I didn't deserve the same fair treatment my siblings received. This was a major setback because I couldn't get away since we lived under the same roof. I thought it was my fault she was treating me this way. I wasn't a perfect child, but I didn't give her a reason to treat me like she did.

I asked, "Why were these things happening to me?" Then I developed low self-esteem and had suicidal thoughts because I was weary and felt completely helpless. As my relationship with my dad weakened, my sadness turned to anger and rage. By the time I was in the sixth grade, I was getting into a lot of fights with other girls that caused me to get suspended. I talked back to my stepmom more and just basically didn't care.

My dad signed me up with a counselor. I thought, *OK, I finally have someone who will listen and probably see how horrible my stepmom is treating me.* Yeah, I was wrong. I quickly discovered everything I shared with this counselor in confidence, she went behind my back and told my dad and my stepmom. I was beyond furious. I was convinced counselors can't be trusted; it was better to keep all my feelings inside and trust no one. But this was harmful; I was literally sinking inside with all my built-up anger and emotions.

I was twelve years old, and I just couldn't imagine still living in this house with my dad's wife.

My older sister told me about her counselor she was seeing at her high school and suggested I should give her a try. *Yeah, right. I'm not cool with having a counselor*, I thought. From my last experience, they couldn't be trusted but would go behind your back and tell your parents what you said in your session. My sister Sam continued to persuade me, saying, "No, she's not like that. You should at least try it." I had a lot of hesitation. But to my surprise, Dad signed me up to receive counseling services, and I was unhappy about that. Many days, when the counselor would come by to see me, I'd conveniently be away from home, visiting friends. I dodged my counselor for about a month.

One day, Dad, noticing I was always gone, said I needed to visit with my counselor because I had a lot of issues to talk about. Well, that day of meeting my counselor finally came. Her name was Premadonna Braddick. When I first met Premadonna, who I refer to as "Ms. Pre," I had my guard up. I didn't trust many adults, and I definitely didn't trust counselors. For the next two years, I pretty much gave Ms. Pre a hard time. I'd be short with her, sometimes rude, and didn't really tell her how I was feeling and the issues I was having with my stepmom. She wasn't deterred by my rudeness and continued to see me. She'd share resources about summer camps and extracurricular programs for me and my siblings.

After two years of counseling with Ms. Pre, I confessed in one of our sessions, saying, "The reason I was so rude and guarded for these sessions, I just wanted to make sure you were the real thing."

Ms. Pre's comeback was classic, "Oh, that's what you were doing. Well, sorry to disappoint you, but that didn't faze me. Check my zip code, 94601. I'm from East Oakland and growing up in the hood, you have to grow thick skin." Her reply shocked me. We both looked at each other and started laughing.

Things between me and my stepmom didn't get better. Many

times, when my dad wasn't home, she'd try to whip me because she thought I had an attitude with her. One time, she got a stick and proceeded to whip me; I got so angry; I snatched the stick from her and snapped it in half. Of course, when my dad got home, my stepmom gave him an earful, telling him what I did. My dad got upset with me and grounded me (I think). But at that point, I didn't care anymore because my life was a living hell, and it seemed like it wasn't getting better. Yes, I thought about living with my mother, but I couldn't do that because at the end of my eighth-grade year, I got accepted into Booker T. Washington, ranked as one of the top high schools in Tulsa. This was a tremendous accomplishment, which meant I needed to ignore my stepmom's nuances and her bullying.

Despite the anguish I endured with her, I tried to look beyond my unwarranted circumstances from growing up poor. Like I said before, my dad always worked to take care of his family, but soon he experienced chronic pain in his lower back that would debilitate him, causing him to be on bed rest. Our home was crawling with roaches. Anyone who knows me, knows I'm extremely clean and orderly. No matter how much I'd help my dad keep the house clean, those roaches always found their way back into our house. I said to myself, "I'm going to live a better life than this." No put down to my dad; I knew he did the best he could to provide for his family.

I've always been smart in school and had a drive to make high grades. My dad was a big factor because he and my mom never graduated from high school. Dad drilled into me and my siblings his desire for us to graduate high school and attend college because he chose the life of the streets, causing him to be in and out of jail, have kids at a young age, and not really have a good direction in his life. He was always very transparent about his unstable past and wanted us to make better choices and have a better life than he did.

I could see it deeply disappointed my dad to see my older siblings become teen parents, drop out of high school, and live a

transient life. All of my many siblings have potential, but some made poor decisions. During all of this, I always told myself I'd be different and not make those same choices. I knew God had a calling on my life, and He had His hands on me.

By the time I was in ninth grade, things between my dad and his wife unraveled. He finally saw the lies she was saying about me when he wasn't around. Although Dad tried really hard to keep his family together, he realized his wife clearly had mental issues, but she refused to acknowledge it or get professional help. Dad apologized for all the years he didn't believe me when his wife lied about me. I know it's wrong to say I was elated Dad divorced his wife, but honestly, I finally felt like I had my dad back; the dad I knew when I was four years old. The dad who wasn't always stressed out but had contentment and peace. I was the happiest I have ever been in my life because I felt like a very heavy burden was lifted off me.

My happiest times followed. Remember, I mentioned Ms. Pre, my counselor? Well, she fired herself as my counselor and became my mentor. She said she saw something in me where I'd need more of her attention and direction. She told me about Harvard's summer school program for high school students. I looked at Ms. Pre like she was crazy. I thought, *Who in the heck goes to school in the summer?* There was no need for me to go to summer school because I was a straight-A student, and my plan was to get a job and hang out with my older siblings living in Oklahoma City. That wasn't Ms. Pre's plan for me. For six months, she hounded me about applying for Harvard's summer school program. To be honest, I was trying to avoid Ms. Pre and made excuses why I wouldn't be able to go. Well, if anyone knows Ms. Premadonna, she doesn't take no for an answer and found another way to get me to fill out the application for Harvard.

