

BOUNDLESS, BLACK, & BEAUTIFUL:

A BRAVE BREAKTHROUGH

For a long time, if you asked me when I stepped into the full sacredness of my womanhood, I might have told you it was the moment I brought my son, Roshawn, into the world. I was just seventeen. But if I am being completely honest with my soul, I was still a young Black girl carrying a heavy, adult reality. Even amidst the joy of motherhood, I dreamed of a wider sky. Life had gotten

real, very fast, and an insatiable hunger for absolute freedom took deep root in my spirit.

In my early twenties, I answered the call for something greater. I packed up my dreams and moved from the

familiar soil of Waterloo, Iowa, straight into the high-energy rhythm and electric heartbeat of Chicago. I was fiercely determined to break out of the restrictive, suffocating box of the “teen mom” stereotype and claim a better future for my son and myself.

I braved the Windy City alone at first, sharing a space with a roommate to anchor the expenses while I laid the foundation. Once my footing was secure, Roshawn joined me. By then, my brave little boy was already in the second grade.

Then came the defining crucible—the moment that shook the girl right out of me and forced me to stand entirely in my own power. A relationship crumbled. I found myself devastated by a man who chose to deal with someone else right before my very eyes. Standing in the wreckage of that heartbreak, a profound clarity washed over me: I had a little Black boy depending on me to survive this massive city. I couldn’t afford to be broken. It was time to become the sole author of my own destiny.

I leaned heavily on the roots that raised me, temporarily returning to Iowa to re-center my spirit. I may have faltered in Chicago without a flawless blueprint, but the intoxicating taste of independence had changed me forever. I returned to the Windy City, and it was there that I fell in love with Godwin—a beautiful, proud Nigerian man. We married, beautifully blending our rich cultures, our heritages, and our grandest dreams.

But being a Black wife in the 1980s carried its own intense weight. It was an era when international

marriages between American women and immigrants were subjected to relentless, hostile scrutiny. We had to fight fiercely, day in and day out, just to prove our love was legitimate, constantly defending our peace against systemic walls. And then, the bottom fell out. Godwin was deported.

For years, I held onto hope, carrying the heavy, complicated grief of that separation, refusing to let the system break my spirit. But true resilience also knows when to release what no longer

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serves the soul. When I finally chose to let that weight go, standing tall through the scrutiny, the betrayal, and the loss, my womanhood was permanently cemented. I returned to Iowa for good.

I poured my soul into education, viewing it as the ultimate passport to freedom. Step by step, I climbed: first earning my Associate degree from Hawkeye Community College, followed by my Bachelor’s, and ultimately pushing all the way through to a Master’s degree in Mass Communication. With every degree earned, the shackles of my past circumstances dropped away, and the universe began shifting in my favor.

I stepped into the powerful lineage of Black media when I accepted a position as the Assistant Development Director at KBBG Radio. It was there that the ancestors blessed me with a phenomenal mentor: Lou Porter, the station’s president and the brilliant wife of its founder, Jimmy Porter.

While my beautiful mother had spent her life selflessly raising eight children after having her first at fourteen, Lou was the woman who taught me how to master the professional world. In our quiet times of growth, she poured crucial business wisdom into me, showing me exactly how a Black woman commands a room with grace, intellect, and undeniable authority.

Armed with that wisdom, I stopped waiting for an invitation. I claimed my seat at the table and ran for public office.

In the year 2000, I won a seat on the City Council. The teen mom from Waterloo was suddenly traveling the globe as a respected statesman—walking the grounds of Nigeria, China, and Turkey. Life was flourishing, my career was impactful, and most importantly, my son was secure. The heavy worries that used to anchor me down were entirely gone.

Through the noise of politics, my faith remained the ultimate anchor of my freedom. I sang my praises in the choir at Antioch Baptist Church under the late, great Pastor Michael Lee Coleman. Whenever the world got too loud or tried to box me in, I went to God to remind myself of exactly who and whose I was.

My message to young mothers is, “You are not trapped ... stay persistent, keep your eyes fixed on the horizon, and believe fiercely in your own divine power. Do not let pride trick you into thinking you must carry the weight of the universe alone. You need a village, and sometimes, you have to dig past the immediate family drama to find the chosen tribe you can truly trust to lift you up. Stand tall, keep going, and watch how far your wings will take you.

I am Deborah Berry TS#30 of 52 of The SoulTown Magazine. I want to thank you all for having SOUL! 🌟



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