

VOSAS

VOICES OF SEXUAL ABUSE SURVIVORS

SPOTLIGHT



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"Under Construction"

Lydia Jones

inform
encourage
empower

VOSAS MAGAZINE

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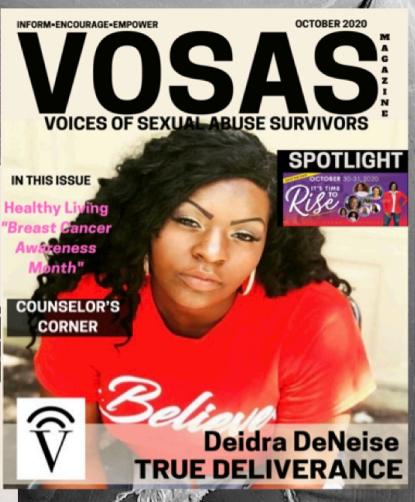
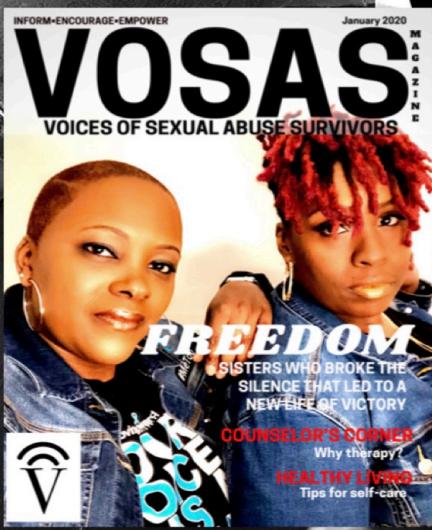




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FLAWS AND ALL...



Trauma is one thing that can show up in many different ways. What one person may experience is totally different from what another person may experience. The effects can be very subtle, or very noticeable. One thing that I have realized is that sometimes traumatic events from the past can have a person devaluing who they are. Recently in one of my therapy sessions, my homework was to look at myself in the mirror and write down what I see, then write down what I would like to see. As I began writing, I picked out everything negative about myself. I realized what I was doing, and I thought, wait a minute! Everything about me is not negative! As a matter of fact, I have come a long way, and am now on my way to being the best woman I have ever been. I stepped back from my assignment for a second and thought about how much I had accomplished and started writing down the positive things. No matter what life has dealt any of us, there is still greatness inside each of us. It may take time to tap into everything we are, but the greatness is there. After the mirror experience, I decided to embrace my whole self, flaws and all. Instead of picking out my faults as some terrible part of me, all of it, the good and the bad, makes me uniquely me. If it had not been for some of my mistakes, I wouldn't be who I am today, and I love this person. Yes there will always be things in your life you'll want to improve, but everything about you is beautiful, your flaws and all. God made no mistakes when He created each of us. As a matter of fact He says we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Take some time and celebrate who you are. It's okay if you're not where you want to be, the fact that you are here means you're on your way, enjoy the ride, flaws and all!



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Survivor's Story



Under Construction...
Please Excuse The Mess

Often times in life there comes a time when things happen to us that will cause us to look a mess, act a mess, and be a mess. Have you ever driven down highway 64/40 (depending on which area of St. Louis you are from) and ran into the mess on the highway caused by the never-ending construction (well at least it seems never ending) and said to yourself, "What a Mess?" How about walking into Barnes Hospital while they were building the new wing and saw all the tarps, boards, and cement, then you look up and see the sign asking for your patience while they complete the work that says, "Under Construction: Please Excuse the Mess." In both scenarios it was inconvenient, ugly and hard to look at; however, the end result is a thing of beauty. This is exactly how I would describe my life and all that has transpired in it. I can't remember exactly how old I was when it started; however, what I do remember is the age I was when I realized it wasn't

right. I was around 6 years old when I understood what was happening to me by my oldest nephew (step-nephew). He used to babysit my brother and I while my mother worked. This continued for a few years and I guess his brother saw or caught wind and instead of putting a stop to it, he threatened me by saying he would tell if I didn't let him do what his brother was doing. Me being the kid who never wanted to get into trouble I complied and kept my mouth shut as instructed. No child male or female should be exposed to sexual sensations before they are old enough to process it or understand it mentally, physically and emotionally. Just as many before me, I never told. I kept it to myself. In my youth it was out of fear, and as I got older it was out of shame. It finally stopped when I vehemently refused to be alone with them anymore, and insisted I was old enough to watch myself in the evenings. On the weekends and summers, I