She approached my dad, sharing about this wonderful opportunity for me to attend the top college in the United States and receive eight college credits while in high school. My dad was a little

hesitant because the school was far from Oklahoma, but knew Ms. Pre's work through her nonprofit, Soaring Eagle's Youth and Family Service's, with at-risk teen girls and that her intentions were good for his daughter. Now that my dad caught wind of my chance to get accepted into Harvard, he stayed on me about completing my application.

Although I was very hesitant because I felt that a young black girl from the hood, like myself, hardly had a chance. Nervousness and anxiety rose as I went to the website to apply. I felt as if my stomach was tied in a knot. This feeling lasted as I awaited the result from my application.

One day, I was casually looking through emails, and this specific email looked as if it was glowing. As I scanned its contents, I read they had accepted me into the program! I felt so many emotions as I ran as fast as lightening into my dad's dim and boring room to share the good news. When I told him about my acceptance, his eyes grew so big, and his mouth opened wide. Excitement took over his body as he grabbed me and hugged me so tight; it felt as if my body was losing circulation and tingling. His eyes watered and tears dropped, even though he was trying to not let his emotions flow out like water.

Over the next several weeks, we prepared for me to take this journey to Harvard. I received a partial scholarship but needed to raise \$7,000 to pay my remaining tuition. Tulsa's Channel 6, a local news channel, aired my story, helping me raise the remaining tuition through my GoFundMe campaign. I needed to attend Harvard.

Ms. Pre's nonprofit, Soaring Eagle's Youth and Family Service's, along with many community leaders, financially supported me too. Pastor Tim Newton from the Tulsa Dream Center found a sponsor to pay for my airline ticket. Others bought me luggage, clothes, and a computer. I was in complete awe of the amount of monetary and in-kind donations I received. I truly felt blessed, and it was as if God

was telling me He truly loved me, and through everything I went through with my dad's former wife and various struggles, I learned who I am and who God has called me to be. I'm very thankful I was faced with these different challenges because it has sparked personal growth and happiness in me.

Fast forward to the day when we caught our flight. This was my first time flying and I'm afraid of heights, so I was so nervous and didn't know what to expect. The sun was brightly beaming through the car windows as we drove to the airport. I felt very flustered, thinking I was going to leave something behind. As the wheels of my suitcase rolled quietly through the airport, I felt as if a million dollars was waiting for me in Massachusetts. I was excited and nervous about experiencing my first flight. My hands shook uncontrollably, and I bombarded heaven with prayer. Through the window, I saw the wings of the plane that were as big as a house. As I sat in my seat, I felt the plane drift down the runway and slowly lift us into the air. It felt like I was on a fair ride, being shot into the air. My eyes were glued to the lustrous clouds that looked unrealistic, and my heart was beating on the inside of my chest as if trying to escape. I was off to a new experience and journey.

It felt surreal when I arrived in Boston, Massachusetts, and stepped foot on Harvard University's campus; I had never felt this feeling before. Everything seemed so different, and in fact it was. I had never really been out of Oklahoma my entire life, so the environment there was a complete culture shock. Everyone talked differently and dressed differently than I did. Many of them had different goals but similar life stories. On the first few days, my dad, mentor Ms. Pre, and I explored the city and saw what it offered. Then it was time to move onto campus. I was excited about move-in day, but also nervous since I didn't know what to expect. When I saw the huge, beautiful campus, I was more excited about what the next two months had in store for me. Meeting my roommate from Saudi Arabia was a very enlightening experience. Even though we were

from two different countries, we bonded and got along very well.

My dad and my mentor were there every step of the way and helped me get settled into the dorms and in Boston. At the beginning, it took a little while to get adjusted to being by myself and learning to navigate through the new city. I made many friends and associates as soon as I got to Harvard. I met people from many states, countries, ethnic groups, and backgrounds. I was very open to meeting new people and having new experiences. I had a full week before classes to get settled and take everything in.

Once classes started, I had to attend four days a week. I took African American Studies and Law and Psychology. Both were lecture classes and very fast-paced and rigorous, requiring me to work very hard. Fortunately, I was prepared because I had already taken advanced classes in high school. I really enjoyed my classes here because I was interested in these subjects.

During the day, I'd go to class, spend time with my friends, study, do homework, and participate in activities around campus, including volunteering, working out, and joining a few clubs. One of the volunteer groups I joined was about helping foster children, mothers, and fathers in need. This club had a very special place in my heart because I thoroughly love helping people, especially the elementary and adolescent kids. As time passed, I became more familiar with how the people were, how to get around the city, and how my professors operated their classes. I felt like the people in my African American Studies class were family because we could really bond in a small class. I worked very hard to be successful and often had to make sacrifices. I had to make excellent grades because that was the primary reason I was there. But I didn't limit myself with activities, making it a goal to experience things I've never done before.

Midterm week was the first critical time while I was there; I had to study like there was no tomorrow. I studied with friends, motivating me to do it more. I successfully completed my classes and

even made straight A's.

By the end of my stay, I had experienced, learned, and accomplished so much; I was very attached to the people there and the campus. Wishing I had more time there, I was sad to leave, but I still had to finish high school where I was starting my junior year in the fall. I packed my things on the last week, then once I completed my classes, I flew home, alone. I'm very thankful to have an experience like this, especially when so many people doubted me, telling me I wouldn't be anything.

