

FOREVER *Young*

*Rashad
and
Katia*

Our Story

11th Anniversary Edition





Katia

I promise to give you my all. I promise that you will never have to face the world alone again, knowing and loving all of your strengths and faults, just as I offer myself to you as yours with all of my strengths and faults.

Rashad

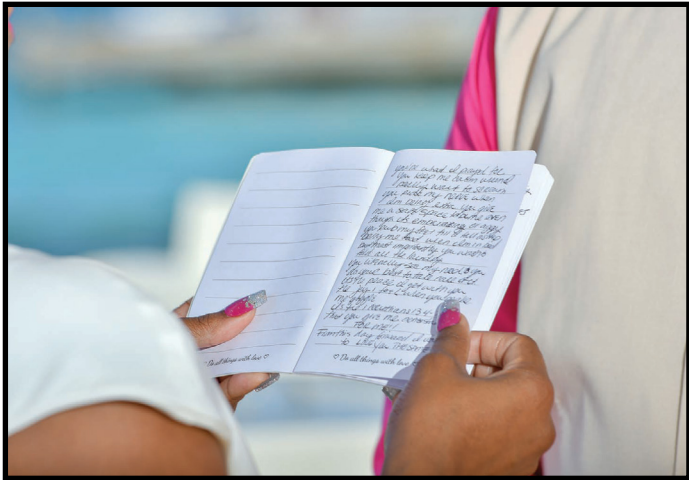


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Rashad

From this day forward, I vow to love you the same way. I vow to do my best every day to choose us and make decisions that enhance our lives. I vow to be present and attentive, to think before reacting, pray before lashing out, and listen before my extraness kicks in.

Katia





The Story of Us

by Mrs. Katia Young



I graduated from boot camp and was transferred to THU (Temporary Holding Unit) on September 1, 2012. Initially, I was told I would be on hold for 1 month to get a waiver approved to become an Air Traffic Controller. Well, I didn't leave until Christmas week. Almost the entire time I was there, I couldn't understand why I was on hold for so long. My waiver took so long to get approved. When it finally did, I left in less than 48 hours. Little did I know God was setting something up.

The Purple Sweater

December 8, 2012

The first day that YOU said you laid eyes on me, you recall me wearing a purple sweater and brown boots. It's amazing how your journey started there before I knew who you were. I will let you tell your story, but not today. I left about 2 weeks from that day.



You Found Me

January 2013

I first met you under the flag poles in Pensacola, Florida. I met up with one of our mutual friends from THU. He introduced us, and I discovered you were an Air Traffic Controller.

Sometime after your birthday on March 10, 2013, you asked me for some study material. I think you needed a reason to talk to me because we had not spoken since we met. You asked if I would watch you play basketball a week or two later. My response surprised you: "That's during chow. Are you going to feed me?" Your response told me everything I needed to know about you. After all, I was 24, and you were super young—I could tell by looking at you. You replied, "No". So, I didn't go watch you play. You asked again, and the same questions and responses came up. It wasn't until the third time that you took a leap. This time, your response was, "Yes, I'll take you to portside to get you some food." I smiled and said, "ok then, what time will you be at the gym?" After that, we just talked in passing and had little conversations here and there until April 13, 2013.

You found me on Facebook, and I messaged you, "You found me." After we talked about a date, I gave you my number; you texted me asking for a date, and I told you you'd have to call. So you called, and we planned for April 19, 2013.



Falling

April 19, 2013

You made reservations at Dharma Blue, a cute little restaurant in downtown Pensacola. We had a great conversation over dinner and then went to the movies to see "The Call." Now, I am not good with suspense movies, but you made sure that I was good. I told you everything about me, and you continued to treat me like a queen. We shared our first kiss that night, and I fell in love. Little did I know, you had fallen for me, too.



