



Au Naturel

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Salon and Personal Updates

Within the salon, the other ladies have been holding down the fort. I have been in Senegal since my last missive. But by this time, I am looking forward to getting back to business as usual. Things cranked back up again right before Christmas. So, we had a pretty busy pre-Christmas week-end. I look forward to two weeks of vacation immediately thereafter. Things will be slow in the salon as people always spend out their funds for Christmas and need to catch up in late December and early January. So, it's a good time for a break.

Within my non-profit work, all of my project offices will be closed for two weeks from Christmas to New Year's. It's been a very busy month and I'm reminded of how much I love the work that I do. And I love these two women. They are powerhouses in the Francophone West Africa family planning world. Of the four projects that I manage, two have had considerable challenges. It's not the two that these women manage. They are administrative geniuses. When I consider what they do and how efficient they are, I understand the likely comportment of the queens of Egypt—graceful, elegant, good-natured, forceful, brutally honest and brilliant. I have honestly had to

confess that I could not do what they are doing as efficiently. Truly!! And I don't give people that kind of credit easily. I support them from the background. And their high standard of excellence compels me—who has rather high-performance standards of my own—to work even harder to deliver the goods that they need to maintain their rapid pace of implementation. I refuse to be the reason for delays. So, we push aggressively forward with the aim of shaking up the status quo.

I have always known about the high maternal and infant mortality rates in West Africa. But the rates are higher in Francophone West Africa than in the other countries of West Africa. The high maternal mortality rates are a factor of high fertility rates often with very little spacing between children. At a recent conference, the woman to the right of the photo reminded the audience to look within their own families for examples of the women who have died giving life—“our mothers, aunts, sisters, cousins and friends.” She heads an advocacy initiative which targets ministers, civil society, religious leaders and youth. When she speaks, people listen. What I did not



know was that a strong contributor to the high infant mortality rate is infanticide. A primary reason that women in Senegal go to jail is because of infanticide. These women are often unaware of family planning or have been advised against it due to religious and cultural norms. The thought is a frightening one. But, when women feel helpless to feed the children that they know and love, what is another mouth to feed but a bother. There is no social welfare system in place that easily allows women to hand over unwanted children for adoption. Family and culture simply will not allow it. So, a pillow over the face is a much easier solution to what seems like an insurmountable problem. Imagine the desperation that must inform such a decision—to feel that you have no options because contraception is either not known to you or discouraged by family, culture and religion. This reality still reigns in parts of the world.

The woman to the left is a medical doctor and an unapologetic family planning champion. Her motivation is very similar to that of the Burkina Faso Minister of Health who spoke of his own experience witnessing women die on the operating table. She understands health systems, and she knows which levers to move to get maximum results. The team that she pulled together is a mere reflection of her spirit. They are all exceptional administrators. So like I said with these two women pushing forward along with the managers of my other two projects, I push to match their energy. I feel blessed to be able to work with them.

When I see them and their lives, I understand why African-Americans have been fed rather distorted views of Africa. After seeing Africa for himself, Marcus Garvey decided that life was better on that side of the world. I'm convinced that he's right. Of course if you are educated, you have natural advantages in Africa. But, people live comfortable, productive lives in an environment whether they rule and they serve their own people. Life is difficult no matter where you live. But, I appreciate the welcoming and secure nature of West African nations. I feel much safer here than I feel at home. And I am not being naïve. I am just aware that not every place is as violent as the West. We give thanks that decency still reigns in some parts of the world. I am grateful.

The Big Chop: Round Two..The Last and Final

Over the years, I've written about the "big chop" many times. It's the haircut that comes after a client has decided to stop relaxing and allow her hair to be. It heralds the end of relaxed hair and the beginning of a new natural look. In many respects, it is a rite of passage. I've seen client's responses to the "big chop" can range from joy to sorrow. It all depends on her frame of mind at the time of the service and what she's seeing. If she sees an opportunity to appreciate her hair as it presents and learn more about herself, the perspective is positive. If all she can see is the hair on the floor which has been released, she will be inclined to be negative. I can almost predict what the outcome will be based on the conversation that occurs prior to and during the service. It's all good. We're all in different places in life and in our natural hair journey. But what prompted me to write this article was a recent client who came to our opening celebration in 2006 but whom I have not seen since. She never came in because she was relaxed at the time and decided to stay that way. After some difficulties, she decided to transition to natural hair. She was natural for 5 years and had grown a beautiful mane of hair. Now quite comfortable with her shoulder length hair, she decided to relax it to make haircare all the easier. One year later, she enters our salon for the "big chop" round two. The service was a difficult one for her. But, it is as much a rite of passage as the first time.