My words of encouragement to anybody, especially those who come from the hood like myself: Don't let anyone tell you what you can't do or will not be. So many people doubted me and thought I was going to be just another statistic of north Tulsa, but I've proved them wrong multiple times. First, I went to Harvard after my sophomore year in high school, then graduated from high school with a 4.5 grade point average. Now I'm attending a historically black college out-of-state on a full-ride, academic scholarship. Even though I've proved all the negative people wrong and flourished, I will not stop here. I will continue to beat all odds; I've already broken the generational chains of poverty and teen pregnancy in my family. All the negative people and challenges I faced were what made me go harder and motivated me to be even greater. I will continue my education, become a successful black entrepreneur, and reach all of my goals. And I want everyone to know to not settle for less.

I'm truly grateful and blessed I have a dad who always told us to put our education first. He pushed me to be the best version of myself. There are always opportunities like I had out there for you. You just have to want better and surround yourself with people who see greatness in you and will help you better yourself. I'm very fortunate to have had my mentor, Ms. Pre; she was there to help me through my anger and depression and to have an experience at an Ivy League school.

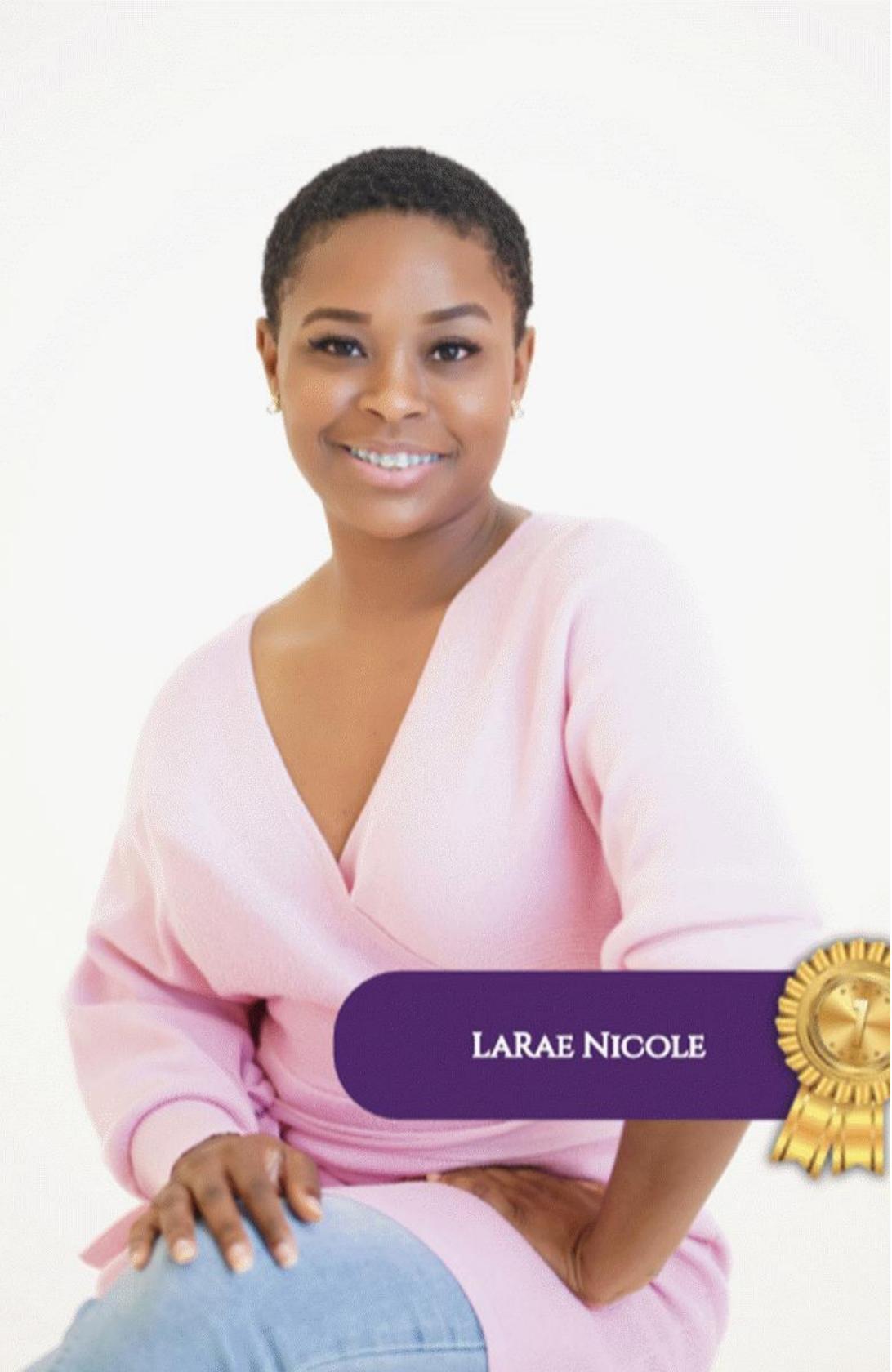
My story made local news and went viral on social media. Because I took the chance and believed I could get into Harvard, many other teen girls from the hood of north Tulsa, Oklahoma, were encouraged to apply to Harvard's summer school program for high school students and similar programs. And to their surprise, they got in. It gives me great joy to know my story inspires other teens, especially those who come from the hood, to change the trajectory in their family and to aim high. Yes, I'm that girl that came from the hood to Harvard University, and so can you.