started spending my free time at my cousin house only to be exposed to a different type of what I now know is abuse by an older female cousin. We would pretend to be engaged in sexual intercourse and she would use wadded toilet paper to mimic the male genitalia. Being young and impressionable I went along and once again I kept it to myself as I didn't understand that it was right nor normal. Having experienced all of these I must admit I was confused about everything regarding sexuality and it wasn't until I met my first so-called boyfriend that I realized what was right and normal. We made plans to celebrate our anniversary and lose our virginity together and I got scared and went to Michigan. I always say that experiencing sexual abuse has three outcomes; promiscuity, same sex relationships, or no sexual relationships and I've experienced all three. My life was a mess just like those construction zones.

I developed a thick skin by high school and considered myself the ugly duckling. My dark skin, tomboy build, and love of sports coupled with the dark cloud I felt lived over me because of my past I didn't see myself as one that would be considered beautiful. When I did want the attention of boys, they preferred the lighter girls so I resolved to be the smartest if I wasn't the prettiest. The cloud of shame continued to cover me, but by now I have mastered being fine and looking the part so no one would be the wiser. I married young (after high school), had my children young and got divorced all before 26. I married again at 30, and it wasn't until my second marriage that I admitted what happened to me. It wasn't because I wanted to as by now, I have taken control of my life, discovered my power to do just that and vowed to never let anyone make me feel as if I had no control over when, where or how I had sex, not even my husband. The cloud is

still over me, but now I am a subject matter expert at my façade. The construction was complete or so I thought. I'd built the walls that protected my secrets and hid my shame and covered them with designer wall paper. I took down the signs signaling my construction zone and deemed project Lydia's secret complete. Living my life, raising my children, traveling the country singing quartet gospel music, being a wife, and whatever else society deems successful is what I had going on and then in what seems like an instant my foundation crumbled when my cousin by marriage revealed her truths to my husband and told him she suspected I'd had that same experience and that she would bet the farm on it. They asked, I finally broke down and admitted it, but refused to talk about it. Opening these old wounds caused me to act out. Coupled with the stresses that were happening in my marriage because of my refusal to perform certain sexual acts, I realized that my

demons were back and my power to control what happens to me was being attacked and I refused to allow that to happen. I knew I would not and could not go down this road, God had been too good to me and I had too much to lose. I decided to go to counseling and it was then that I discovered that holding on to these secrets were slowly eating away at me like a cancer and they were the reason I did not associate sex and love. My therapist helped me see that while I survived it, I hadn't dealt with it and thus it was still impacting my life. I realized that if I didn't, I would continue living behind my mask and it would continue to negatively affect my life.

The more I went to counseling the more I began to see the clouds disperse. After my second marriage ended, I was talking with my then co-worker, church sister, and friend who had just had the courage along with her sister to speak their truths that I felt compelled to tell mine. I told her one day

and I felt the sun for the first time. I felt the weight lift and she let me know that I was okay, I survived, and I conquered it. She let me know that I was not alone and that I was strong and my story would help others.

As I look back over my life, now at age 50, I see how remaining silent all these years has had some very negative impacts on my life, my relationships and even my children. Today, I am no longer ashamed of my truth and I've promised to tell it as often as I can if it will help someone else to know they are not alone and that they too can survive. Speaking up and Speaking out strengthens me with each opportunity to do so, and for that I say, "Thank You Lord, it is only You!" I know that going through that was part of "My Growth and Development Process", because years later God knew I would

need to know how to stand strong because some more dark days were coming my way (the murder of my daughter) and I would need to know that I would survive them just like I did before. What I would



impart to others suffering in silence is, you are NOT alone. Be silent no more because you are the key to your survival and to breaking the cycle. You may be the very one who not only saves yourself, but

the family, and the next victim.

My life was truly a messy construction zone that I hid very well. However, as I've matured in Christ, I realize that God has a plan for our lives and I

understand that all things worked together for my good and His Glory.

Romans 8:25 "All things work together for the good of them who loves the Lord." Not dealing with my issues caused me to make some poor decisions. However, I often hear the words to a song by Cedric Shannon-Rives that says, "I'm Not What I Did," which gives me courage and strength to realize that everything that happened to me built the Lydia you see today; strong, resilient, driven and motivated to help others.