The next day, we made plans to hang out on base, and that day turned into a weekend of exploration. That weekend, we said "I love you" for the first time. Whew, quick, I know. But I couldn't help it. We were inseparable from that moment on. When it came time for orders to be chosen, I was blessed to get the orders I requested in Jacksonville, Florida, because, for just 1 week, I was at the top of my class. That week was the week that we chose orders. Look at God. Rashad, not so much. He was among the last to select orders, but God still worked it out. I heard



through the grapevine that the USS IWO JIMA would do a home-port shift to Jacksonville, Florida. So it worked out perfectly, just how God intended it to.



Answered Prayers

June 6, 2013

On this day, I graduated from “A School,” you attended my graduation and finally got to meet Atiya. Up until that point, you had only spoken to my parents and Atiya over the phone. We had already agreed that she would call you Mr. Rashad. Well, I guess she had other plans because when she saw you coming down that hall, she ran towards you and shouted, “Dad!” I was so shocked. I didn’t want you to think I was trying to trap you. She did it on her own accord. You smiled and responded, “Hi, TiTi,” and hugged her right back. She held your hand and stayed glued to your hip the entire graduation.

Afterward, Bobbie told me that Atiya had been praying daily for a Daddy and someone to love Mommy so she could have a Daddy. That made my heart smile. It was the second sign that we were meant to be. The first sign was deja vu. It came out of nowhere and slapped me right in my face when I thought we were moving too fast. Bobbie then said with a big smile that he was a keeper, handsome, loved TiTi, and I knew he was for you. I felt she was right because she was Jesus’ best friend. So, I am sure He told her long before I actually believed it.





I Do

January 3, 2014

On this day, we said "YES" to what we thought a marriage was. We vowed to love, honor and respect each other. After many counseling sessions, we broke ALL of the vows we set. That caused a lot of friction. BUT GOD!! Over the next 8 years, we were different people with different goals, had many ups and downs, got promoted, raised a family, conquered our first deployment, bought a house, and moved across the country.

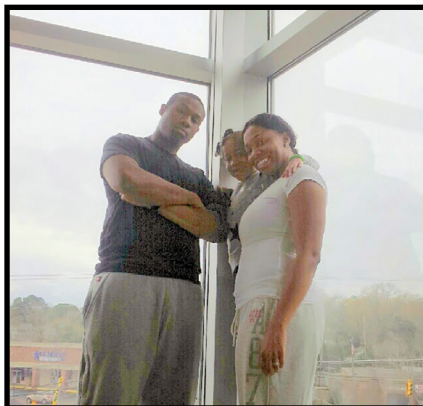


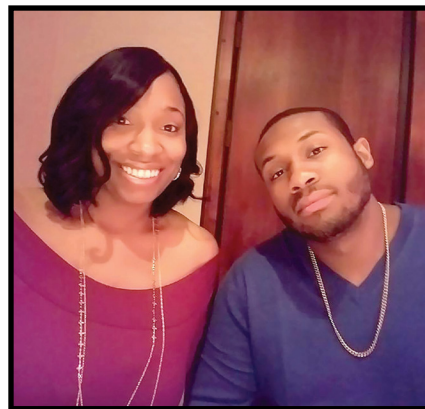
The 8-year struggle

Over the next 8 years, we went through more than our fair share of trials and tribulations. I had counseling myself with 6 different therapists, and we had couples counseling more than I can count on two hands. Still, we struggled. I did not see the value in my husband because I viewed him as a spouse. He wasn't treating me or the household like a husband. Many nights, I cried myself to sleep. I struggled with depression for almost 3 years. I couldn't see the light at the end but stayed because of the children.

These 8 years weren't all bad. We met some amazing married couples that became family, we took family and friend trips, we vacationed often and cruised even more, our bills were always paid on time, we became homeowners, we blessed others, we became godparents, promoted quickly, and we poured ourselves and our gifts into Forward Christian Center. WE LIVED.

