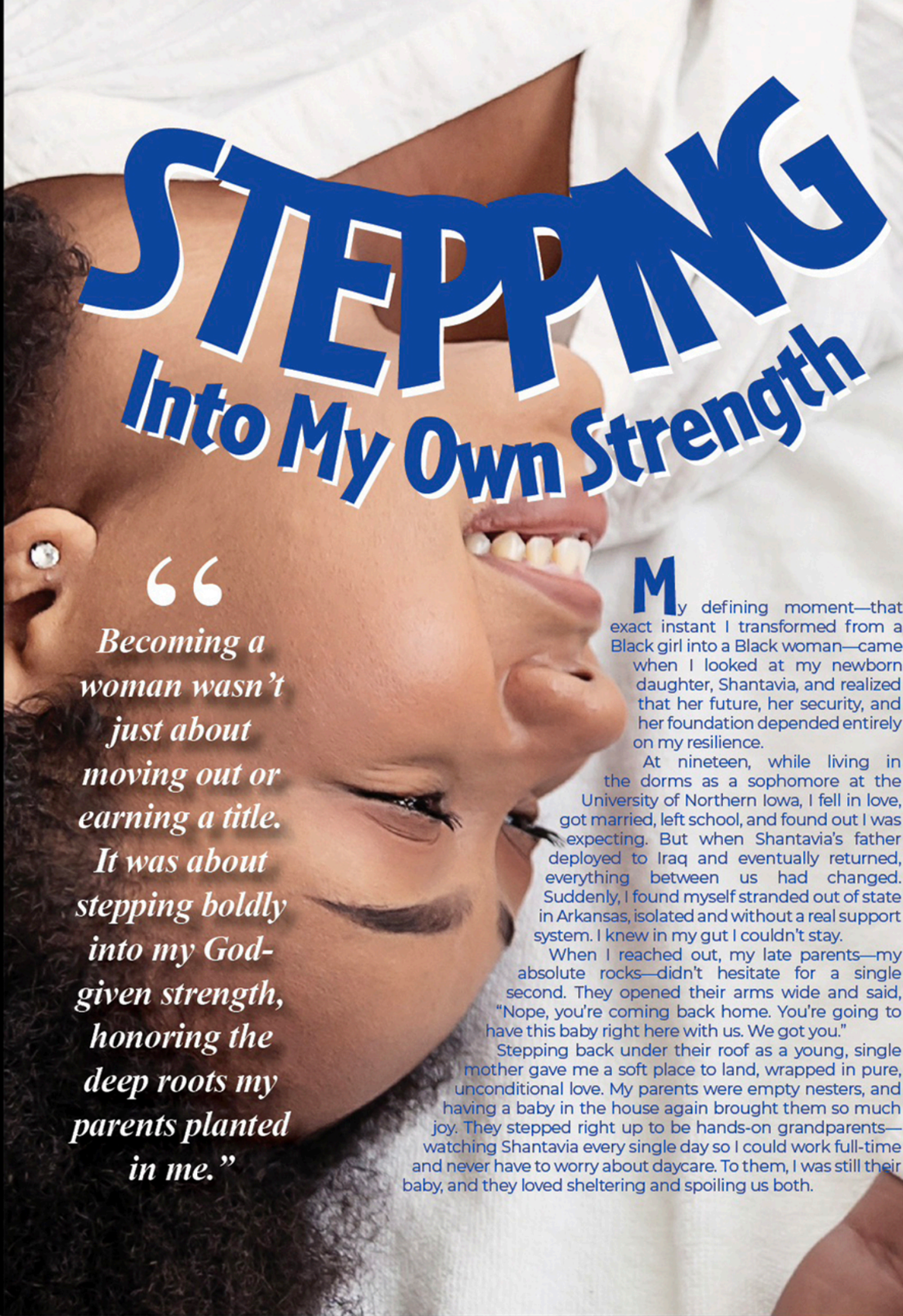
STEPPING
Into My Own Strength



“Becoming a woman wasn’t just about moving out or earning a title. It was about stepping boldly into my God-given strength, honoring the deep roots my parents planted in me.”

My defining moment—that exact instant I transformed from a Black girl into a Black woman—came when I looked at my newborn daughter, Shantavia, and realized that her future, her security, and her foundation depended entirely on my resilience.

At nineteen, while living in the dorms as a sophomore at the University of Northern Iowa, I fell in love, got married, left school, and found out I was expecting. But when Shantavia’s father deployed to Iraq and eventually returned, everything between us had changed. Suddenly, I found myself stranded out of state in Arkansas, isolated and without a real support system. I knew in my gut I couldn’t stay.

When I reached out, my late parents—my absolute rocks—didn’t hesitate for a single second. They opened their arms wide and said, “Nope, you’re coming back home. You’re going to have this baby right here with us. We got you.”

Stepping back under their roof as a young, single mother gave me a soft place to land, wrapped in pure, unconditional love. My parents were empty nesters, and having a baby in the house again brought them so much joy. They stepped right up to be hands-on grandparents—watching Shantavia every single day so I could work full-time and never have to worry about daycare. To them, I was still their baby, and they loved sheltering and spoiling us both.

Yet inside, a real fire was burning. I was caught in this tug-of-war between the comfort of home and the calling of my own independent purpose. I loved my parents deeply, but I knew I couldn’t stay nestled under their wing forever. I needed to stand on my own two feet and show my daughter what strength looked like.

My initial plan to gain financial independence was to head back to school and finish my degree. But life had other plans. When Shantavia was about four or five years old, my father suffered a heart attack. In an instant, my focus shifted from stepping out to leaning in. During that season of crisis, my partner, Juan—who would later become my husband—moved into my parents’ home with me so we could help take care of my dad together.

Living under one roof with my parents, my young daughter, and my partner brought its own unique dynamic, but it deepened my respect for family loyalty. It forced me to grow up fast, teaching me how to balance grace, patience, and mature decision-making. Getting to care for the parents who had held me up when I fell was one of the greatest honors of my life.

Looking back, if I could do it all over again, I might have slowed down to finish my education before jumping into early marriage and motherhood. But every hurdle, every turn, and every lesson taught me the true essence of Black womanhood: it’s about adapting, nurturing fiercely, and building a foundation that lasts.

My late parents gave me the incredible gift of unconditional grace when I needed to reset my life. Today, that profound legacy is the very ground I stand on, and it’s the exact promise I pass down to my own children: No matter what this world throws your way, you will never have to struggle alone.

Becoming a woman wasn’t just about moving out or earning a title. It was about stepping boldly into my God-given strength, honoring the deep roots my parents planted in me, and creating a safe, loving haven for my family.

I am Sheila Hollingsworth, TS#43 of 52 of The Soultown Magazine. I want to thank you all for having SOUL!



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