So yes, I am still Under Construction, just not as messy because at the end of the day I Survived It.

Lydia Jones

THE COUNSELOR'S CORNER



Andrea Jackson, CIT , contributor

Supervised by:Jean Moretto, PhD, LPC

Andrea completed her Master of Arts degree in Professional Counseling May 2017 from Lindenwood University. Andrea believes that a primary means of change lies in developing a strong therapeutic and collaborative relationship. She utilizes a strengths based approach in working with clients to develop a unique fit to their personal needs and draws from several modalities including, but not limited to, cognitive behavioral therapy and solution based work.

Andrea has worked with clients of all ages and has dealt extensively with depression, anxiety, sexual abuse and behavioral issues. When requested by the client, Andrea finds that seeking God authentically in session results in healing and can lead to life forming changes.

Andrea is a member and also on the board at Moving4ward Ministries, a 501c3 organization created to provide the community of St. Louis and St. Charles counties of Missouri, a place where adult survivors of sexual abuse ages 18 and older, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, can feel safe sharing experiences that has caused lasting effects on professional resources so healing can begin. Andrea is Youth Mental Health First Aid Certified. Andrea is also a member of the International Honor Society of Counseling Professionals, Chi Sigma Iota.



HELP WITH RELATIONSHIPS



Psychotherapy can also help individuals improve their relationships. Mental health professionals focus on helping people open lines of communication with each other. People use this treatment to gain perspective on relationship problems that may arise. They can also use therapy preventatively when they know trouble is in their future.

Among the types of therapy for relationships commonly sought:

Family therapy – this can involve both couples and children. This could also involve other relatives which could include aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents. Its general aim is to improve nurturing relationships.

Marriage counseling – this focuses on spousal relationships between two partners. Its goal is to resolve conflict and strengthen a couple's bond.



Cory, Survivor of sexual assault



Jeanette, Survivor of sexual assault



Cheryl, Survivor of sexual assault



Isabella, Survivor of sexual assault

NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT HOTLINE

If you were affected by sexual assault, **you are not alone.**

online.rainn.org
800.656.HOPE

National Sexual Assault Hotline

No matter what stage of recovery you're at, confidential, anonymous support is available 24/7 for survivors & loved ones.



Telephone
800.656.HOPE

- Talk to a trained staff member or connect with a local sexual assault service provider.
- Get direct, personal, one-on-one support.



Online chat
online.rainn.org

- Chat one-on-one with a trained support specialist.
- Secure technology, accessible from any device.

rainn01 @rainn rainn

RAINN

The National Sexual Assault Hotline is operated by RAINN, the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization. This postcard was produced by RAINN under Grant No. 2014-XV-BX-K004, awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this postcard are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

How to Help Someone You Care About

Tips from RAINN

It's not always easy to know what to say when someone tells you they've been sexually assaulted, especially when that person is a family member, friend, or loved one. If you're looking for information on how to support a child, click [here](#). Consider the following ways of showing support:

- **Listen.** Communicate without judgment.
- **Be there.** If the survivor seeks medical attention or plans to report, offer to be there. Your presence can offer the support they need.
- **Offer support.** Encourage the survivor to get support. Share resources like the National Sexual Assault Hotline and online.rainn.org, but realize that only they can make the decision to get help.
- **Be patient.** Remember, there is no timetable for recovering from trauma. Avoid putting pressure on them to engage in activities they aren't ready to do yet.
- **Encourage self-care.** Following an assault it is important to practice good self-care during this difficult time.

National Sexual Assault Hotline
800.656.HOPE | rainn.org

To search for your local sexual assault service provider, please visit centers.rainn.org

If you or someone you know has been affected by sexual violence, it's not your fault. You are not alone. Help is available 24/7 through the National Sexual Assault Hotline: 800-656-HOPE and online.rainn.org, y en español rainn.org/es.

RAINN

To learn more, visit rainn.org.

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HEALTHY LIVING

**Make healthy choices your
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SHIFT FROM:

High-Calorie Snacks



SHIFT TO:

Nutrient-Dense Snacks



Fruit Products with Added Sugars



Fresh Fruit



Refined Grains



Whole Grains



Snacks with Added Salt or Sugars



Snacks Without Added Salt or Sugars



Solid Fats



Oils



Still I Rise

Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.