4

BOOK III

*"How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young,
compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant of the
weak and strong. Because someday in your life, you will have been all of these."*

-George Washington Carver



LARAE NICOLE



12

I'm A Victor, Not A Victim



*"But thanks be to God, who gives us the
victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

-1 Corinthians 15:57 ESV

When people ask me where I'm from, I tell them I was born in California but raised most of my life in Tulsa, Oklahoma. So, I like to refer to myself as a "Country- Cali girl."

I grew up in Oklahoma in the projects, in poverty, and on welfare; some of you can relate because you come from the same background. Growing up in the projects as a teenage girl, I faced many challenges such as peer pressure, sexual harassment (I didn't realize it was sexual harassment then), being bullied, low self-esteem, depression, anger, promiscuity, disappointment, grief, betrayal, discrimination, temptation, police brutality, and so much

more. I know you're probably wondering, "Wow... all that." Yes, all that. It was my life, a life I didn't ask for. A life no young teenage girl should have to experience.

Let me show you an example of a bittersweet life. It sucks being the middle child; yet here I am. I was raised by a single mother of three who also had to be a father, and I know I'm not alone in this experience! I commend her because it wasn't easy raising three children alone. It must've been difficult for her to work multiple jobs, making sure we had enough while trying to protect us from the iniquities and deception of the world. She instilled many morals and values, and for that, I'm so grateful.

My father had always been an absent "important piece" of my life, and that's the same story for many young ladies. I was that "fatherless" teenage girl.

I was curious, facing promiscuity, as I believe many "fatherless" teenage girls are. I went through what I like to call a "boy crazy" phase. I can't say every teenage girl has this experience, but I do believe those girls absent from their father, do. I experimented with sex at an early age with little care why I was even doing it. I asked questions like, "Would I have been as sexually active, or so emotionally tied to receiving acceptance from the boys I laid with if my father was actively involved in my life? Would that have saved me from repetitiously attracting and dating the same type of guys that hurt me? Why did I feel I was in love with every boy that gave me attention? Why did I have to deal with that hyperventilating, heart-breaking feeling?" It felt like that second cramping day of your menstrual cycle mixed with a migraine headache. I never want to feel that excruciating, empty feeling again.

A young girl needs the love and the teaching of her father. Not having a loving father-daughter relationship creates a pattern that most would call, "looking for love in all the wrong places."

Growing up in the projects is like a war zone. Almost every day, the police were called because of domestic violence disputes or

reports of gunshots. I saw a lot of illegal activities, and many times, I turned my head because there's a saying in the hood, "snitches get stitches."

That day came where the very woman I trusted (I considered her my best friend) turned her head when I was sixteen years old. She asked me to leave with a guy I didn't really know, but knew he was a drug dealer. I saw him around the projects, but that was it. The guy asked her if I could hang out with him. I was perplexed, thinking, *why should I go with him?* But I didn't ask questions because I knew she was high, and I didn't think I'd get a straight answer.

Suddenly, the cards have been dealt to me; I couldn't believe this was happening to me right now. Once I left with this man, I could smell his foul, sweaty, toxic scent! It was so strong that I felt my nose hairs pulling in the floor's direction. When I looked up, he was staring at me with his crooked half grin, ready to take me away in his car. I didn't feel comfortable and didn't trust him.

He said, "Come with me. I need you to bag some marijuana for me." I didn't think anything of it because I had been around it and smoked it before. Overall, I trusted her and couldn't understand why she told me to go with him. On the ride, he was trying to make conversation and offering me things to take the edge off.

I said, "No!" *Why was I even in this situation?*

When we arrived at what appeared to be a hotel, I became uncomfortably suspicious. I got out of the car and went inside to find another woman half-dressed in the bed. She asked, "Who is this?"

The man told her, "Don't worry about it," then looked at me and said, "Come over to the table I have set up."

I was really confused, scared, and uncertain how the night would end. The woman was outraged as she cussed, called me names, and demanded answers. I felt the tension rising uncontrollably.

He told me, "Take a break and go with me to the bathroom."

This was the very thing I hoped he wouldn't try to do, but I

followed him. He closed the door and began kissing and touching me everywhere. I told myself, *it's OK*. I didn't know what to do; I just sat there and let him do it.

Then, there was a heavy knock on the bathroom door. He opened it, and it was that woman. She screamed, then they yelled back and forth at each other. Suddenly, I experienced the worst thing to see in a situation like this. He pulled out a gun! It was the last straw. Officially horrified, I closed and locked the bathroom door behind me. They were in the other room. Then I sat in a ball, crying and hoping I'd get a chance to survive the night.

I could hear them outside the door. She was crying, and he was yelling, "Get back." Then he knocked on the bathroom door with the gun, saying, "Open up. It's OK. Come out."

I couldn't open the door; I was too nervous and afraid! I heard a loud knock on the front door. "It's the police. Open up," they said. Someone called about the noise. Finally, I was saved. I immediately opened the bathroom door. The man had quickly put the gun and drugs away, I guess because the police calmly pulled us all out of the room.

They questioned me, but I didn't tell them anything that happened. I told them I was just leaving, so they let me go. I didn't know what happened to him. I safely got away from this nightmare and returned home to my bed. I never spoke of that day; I just wanted to forget about it altogether.

No matter how much I tried to dismiss that night, it still came back to me. I realized as a young girl that my father was supposed to be there to protect me, but he wasn't there. Fortunately, I have a heavenly Father, my protector, and someone I can always trust. I strongly believe God saved me from that guy and had the police come. Now should I be mad at that woman who asked me to go with this guy? Absolutely! But looking back, she wasn't in her right mind; drugs definitely impaired her judgment. After that experience, I had very little trust in adults.