But even in ALL of that greatness, we struggled. We struggled to find a balance. We struggled to see the covenant for what it was because of hurt, misunderstandings, and silent expectations, but mostly because of BLINDERS. Those blinders consisted of a lack of grace shown towards each other, a lack of understanding, and a lack of commitment because of where we thought we should be, who we thought we should be, and why we didn't feel





good about being married. We had so many triumphs followed by so many setbacks. It was very exhausting.

I decided in 2018 that I wanted to get divorced, but I didn't voice it till 2019. Still, I didn't divorce Rashad because I needed us to stay together for Aniya. I didn't want to move away from him and rob him and the girls of the opportunity to be together consistently. So, I stayed.

In 2019, before we left Jacksonville, two people gave me a word that went through 1 ear and out the other. I hadn't told anyone but my little crew that I wanted a divorce. But these two pastors had no clue; they only saw me struggling. I believe God put it on their heart to minister to me. Pastor Sky told me that love is a choice and that I have to choose every day to do that and find the signs that show me that he loves me. She even said, "Don't leave for 12 months. Just sit there and watch God change your heart about your husband and your marriage." I just smiled, said, "Yes, ma'am," hugged her, and kept moving. Pastor Sam told me a week later, "If God ain't say move, you don't move. It doesn't matter if you think the change would be good. If God ain't say move, then don't move."

After that, until we left for Cali, there were many garage talks at the Cox's house, tears and counseling arguments, quiet and loud support, listening ears, and many tears. Duck and Ashlee supported us through our mess, pushing us to be better and to think and understand differently.

They conveyed what a marriage is versus what we thought it was. Marriage is full of trials and tribulations.

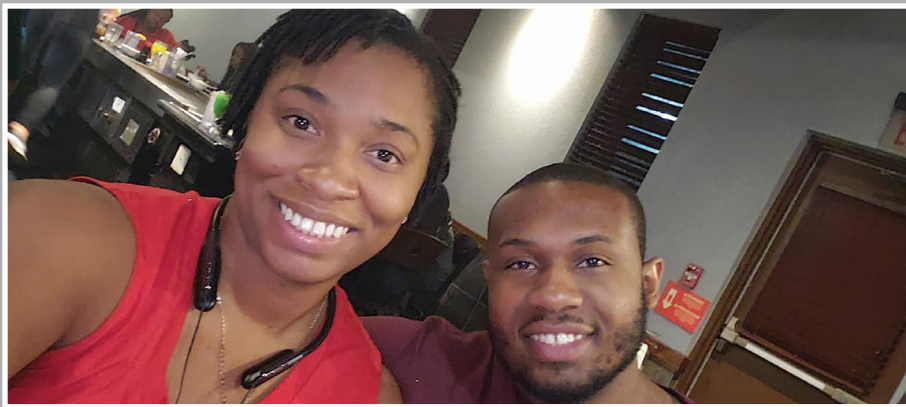
They were in our faces, and I stopped fighting. I gave up. I wanted out. Our friends constantly prayed for us, and Nick and Rochelle made us want to be better. Every time we spoke, they would say we were praying for y'all.

In September 2020, we headed towards Cali, and I decided that we would start over. Clean slate. Two months later, I QUIT! I didn't want to do it anymore. I just felt so detached, and I couldn't shake it. I called my Bobbie and told her I wanted to get a divorce. She asked me why, and I explained to her as best I could. Her response made me look at the phone like huh. She said, "You sure? Because if you are, I'll support and pray for you, but if you're not, I'll just pray for you." I was like, she gonna support me with this divorce BET. Following that conversation, in every conversation we had for the next year, she said, "Have you come to your senses yet?" I knew she didn't want us to split; that was my 1st sign that maybe God told her to tell me to sit down somewhere.

I could see Rashad loved me, but I couldn't feel it because of those walls; the heart blockages I had were embedded in a way that caused me to be numb. It turned a sweet gesture into an aggravating headache. Over the next 15 months, Rashad took care of the kids when I was away, and when I came home, I was still "in my feelings." Well, that all changed in January 2022.