The reason I say this is that I went through this process over 30 years ago. After taking the time to grow my shoulder length hair, I was strongly lamenting hair care and begged my mother to let me relax my hair.

Despite her strong objection, she allowed me to make my own decision.

So, I followed my heart. I had never relaxed, and I was ready for long, smooth, flowing locks. Well, my hair was only relaxed for one year. After seeing how lifeless and weak it had become, as it was breaking off rather easily, I decided to go back to my

natural hair. So, I did the big chop during my first year of college. It was liberating. It was my first “big chop”; but after the long period of natural hair growth that I had gone through and the rather short period of destruction that ensued, it felt like my second service. So when my client came in reluctant to cut but knowing that it was inevitable, I was full of empathy. In some places, her hair had started to break off and was only natural. In others, weak relaxed strands told the story of exactly how much damage had been done. She was going to be cutting off up to six inches of relaxed hair, leaving only about 4 inches of natural hair. I felt her pain. But as I was there before, I felt confident that she would never walk down this road again. She went through relaxer damage in the past and grew her hair to a beautiful length and thickness. Feeling confident in her hair’s strength and vitality, she went back to what she knew was not ideal for her hair but which she was willing to take a chance on for the sake of ease. Now, she was faced with the reality that all of her time and effort were lost. But in my view, they were not in vain. When you learn a lesson the hard way, you aren’t typically inclined to repeat it. So, I think this will be her last walk down “big chop” way. She realizes that there are no real short cuts that are worth having. And so, she will do the needful to maintain healthy hair first and foremost. And for this reason, I call the “big chop round 2”, the last and final round. If you never have to take this second pass down a rather challenging road, feel blessed. But if you do take this second journey, feel equally blessed. I am a firm believer that it’s better to know for sure what’s best for you. If you want to revert back to relaxed hair and it is the desire of your heart, do it. It’s your prerogative as a woman to choose. The second time might be the charm. But if you encounter hardship as in your first encounter, the lesson will only service to strengthen your resolve to walk the naturalista journey fully committed to stay the path. This is the reality for the majority of regular natural hair care clients that we have. We give thanks for all journey along naturalista way.



Artistic Interlude: Soulful Selections

I’ve been in the air a lot lately. Things are pretty serious when you’ve maxed out the Delta airlines movie selections that appeal to you. (I just don’t sleep well on planes.) So, I’ve switched over to musical accompaniment. I heard of Gregory Porter before; but, I’ve only recently come to discover his gift with his albums “Take me to the Alley” and “Liquid Spirit.” I fly a lot of Delta airlines flights and these two albums are available under the Jazz music section of entertainment. Gregory Porter is a multi-genred artistic who with [this selection](#) refuses to be placed into a box. (If you know your music, the pianist solos a brief commentary on human genocide as well.) As such, he blends [jazz](#), [blues](#), [R&B](#) and [gospel](#). In my view, his voice has a depth that is reminiscent of Lou Rawls. He doesn’t have the

strongest vocals in the world; but, you're okay with it because there's so much life in his instrument. And then when he emerges with a piece like [Fan the Flames](#), you realize that he may actually have the vocal dexterity of Kem. (Incidentally, I think Kem is a live performer who is not easily matched. If you haven't seen him perform, you don't know what I'm talking about. But, he's truly phenomenal.) But, Porter only taps into this dexterity on occasion. It's surely work for him; but it's worth the effort when he dives deep. But then, if he never dived deep, you'd still be enamored with the richness, the honesty and the simplicity of his style. He sometimes goes flat when holding notes—a faux pas that would have given my high school band director a fit. But, he's where he is despite the imperfections. Do you think his audience is unaware? I assure you they're fully "in the know", and they love him anyway. This truth is a testimony to the call on his life, the power of his message and the authenticity of his delivery. He is a classic jazz/blues aficionado. I love both albums completely and that doesn't often happen for me. But, I love jazz singers. Yet, brother went back to a classic 80s duet vibe when he chose Lalah Hathaway to accompany him on "[Insanity](#)." The song was a standout gem from the first time I heard it. But while surfing some of his tracks on the net, I observed that he had the genius to pair with this songbird. I said, "Oh, this is going to be good!" And I was not to be disappointed. I swore "DAMN!" when I heard this song the first time. Yes, I've even gone to the Florida Evans extent of saying "Damn, damn, damn!" with this one. God is all wrapped up in it. And if you don't get it, you've never been to the point described in this song in your marriage or significant relationship. And you just won't get it. It's all good. When I first heard this version of the song, suddenly a standout gem became an instant R&B classic. It is perfection that literally brought tears to my eyes. I dedicate this one to all couples "on the verge." And just to provide further testimony of Lalah Hathaway's musical genius, [check this out!](#) I have never heard any other individual on the PLANET sing a three-part harmony on one vocal take! My brother enlightened me to this vocal impossibility. In case you didn't know: YOU NEED THREE FINGERS TO PLAY A CHORD ON A PIANO!! AND THREE INSTRUMENTS TO PLAY A HARMONY!! What the heaven?! Tell me God did not reach out and accompany her on this one. Or maybe it's her Dad Donny. Or maybe it's the entire Trinity. Whatever it is, it's something out of this world! Chic is ON FIRE!! The reaction of the other artists WHO KNOW BETTER says it all!