Then God sent my “big sister” Premadonna Braddick to me. She began as my therapist and later, my mentor. I call her “Pre.” When she met me, I was broken and confused. I had a lot of trust issues, and I was a bit naïve because I had given adults in my life the benefit of the doubt a lot, only to be disappointed or betrayed.

One time, during one of our counseling sessions, I told her, “It’s OK for me to be sixteen and pregnant because a lot of other girls are sixteen with babies, and it looks like they’re making it.” You’re probably thinking that’s an insane thing for a teenager to just come out and say.

My social context taught me that having babies as a teenager was normal. Until I met Pre, I hardly knew anyone who had successfully graduated from high school or attended college. The black women I came across had several children by different men and were often on welfare. Sadly, that was my reality, and I didn’t want my life to be what I saw; yet I made a silly statement that would’ve easily ensnared me to live the life of other women in my community.

After I made that statement about being pregnant, Pre pushed me harder. She encouraged me not to get caught up, but to follow my dreams because I didn’t have to be a victim of my environment. I could rise above it all and have a successful life. I reflected on my life and thought, *Yes, I can have a better life than where I come from.* Today, we laugh about my foolish statement about it being OK to be pregnant at sixteen. It’s a testimony of a lifetime! She allowed God to use her as a vessel to help redirect my path and my focus. I thank God I *chose* to listen to wisdom!

I’m probably one of the last of my close friends, family, and peers who hasn’t yet become a mother. Not because I don’t want to and not because I can’t. I believe God has always had His hand on me in that area, and I made a defining *choice* to make better decisions. I don’t say that to pass judgment on anyone because we all chose our own paths!

Now, I was overall a good kid. I wanted to go to school and actually be involved. I like to say I was a popular kid. I wanted to be in the midst of everything, trying to find my way just as all teenagers do (in my own way of expression, of course). "I could do it all," I said. At least I always believed I could. I joined different clubs and organizations and sang in the church and school choirs. I was one of the Tulsa McClain's Foxy Titan Auxiliary Dancers on the school band and was voted drum majorette at the end of my senior year. Honey, you couldn't tell me anything!

I love sports! I played basketball in school as well as AAU basketball. The AAU league was basically an off-season basketball organization. On my team, we were friends and siblings outside of school. We traveled in and out of town competing in tournaments. We had the best coach; he didn't "play." Track-and-field was one of my biggest passions throughout high school and college; they called me "Track Star" and "Speedy Gonzales." I earned awards and medals and set a few small-time records. I met the most amazing athletes who are still my good friends, and some of the best times of my life happened on the track. I was a natural-born sprinter!

I've always felt like I was living in the fast lane, everything around me was racing at one hundred miles per hour, including my mind. As a teen, it seemed like there wasn't much time to think about what you shouldn't do in life. For most of us, our first reaction was to do what we wanted out of curiosity, and most of the time, it was what our friends were doing.

The spirit of low self-esteem, bullying, comparison, doubt, and insecurity revealed itself when I noticed a pattern of fighting among me and groups of girls in and out of school. Notice I said "spirit" because that wasn't who I was. I wasn't a fighter; I was a lover. I was the girl who gave everyone the benefit of the doubt. It seemed like I had something that other girls wanted, but the only way for them to express their interest in getting to know me was through conflict emotionally and sometimes physically. I didn't understand why. It

made me question a lot of things within myself, even sometimes convincing me I was less than. It's easy for us to think this way about ourselves, especially when the pressure is on, but it's not true. God had a plan for me; He always has a plan.

I got my first job at IHOP as a waitress toward the end of my junior year. I couldn't believe I was going to have real money. I thought I was "all that and a bag of chips;" nobody could tell me otherwise. I felt like it was the beginning of my crossover into independence. It felt good! But just as fast as things fell into place, things took a bad turn. It only took one day to turn that feeling of accomplishment inside out.

One morning, as I was getting ready for school, my mother and I got into a huge argument that turned physical. Next thing I knew, I was picking myself up off the floor and got away from her. I became fatigued as I ran miles to the school's bus stop where I felt safe and made it just in the nick of time before the bus left. I said to myself, *I can't do it anymore.*

My mom lashed out at me, and it wasn't the first time. I knew she loved me, but she was dealing with deeper generational family trauma that caused the verbal and emotional abuse to arise.

That day, I took control of my life. As soon as I made it to school, I walked into the principal's office, feeling so confident! I used my voice this time and spoke the truth. I did what I felt I had to do, and as a result, I was removed from home and placed in an all-girls' group home. I didn't foresee that being the outcome... I really didn't!

I asked myself, *What have I done and why did I say anything at all?* To my surprise, after a month, CPS reunited me back with my mother. Unfortunately, our relationship didn't get any better. My therapist, Premadonna, would confront my mother many times about the way she treated me. I felt relieved to finally have someone who'd stand up for me and saw how my mom mistreated me. Nevertheless, the feeling of validation quickly dissipated because once Premadonna left, my mom and I would argue again. The more

I tried to act the way my mom wanted me to, it always seemed like it was never good enough for her.

It was summertime! And I had the option to attend boarding school or to go to sunny California for the summer and visit my cousins. The grass was greener on the other side! I made it out. I was in California, enjoying the beautiful summer sun and beginning my new life. I couldn't believe it was my senior year in high school, and I was finally going to walk the big stage. I had a lot of adapting to do since I came from a predominantly black school to a really diverse one. I had to make new friends-nerve racking because it seemed like the school was full of cliques. I wasn't into cliques. I just wanted a friend or friends, period.