The Turning Point

January 3, 2022

The first day of my deployment was not a celebration, even though it was our anniversary. On this day, I felt like I was set free. This is where the testimony began. Until then, I tried to stay committed to us, but I was in the way. I stopped seeing what God was doing in year 4. I went into a deep depression; I lashed out; I even forgot who I was and completely lost myself.

On December 30, 2021, I had officially filed for divorce. Rashad didn't want it, but he would do it if it made me happy. He told me he would continue fighting for me and his family until we were officially divorced. Well, I was set to be back in August. By then, the 6 month California requirement would have elapsed, and we would be divorced. I could finally be happy. Well, God proved to me that my way was NOT His way.

Deployment was very difficult for me. I had a successful 7 months, but I was alone. God made it so that the only person in my corner was Rashad. Throughout this entire time, I was still waiting for the judge to sign those papers, not knowing that each day Rashad showed up, he knocked those walls down one by one.

It's something about that number. God commanded Joshua to go around the walls of Jericho for six days, once every day and seven times on the seventh



day. After those 7 days, the walls of Jericho fell. Seven months and my walls fell!!!!

Each month, Rashad showed me that he loved me no matter what. Each month, a piece of me became softer. During the 7th month, the last month of deployment, I had nightmares almost every night until I stopped and listened to what God was trying to tell me. I woke up, called the courthouse and checked on my divorce status. I mean, it's month seven; I should be divorced! WELL GOD HAD OTHER PLANS. When the clerk looked for my file, all she could say was that it was signed by the judge, but it still needed to be filed by the judge. She wanted me to call her back the next day so that she could look for the file. So, NOPE!! I still was not divorced.

I called Rashad with a hypothetical question: "What if he cancels the divorce and we date? We can give it a year; if nothing changes, we can go back through the process." I was shocked at the words coming out of my mouth. He agreed. The next day, I called the clerk back. She still could not find my paperwork. Even though the judge signed it, it could not be filed if the physical paperwork was not in hand. So, I asked her, "What if I just want to cancel the divorce?" I was informed that I would have to sign some paperwork with Rashad, and he would have to bring it to the courthouse the following day.

Rashad signed that paperwork and was late to work because he wanted to ensure they got it. I called the clerk to make sure she had gotten the new paperwork. SHE DID!!! Guess what else happened? She found OUR DIVORCE PAPERWORK, signed, NOT FILED, and sitting under a stack of papers on the judge's desk in a place where our paperwork was not supposed to be. And get this: our file was the only file missing. You can't tell me that GOD DID NOT PLAY A PART IN THIS MARRIAGE!!!

Emotional Rollercoaster

August 2022

When I got home from deployment, I made it very clear that I wanted to date and nothing else. I was forced out of my comfort zone, and each month after that, he CONTINUED to win me over with flowers, food, forced QT, and laundry. So, I purchased a couples' vacation for the next year to have

some alone time because I fell in love with him again after our last couple's trip out of the country. That was back in 2017, so history may repeat itself.

Initially, it was supposed to be in August, but the ship had other plans. God knew I needed more time to experience the change in Rashad. This trip was just supposed to be a vacation. What is funny is that our best friends (Nicholas and Rochelle Footman) were supposed to join us. It wasn't supposed to be anything but a vacation. Still, somehow, I opened my big mouth and told Rochelle, "I'm thinking about renewing my vows when we go." Man, oh, man. Yes, I had thought about it, but it was sealed when it came out of my mouth.

Over the next year, we dated, got to know each other, and put the work in. Was it easy? Absolutely not. Even though God performed miracles, I still didn't see it. I was still unsure if I wanted to be with him. I didn't know how this vow renewal was going to take place. I was just so unsure. I just continued to go through the motions and emotions. I went to therapy every week and tried the best I could to have that mindset shift. I experienced every emotion you could think of. I mean ALL of them!! I finally came to my senses when God tapped me on the shoulder again. It wasn't a tap; this time, it was more like a push or a jolt.