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SPOTLIGHT



Domestic violence is defined as a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Physical, sexual, emotional, financial, or psychological acts or threats of actions involving another person are forms of domestic violence. This encompasses all conduct that threatens, intimidates, terrorizes, manipulates, harms, humiliates, accuses, or injures anyone. Individuals of any race, age, sexual identity, sexuality, or gender may suffer domestic violence. It may occur in any type of relationship, such as casual dating, long term dating, short term dating, live in partnerships and not to exclude marriage.

Did you know that on average, 3 women per day are killed by an intimate partner? In Missouri, 22% of women report being physically abused by an intimate partner in their lives. Last year, the St. Louis Circuit Attorney's Victim Services had 673 new domestic violence cases. 3,568 domestic violence incidents were reported to the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department in 2016. Statistically, 1 out of 4 women has been affected by domestic violence. In the early stages of a partnership, it is not always possible to decide whether one partner will become violent. Over time, domestic abuse intensifies. Abusers can always initially seem great and perfect, but as the relationship progresses, they eventually become more violent and dominant.

Diamond Diva Empowerment Foundation (2DEF) is a nonprofit 501©3 organization dedicated to educating, strengthening, and empowering women and children affected by domestic violence and various socio-economic conditions. These conditions limit them from gaining and maintaining self-sufficiency which prevents them from being successful and contributing members of our community. Our programs and services answer the call by providing housing placement, rental assistance, trauma relief, literacy education, prevention, safety training and connections to other viable community resources.

DIAMOND DIVA EMPOWERMENT FOUNDATION

As an organization, we are committed to rebuilding the core of the family unit, while encouraging each survivor to focus on their strengths and well-being. All clients must complete an intensive 8-week Empowerment Program. The program consists of four (4) financial literacy classes, four (4) personal development classes and four (4) empowerment sessions. With these strategies in place, we can inspire, uplift, and empower the women that we serve. Once they have completed with the program, Diamond Diva Empowerment Foundation provides up to \$1,500.00 per client to either help find a new residence or to assist with their current rent.

February 2021, in partnership with Pathways to Brightness, Diamond Diva Empowerment Foundation hosted its 8th Annual Love Packages Campaign. The goal was to provide 2500 Love Packages™ to local domestic violence shelters and safe houses around the Saint Louis Metropolitan area. A Love Package™ is a reusable and durable tote bag consisting of full-size personal, feminine hygiene and healthcare products essential to a survivor's needs. The Love Packages™ are donated with a small bouquet of flowers and a positive affirmation message to assist with the process of rebuilding their self-esteem. The Love Packages™ shows them that they are loved, during this season that so many women look forward to which is- Valentine's Day!

In cases of an emergency, victims of domestic violence should call 911 or contact their state or local law enforcement officials, who can respond to these crimes. However, we do assist individuals in need of non-emergency assistance. We have trauma-informed and licensed professional counselors and case managers in place ready to assist. For more information, we can be reached at 314.328.4348, Monday thru Friday from 9:00am to 5:00pm, or to apply, visit www.2def.org.



Bran-Dee Jelks-Ross serves as the Program Director for Diamond Diva Empowerment Foundation. She is a gifted organizer, constantly motivating the community that she serves and encouraging them to achieve their personal best. Working with victims of domestic violence for the past eight years, she has witnessed the devastating impact of domestic violence on survivors and their families. She is relentlessly driven to empower and serve domestic violence survivors to overcome their traumatic experiences. Bran-Dee believes in destigmatizing mental health and the trauma that comes along with domestic violence, which is why our newly established counseling outreach center is a significant part of the assistance 2DEF provides.

Bran-Dee is a proud alumna of Southern University in Baton Rouge, LA having studied Psychology and Business Administration. She also has over 20 years of experience in real estate, entrepreneurship, marketing, non-profit development, and outreach. Her mission is to help end violence against women by empowering survivors to escape cycles of domestic violence.

Peculiar Eyewear Collection is founded by Adija Gaddy. Her passion is to reach out to those struggling with their very own uniqueness. Adija's purpose is to encourage people all over the world to embrace their authentic self.

She's innovative, a visionary keen on providing more varieties of custom made glasses in the market place. Peculiar Eyewear is affordable and is in very high demand due to the excellent services and high quality glasses that are provided.

Peculiar Eyewear is a fashion statement. We offer personalized glasses in different colors, patterns, and materials. We also offer Limited Edition Eyewear based on popular demand. Get those while supplies last!

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