

# Sankofa Season

## MEET THE GREAT 8-EIGHT SOULS, ONE SONG OF GRATITUDE

I'm convinced that November—that soulful eleventh month of the year—was created to make us pause, look back, and give thanks not just for the big wins, but for the small, sacred moments that shaped us. It's the time when gratitude takes center stage and reflection becomes an act of healing.

Now, I may be a proud Chicagoan by birth, but let me tell you—those icy winds and snowstorms never made me feel thankful. California sunshine has spoiled me, and I'll gladly trade a snow shovel for a gentle ocean breeze any day. But even back home, Thanksgiving was never about the history books. It was about soul—slowing down, gathering the family, and filling the house with laughter, love, and the smell of something good cooking.

In my family, our Thanksgiving planning sounds like a choir of voices. Canned or fresh collard greens? Who's making the baked mac and cheese? And don't forget the cranberry sauce. We laugh about how my grandmother, Meme, taught me to make the best sweet potato pies and peach cobbler—the kind with more dumplings than peaches, because that's how the ancestors intended it. And please, don't even mention boxed stuffing in Meme's kitchen. Everything came from scratch, seasoned with love and wisdom.

The year 2025 has tested me. I've spent more time on

my knees in prayer than I ever have before. But when you know God for yourself—when you've seen what prayer can do—the conversation becomes constant. God becomes your bestie, your confidant, your daily counselor. We talk every day, and I don't need a Sunday morning to feel the Spirit moving.

This season, my Sankofa Vow—a promise to go back and fetch what is good from the past—is dedicated to eight phenomenal women: Auntie Saundra, Vanessa, Nara (Esperanza), Yolanda, Rosana, Maryam, Teresa, and Roselyn.

What started as a writing class for seniors at the Belle Haven Community Campus in Menlo Park has become one of the most fulfilling journeys of my life. Every Wednesday and some Thursdays, we gather as a circle of storytellers—wise, funny, brilliant women—who remind me that the power of story runs deep in our bloodlines.

When I first sat down with Natalya and Rondell at the Belle Haven Community Campus, they trusted me to bring something magical to life—and the Message2Me Storytelling Class



was born.

Then came Teresa, my Mexican sister with the purest heart. English isn't her first language, but her spirit speaks volumes. When she shares, her passion fills the room—so much so that I nicknamed her "Mother Teresa." She laughed and called herself my "walking flyer," recruiting others with joy.

Rosana and Vanessa—best friends for over twenty years—bring their own flavor to the mix. Rosana, proud and rooted in her Indigenous and Mexican heritage, shares pieces of her history with honesty and curiosity. Vanessa, our African American queen, keeps us laughing with stories and old photos of her younger self. She swears she has looked like a grown-up her whole life, and maybe she's right—because wisdom has always lived in her eyes.

Yolanda is quiet but powerful. She shares photos of lost friends and speaks truth about grief—not for pity, but for peace. When Roselyn opens up, her stories touch the heart. They've both carried loss—friends, partners, loved ones—and they joined the class to heal through storytelling. Their transparency teaches us about courage and the quiet power of grief transformed into gratitude, through storytelling.

Nara (Esperanza), whose name means hope, is from Serbia, and she fits right in like she's been part of our circle for years. She came in with an open heart, ready to learn and love. Maryam, tell her stories with

gentleness and grace, always with that beautiful smile that radiates peace. She is from Iran, speaks gently but powerfully, painting vivid portraits of her family and the love that binds them across continents.

Auntie Saundra, our spiritual matriarch, keeps us grounded in faith. When she speaks about God, you feel it—like a Sunday morning choir note that hangs in the air just long enough to stir something profound inside your heart. She walks in love. When she grabs that imaginary mic, we all know a word is coming.

Together, we are a tapestry—woven with laughter, prayer, and resilience. The two hours we share each week feed the spirit like Sunday dinner. Every woman shows up, open-hearted and ready to learn, to write, and to heal.

And while some folks complain about the cost of living in California, I've learned that what we're really paying for is the richness of diversity—the sunshine, the community, and the freedom to build something meaningful.

As I sit with these women, I feel my ancestors smiling. I can almost hear my mother and grandmother—those strong, praying women—whispering from the heavens, "Cherie, we're proud of you."

So this November, I am thankful. Thankful for the Message2Me family—Auntie Saundra, Vanessa, Rosana, Esperanza, Yolanda, Roselyn, Maryam, Teresa, and me, Chillin—and grateful to the Belle Haven Community Campus for giving us space to make something magical together.

Because when we come together—across cultures, across generations—we don't just tell stories.

We make history.

*I am Chillin, Founder and Innovative Extraordinaire of The Soutown Magazine. I am keeping my Sankofa Vow—reaching back to honor the wisdom of those who came before us while carrying their legacy forward. Thank you for having SOUL! ☺*