Dreams Do Come True

June 2023

I began having very vivid dreams. I woke up in the middle of the night, hacking my brains out because I felt like I was choking. This went on for a couple months. Because I could not sleep through the night, I got up early, exhausted. At the end of July, I had a dream. In this dream, Rashad was dying. I tried to save him, but I couldn't. He passed away, and I cried over his body. I was utterly lost in this dream; I was overcome with sorrow and grief. I woke out of my sleep just looking at him, thinking what I would do if he was gone. Then God spoke to me. He said, "You're taking advantage of what you asked Me for; look at the journal entry you wrote during therapy. You are killing the gift I gave you."

I opened up my journal, and there it was. The list of things I wanted in my marriage from my HUS-



BAND: A solid foundation of trust and loyalty, A best friend, Spoiled, Has the time for me, is Dedicated, Believes in God, goes to church, Wants our kids to be raised in the church, family-oriented, Loves to brag about me to the world, Shows me off, Makes me feel like I am the only one cause I am, Provides, Security, Safety, Spontaneous, Fun, Cooks, Cleans, Stable, Has goals of his own and strives to achieve them, Unconditional Love, joy and TRUST!!!! Man, why was I so blind before! From that day, I looked at him in a different light. I didn't want to lose what I asked for because I was being "stubborn" in my head about this fairytale love. I already had what I desired. I started smiling more at the little things he would do for me That I never noticed before.

Joy

August 21, 2023

The day my name was announced over the 1MC ACC Young. I made it. I cried so bad, and the 1st person I thought about was Rashad. I wanted this to be a win for US. I wanted him to celebrate with me because WE MADE IT! He had gone through every piece of my career with me, and whether he made it didn't matter. Over the next six weeks, I grew even more of an appreciation for him. Even though he didn't pick up, he rode with me daily! He made sure Niya was on a schedule, her homework was done, I had good keto meals to eat every day, helped me with my assignments, and made sure I was getting rest. THAT MAN TOOK CARE OF ME. He rubbed my feet when I couldn't walk, encouraged me when I was ready to quit, and, most importantly, never complained about how tired I was. He supported me! He read my mind and body language and could tell my mood. I couldn't care for myself, so he did that for me. When I had time to sit, more and more joy filled me, and after it was all said and done, on my pinning day, he took those steps with me just like he did when I graduated A-school all the way back in 2012. We did it together then, and we're doing it together now. I knew then that he loved me beyond any fathom of thought I had ever imagined.

When the dust settled and it was time to head to Jamaica, I was finally able to sit still and Thank God for opening my eyes to a man who met me where I was and continued to walk with me even though I

took a hard left up the backside of this steep mountain that had warning signs that said "DO NOT ENTER," "YOU'RE GOING THE WRONG WAY!," "GIRL, I SAID WRONG WAY," "TURN AROUND IMMEDIATELY and "FINE, DON'T LISTEN THEN." I will never deserve such an amazing man. The maturity and love he has displayed in the last three years is astonishing. I am overcome with joy and realize I NEVER had that. All I can say is GOD DID THAT!! He turned my mourning into dancing and my sorrow into joy. I believe that God can do anything! He can change the coldest of hearts and straighten the most crooked paths. He amazes me!

Fruit-Filled Marriage

October 12, 2023

Nine years, nine months, and nine days into our marriage, we stood before each other, close friends, family, and God and recommitted ourselves to each other. It's amazing how God works. Even more amazing that He continues working in ways we don't see. When we planned to renew our vows, it didn't occur to me that it would be 9 Years, 9 Months and 9 Days into our marriage. I didn't realize it until the morning of the ceremony while I was getting ready. I started thinking about what this day meant to our marriage and me. Well, I knew it had something to do with God. So, I started thinking. What does "9" have to do with anything?