When I attended my new high school, I experienced racial discrimination from some of my teachers, amongst other setbacks such as not being allowed to graduate with my high school class because in California, all the high school students have to take an exit exam to graduate. Unfortunately, I didn't pass the math portion, missing it by two points. I had to attend night school. My memory of my high school graduation was receiving my diploma in the mail. Although I didn't graduate with my high school class, living in California was good, and it brought my mother and I closer.

As my mother and I were repairing our relationship, I was forming another relationship with a guy, and in hindsight, I should've taken my time. At twenty-three, I married my high school sweetheart. It seemed like so many things were right, but at the same time, so many things were wrong. I figured I had taken the right steps. We had begun as friends for three months. I had led with my heart again, but not with my head. I was ready to get married, so I took the man's position. I proposed to him, and then we eloped, tying the knot at a chapel in Reno, Nevada.

I was so blind from being in love, I robbed myself of the true meaning and experience of becoming a wife in the presence of God. The one thing we had in common was, we both loved each other very

much, but loving each other wasn't enough. Our marriage lasted two years before we separated. We didn't end our relationship on healthy terms.

I learned, marriage is a serious commitment, not something to jump into lightly. I also discovered God needs to be in the center, if you want a *successful* marriage. I didn't let my experience with divorce scare me into never consider getting married again; I will and definitely want to. Now, I know what I need to do differently the next time around. In fact, I have an amazing man in my life who loves and respects me, and as long as God is our center, we will be guided through it all.

What I learned over the past years is the enemy uses those *close* to us to tear us down. It is not always the person, but the negative spirit behind them. It's confusing and hurts, but God is always there. And He will pull you through if you seek Him and don't give up on yourself or on anyone else.

I've always been told to slow down, I'm trying to do too much, and I can't do it all. I've always had the same response, "I don't understand. Who said? Why not?" I believe in embracing all the talents I've been given, and they've led me to be the person I've become.

Today, I'm a singer songwriter. My music is my therapy, and my voice heals me. When I began my solo music career, I was afraid, and I'm still afraid. I'm proud to say I've created and released inspiring music, but I lack the confidence in myself. I don't know why it seems like it's only with my music. I think my setback is, I care too much about people's opinion. My first album is coming soon. I won't give up because I see the need for people to hear my message and the positive effect I have on them when I silence fear and focus, giving my all.

I'm also a professional, published international model. The most inspiring trait I've been told I have is my confidence. I've been 4'11" all my life-well, I'm 5'1" now-and that makes me a petite model. I've

been told that given my height, I'd only succeed in print or commercial modeling. Well, I never believed that. I've faced many challenges with following my passion in this line of work. The ideal look in the modeling industry is a tall, skinny, Caucasian female, or a woman with the same build, but with skin that's smooth, silky, and the shade of a jaguar of African descent. Quite beautiful!

Over the past few years, the modeling industry has changed and seems to be a little more diverse, giving a model like me a better chance at making it. I'm so glad because everyone deserves an equal opportunity. Develop tough skin and have the will to not give up! I have learned there will be a thousand "no's" waiting for me, but that doesn't define my capabilities, because the "yes" waiting for me is meant for me. I love being a petite model and because of my determination, I've strived and laid a foundation for myself. I have met and worked with many brilliant designers and stylists, travelled to and showcased in many hair and runway fashion shows, boutiques, banquet events, and fashion weeks all over. I was blessed to have been invited to London and Scotland to walk for their biggest fashion week showcase. The experience was life changing, and it was an opportunity that doesn't just fall on your doorstep. I'm forever grateful for those who believed in me! I'm looking forward to many more life-changing moments as I stay on course in my modeling career.

Finally, I'm an entrepreneur. I'm a new owner of a braiding and weaving boutique. I've been doing hair since I was a pre-teen. It was my first hustle and had wished that one day, this moment would come true. I'm also an upcoming actress. I enjoy meeting new talent, and I love being on set. There is an unexplainable feeling I get when I hear, "Action!" Look out for my projects on the big screen that will be soon released in the near future. I'm so grateful and blessed for the path I've taken.

Although in the past my mother and I had a fractured relationship, I took the time to understand why she was so harsh.

Her mother was emotionally, verbally, and physically abusive towards her. Although Mom tried her hardest to be a different mother with me and my siblings, I realized she was raising kids from a broken vessel needing to be healed. My mother sought her healing through counseling. Today, my mother and I are in a much better place; I love her dearly. She's my biggest support and cheerleader, and I'm proud to call her my mom.

I could dwell on the fact I had to grow up too soon or was exposed to the wrong things too early, and so many other things we blame everyone else for. When I was a teenager, I was a victim to many circumstances such as being trafficked, enduring emotional and verbal abuse by my mother, and growing up without a father.

It's true, the cards dealt to me have shaped and caused me to make foolish decisions. The hard reality is, we're responsible for our own actions; thus, who we are results from our own desires. Like many other young girls who desire to be loved, they mask their emotional pain through substance abuse or several failed relationships. I refused to live with a victim mentality; instead, I fought victoriously through my fears and setbacks. My advice to teenage girls and young adult ladies is, "Give yourself a chance for inner healing, forgiving yourself for making poor choices and others who've wronged you. Surround yourself with positive people and get a mentor-someone you can talk to and will tell you the truth in love without judgment." Although I've had a rough past, I don't consider myself a victim, but a victor. My life has taught me hard lessons, but it has molded me into a beautiful, strong, black woman today!

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Co-Author Biographies

Book I

NAME: Mahogany Lucius

CHAPTER TITLE: "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall"

GENERAL EDUCATION: Senior in high school.