The number nine also symbolizes completion. Knowing this and the nine fruits of the Spirit, it clicked that God was showing me that even OUR marriage, the one that went through so many "flesh" issues, is STILL a gift from Him. While going through counseling, one of my homework assignments was to write down what I wanted in my marriage. I KID YOU NOT that joy, unconditional love, trust, and a best friend were just some of the things that I placed on that list. I couldn't have those things without forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. God turned my perspective around and showed me we were made to "do life" together. A threefold cord cannot be easily broken; without Him in the midst of this marriage, we couldn't be here. We would have not made it. God was working when I quit in the middle of our bad times.

I don't know what God has in store for us, but I do know that HE IS ABLE TO DO ANY AND EVERYTHING. Our marriage is a testimony, and all the trials and tribulations we have endured set us up with lessons of a lifetime. I am thankful to God for what He has done for us, and I intend to keep our testimony at the forefront of my mind at all times.



— THE —
FRUIT
OF THE
Spirit
is
Love, Joy
peace
FORBEARANCE
KINDNESS
GOODNESS
FAITHFULNESS
Gentleness
— AND —
SELF-CONTROL
➤ **GAL. 5:22** ➤



His Vows

Vow Renewal 2023

Nine years, nine months, and nine days ago was the day that I will always remember. That was the day we decided to go on this journey called marriage. At the time, I thought our journey was going to be a piece of cake, but then I learned over time that it wasn't. I had many things to overcome, like being the man of the house, being your security blanket, and knowing that when you asked me to do the dishes, you meant right now. I had to learn your love languages and how to read the situation better to make sure you are okay. Over the years, we had our fair share of ups and downs.

Today, I can proudly say I am not the same boy you originally married. Today, I want to thank you as you played a part in me becoming the man I am today. So, as a man and as your husband, I promise to give you my all. I promise that you will never have to face the world alone again, knowing and loving all of your strengths and faults, just as I offer myself to you as yours with all of my strengths and faults. I will be there for you in your times of need, just as I know I can turn to you when I need a guiding hand. Katia, with you by my side together, we can weather any storm, no matter the season of our lives. I have found my forever partner. With you in my life, I could never be lonely again. I'm in awe of you, our bond, and our potential. I promise to remain in awe while I cherish you for all the rest of our days.



Her Vows

Vow Renewal 2023

First Corinthians 13:4-7 says, "Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

Sixteen months ago, I told you what I needed from you, that we would only date, nothing more and that you must respect my boundaries and how fast or slow I chose to move. You're still here. That's Patience.

You listened, understood and showed every action that I needed you to deliver. That's kindness.



You let me make my mistakes without counting them; you loved my flaws when I was unlovable. You never compared me to others, never talked down about me and always made sure to look out for me. That is love. So, thank you.

Thank you for mending my broken heart. With perseverance, you showed up when I didn't want you to. You kept trusting God, and with lots of prayer, faith, and hope, you healed a piece of me I never thought could be warm again.

I now know that you are more to me than I ever expected or imagined. You're what I prayed for. You keep me calm when I really want to scream. You ride my nerves when I'm being extra. You give me a safe space to be me. Even though it's embarrassing or aggy, you rub my feet till I fall asleep, bring me food when I'm in bed, but most importantly, wash and fold all the laundry. You literally see my need, and you do your best to take care of it.

It's the peace I get with you and the joy I feel when you make me giggle. It's the 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 love that you give me. From this day forward, I vow to love you the same way. I vow to do my best every day to choose us and make decisions that enhance our lives. I vow to be present and attentive, to think before reacting, pray before lashing out, and listen before my extraness kicks in.

Today, my heart loves you more than it has ever loved anyone. You are the true definition of faith-without-works-is-dead. Because of your faith in us, God performed His miracle and worked it out. I'm forever grateful. I love you, Honeybun.