INTERESTS, HOBBIES: Reading, fashion, and music.

HER PURPOSE: Mahogany Lucius is a young woman with greatness attached to her name. She is smart and fully devoted to goals that she accomplishes every day while reminding herself that she is imperfect but progressing daily.

NAME: Atiya Bey

CHAPTER TITLE: "My Journey in Setting Scoliosis Straight"

GENERAL EDUCATION: She is a senior in high school with plans to attend college in the fall.

INTERESTS, HOBBIES: She's always been interested in medicine and helping others around her. Starting high school, the pathway she chose was Allied health. She's participated in an organization called

HOSA, where students travel around the state, competing with other high school students in different medical field disciplines. Once she graduates from high school, she wants to attend an HBCU to study neuroscience and psychology. As much as she enjoys helping others, she'd like to become a life coach when she turns eighteen. Atiya's passion is to serve as a professional in the medical field and help others despite their circumstances.

HER PURPOSE: She's a member of the NY Grand Lodge. She's been active in community service since she was five years old.

NAME: Delashay Lawrence

CHAPTER TITLE: "From the Hood to Harvard University"

GENERAL EDUCATION: Graduated from Booker T. Washington High School. Currently a freshman in college.

INTEREST, HOBBIES: Athletic trainer, former film student for high school football, enjoys volunteering and giving back to communities, very focused on her career and finding success.

HER PURPOSE: Delashay is a very determined person who loves to serve as a mentor and advisor to help people discover opportunities when one isn't provided.

NAME: Jaya Tarver

CHAPTER TITLE: "Black Excellence"

GENERAL EDUCATION: The eighth grade.

INTERESTS, HOBBIES: Enjoys spending time with family and friends, playing basketball and volleyball.

HER PURPOSE: Jaya is passionate about being a light to people who need it most.

NAME: J’Naya Johnson

CHAPTER TITLE: “Unexpected Life”

GENERAL EDUCATION: Graduated from Newman Smith High School located in Carrollton, TX. Currently taking college courses majoring in psychology.

INTERESTS, HOBBIES: She’s a huge fan of all things art. Anything perceived as an artform can usually pique her interest. As of now, Japanese animation is what she’s got her eye on.

HER PURPOSE: J’Naya enjoys being a safe person for people to confide in. She is passionate about making the world around her a safe haven for sharing all types of deep emotions.

NAME: Eden Burrell

CHAPTER TITLE: “Dead Roses Are Still Red Roses”

GENERAL EDUCATION: Eden is currently a senior in high school.

INTERESTS, HOBBIES: She’s an eight-year-long gymnast, dancer, and artist with a passion for acting and theatre. Her main love is singing and songwriting and shares her musical talents on YouTube under Eden Makay. She clearly values the arts and enjoys fashion and shopping! Eden displays all three interests through pageantry.

HER PURPOSE: Eden is committed to providing healing and love through the art of music, acting, and sharing her story.

NAME: Naomee Casey

CHAPTER TITLE: “God’s Plan”

GENERAL EDUCATION: High school Senior, Sports Medicine Student

INTERESTS, HOBBIES: Varsity Track and Field, Competitive Power Tumbling.

HER PURPOSE: Naomee is passionate about sharing her journey with others and helping people become the best versions of themselves.

NAME: Niomee Casey

CHAPTER TITLE: "God's Plan"

GENERAL EDUCATION: High School Senior, Sports Medicine Student

INTERESTS, HOBBIES: Varsity Track & Field, Competitive Power Tumbling

HER PURPOSE: Niomee is passionate about helping people reach their full potential.

NAME: Jasmine Cox Phelps

CHAPTER TITLE: "I Decide"

GENERAL EDUCATION: Senior in high school, looking to attend college soon after graduation to become an editor.

INTERESTS, HOBBIES: Enjoys writing songs and playing music on her ukulele, as well as drawing and writing fiction.

HER PURPOSE: Jasmine is passionate about writing and creating, whether in her music, stories, or art. She believes, if even one thing she creates can help or inspire someone, it's all worth the effort.

Book II

NAME: Marissa Ibarra-Reyes

CHAPTER TITLE: "My Pain Has a Purpose"

GENERAL EDUCATION: Bachelor of Science in human development and family sciences with a minor in Spanish from Oklahoma State University.

INTERESTS, HOBBIES: ministry, public speaking, singing, writing songs and poetry, advocacy, and exercising.

HER PURPOSE: Marissa just received her bachelor's degree in human development and family science with a minor in Spanish from Oklahoma State University. Marissa is on a journey to continue learning to develop her gifts to glorify God. She enjoys helping

others and seeks to change the world since God changed her world.

NAME: Kenyari' Bevan Porter

CHAPTER TITLE: "Exactly Who I'm Supposed to Be"

GENERAL EDUCATION: High school graduate of Tulsa Memorial High School (Tulsa, Oklahoma).

INTERESTS: Make-up Artistry: experienced in theatre, glamorous and gore. Experienced in full-figure modeling, creative photoshoots, and photography (especially nature). Singing, dancing, and worship dancing. Writing: poetry, songs, plays, and short stories. She loves working with children especially those with special needs.

HER PURPOSE: Kenyari' means "Determined Woman." She is passionate about body positivity and self-love. Being "teased, bullied, and told no because of her differences" propels her to knock down the man-made rules of what is normal and acceptable. Knowing God's banner over her is love and having a supportive family (natural and spiritual) gives her the courage to face every obstacle with a smile.

NAME: Breonna "BG" Gildon

CHAPTER TITLE: "The Affair"

GENERAL EDUCATION: Breonna obtained a high school diploma in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Currently, Breonna is in the process of receiving her bachelor's degree.

INTERESTS, HOBBIES: Breonna leads a blog and women's life community where its vision is sharing Christian transparency to empower. She also enjoys volunteering through local ministries and serving with her sorority sisters of Sigma Gamma Rho, Sorority, Inc.

HER PURPOSE: Breonna loves to share Christian transparency to empower. She believes every person's story has the power to positively impact other lives for the better! To learn more about

Breonna's Christian transparency platform, visit www.empowerher.blog/.

BOOK III

NAME: LaRae Nicole

CHAPTER TITLE: "I'm a Victor, Not a Victim"

GENERAL EDUCATION: Attended Sacramento City College in Sacramento, California.

INTEREST, HOBBIES: Model, Actress, Singer-songwriter, loves dancing, and enjoys painting.

HER PURPOSE: LaRae has always been passionate about people! LaRae believes everyone deserves to be heard and loved unconditionally!

NAME: Jasmine Goko

CHAPTER TITLE: "Finding My Voice: My Journey of Discovering My Worth and Committing to Celibacy"

GENERAL EDUCATION: Graduated from Long Island University in Brooklyn Class of 2018- MBA. Graduated from Delaware State University Class of 2013 - BS in psychology.

INTERESTS, HOBBIES: Event Planning, Project Management, Makeup, Designing, Singing, Dancing, Worshiping, Modeling, Speaking, Writing, Creating, Mentoring, and Counseling.

HER PURPOSE: Jasmine's purpose in life is to bring others close to God through her testimony, and by being a light to whomever she encounters. Through her bubbly personality, pure heart, skills, and gifts, she can bless others.

NAME: Jacquelyn Mix

TITLE OF YOUR ENTRY: "The Red Flags Girl Should Know"

GENERAL EDUCATION:

Graduated from James Logan High School in Union City, California. Attending college where she will receive an AA in Business Management.

INTERESTS, HOBBIES: Singing, baking, and helping others.

HER PURPOSE: Jacquelyn's passionate about loving and caring for other people. Jacquelyn loves to cook for people and make them laugh. Despite what Jacquelyn has endured, she loves helping others and telling her story about her harrowing experiences, breaking free from the bondage, and what it took for her to leave. Jacquelyn plans on serving as an advocate for women and young girls to help them get free from abusive relationships, even if it is family. She is motivated to help others become resilient, discover their courage to face the unknown, and to love themselves first.

NAME: Jennifer "Jenn" Ousley

CHAPTER TITLE: "If You Only Knew"

GENERAL EDUCATION: Booker T. Washington High School in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The University of Tulsa.

INTERESTS, HOBBIES: Personal Styling. Traveling. Enjoys intellectual conversations. Playing *Connect Four* with family.

HER PURPOSE: Jennifer "Jenn" finds great joy in connecting with other everyday women and mothers to cultivate purpose, create value, and circulate wealth of all kinds. Her passion is to help ladies confidently express who they are daily, on every occasion.

Helpful Resources

Sexual Assault

National Sexual Assault Hotline: (800) 656-4673

Oklahoma Coalition against Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault
State Office www.ocadvsa.org

24-Hour Sexual Assault Hotline: (405) 943-7273

Rape Hotline: (405) 943-7273

Domestic Violence

Nationwide: 1-800-799-7233 | 1-800-787-3224 (TTY)

24-Hour Domestic Violence Hotline: (405) 917-9922

Oklahoma Safe line: (800) 522-7233 | *You can ask about getting a
Victim Protective order on this hotline*

Heartline: 2-1-1 or (405) 848-CARE

VPO (Victims Protective Order): Protective orders are available to people who have been physically abused, stalked, or threatened with imminent physical harm by a family or household member. For more information on the protective order, what types of protective orders are available, how long they last, steps for getting a final protective order, and what happens afterward, visit <http://www.okdhs.org/purpleribbon/howto>

Legal Resources

<http://oklaw.org/resource/domestic-violence-resources-and-links>

Mental Health

SAMHSA's National Helpline: 1-800-662-4357

Suicide Hotlines: (800) 273-8255 or (800) 784-2433

NAMI Oklahoma Helpline: 1-800-583-1264

National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-8255

Sex Trafficking

National Human Trafficking Hotline: 1-888-373-7888

OBN Human Trafficking Hotline: (855) 617-2288

National Autism

National Autism Association: 877-622-2884

or visit <https://nationalautismassociation.org/>

Small Business

If you are looking to start your own small business, visit score.org or call 1-800-634-0245 for more information.

Ten steps to start a small business:

<https://www.sba.gov/business-guide/10-steps-start-your-business>

Life Coaching

Life coaches aid clients in improving their relationships, careers, educational pursuits, and day-to-day lives. Life coaches help clarify goals and identify obstacles holding clients back and providing strategies for overcoming them. If you need life coaching, please connect with Soaring Eagle's Youth and Family Service's at our website: www.soaringeaglesyfs.com or call 918-739-8336.

Podcast

TulsaPeople.com interview: Rewriting your story- Premadonna Braddick at:

https://www.tulsapeople.com/multimedia/podcast/rewriting-your-story-premadonna-braddick/article_e730a0c4-f825-11ea-a3cc-cbe1a42c8435.html?utm_medium=social&utm_source=email&utm_campaign=user-share.

Radio Station

You can catch, *Real Life, Real Talk* on Thursday from 2:00 p.m.–3:30 p.m. CST:

- On the radio at KBOB 89.9 FM
- On their website: <https://kbob899.com>
- On Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/RLRTRadio>