The Blessings of Strangers

On December 10th, I met two gentlemen while at the Novotel Hotel in Dakar. [Dr. Yrneh Gabon](#) and [Dr. Ibrahima Seck](#). I was seated near them at breakfast, and when I heard one of them (Dr. Gabon) speaking with a strong American accent, I asked "Where are you from?" He said, "Jamaica." And the conversation ensued from there. Dr. Seck lives and works in New Orleans while Dr. Gabon lives in LA. While discussing our respective pathways that brought us to Senegal, I learned that these two gentlemen were leaving the hotel after breakfast to go out to the countryside. They themselves had newly met. I understand that young people would be engaged in wrestling matches and that there were other celebrations going on consistent with ethnic culture and local religion. I naturally wanted to go and could not disguise my interest. And I was immediately offered an invitation. But, they were to be gone overnight and would return by 11am the next day. As I was scheduled to be in meetings starting from 8:30am, I simply could not go. But, I definitely felt that there was much life outside of the city that I was want to be a part of. It was one time in my life where I wish that I could have become someone other than myself. I'm just way to responsible sometimes. On this occasion, I wanted to be less predictable and more spontaneous. But, I am who I am. So, I

missed out, and I KNOW I missed out. They are solidifying the common linkages to do research on the role of religion in slavery. The attached is a rather insightful interview with Dr. Seck, John Cummings and Dr. Jelani Cobb on the first Slave Museum—the Whitney Plantation. I definitely need to take a trip there. All the same, they introduced me to an artist whose work was on display at the new museum which was unveiled a few days before. She and I had dinner and seemed to get along famously. She was returning to Mali in the morning but said she would love for her mother—a famous Malian writer—to meet me. I told her that if work plans unfold as expected, I will be there within 2 months. We parted with the agreement that I would come to see her whenever I finally do reach Mali.



When I finished the day, I thought about how much I enjoyed my day. It also occurred to me that I was quite willing to leave the hotel and spend the day with two absolute strangers without a second thought. I considered my carelessness for a

moment. Have I ever met people informally at a hotel in the States and just decided to go off with them? I considered and remembered the Conference in DC where I met my friends Meiko and Cheryl. We met at that conference and within 4 months, Meiko and I took flights to Oklahoma to stay on Cheryl's farm. So, yes the precedent was there. But, they are also women. So then I reasoned, 50+ year old men with a reputation to lose certainly don't behave recklessly. And in this Me Too world of ours, they probably were as vulnerable as I. But as my travels extended, I regularly found myself with male escorts who wanted to show me some aspect of the country.

On Saturday, December 15th, while walking on the Corniche (a road along the sea regularly used for exercise) which is just behind my hotel, I encountered a man named Blanchard. He was walking across the street from me at a very fast pace. I said, "Wow, I need to speed up my pace. I'm walking too slowly." And I started to match his pace. We spent the rest of the walk together. It's strange because he said he was not feeling well and was not going to walk that morning. But, he said something kept nudging him to get up, so he did. During our walk, we could see Goree Island off in the distance. He asked if I had been. I acknowledged and recounted how on my initial visit, I was not too happy. A vendor wanted to sell me some Chinese trinkets with Goree written on them and I said, No and kept walking. She followed and persisted. My opinion was unchanged. She finally said rather annoyed, "WHY WON'T YOU BUY FROM US?!" All I can say is that I got hot around the collar. The last time I felt that way was when a woman in a Nubian village in Egypt snatched some pencils out of my hand that I was going to give to the local school. My thought was the same, "There is about to be an international incident of Black on Black crime right here in the Motherland if somebody don't come and get this chic off my tip!" My response was, "Because I am here to reflect on the journey of my ancestors and I frankly do not wish to support another

MARKET built off of their suffering.” She said, “YOU THINK YOU’RE THE ONLY ONES WHO SUFFERED!” I then said, “I am not the one! Find someone else.” My voice was unusually quiet, but I could see from the expressions of other vendors around her that they felt strongly that she should leave me alone. And she did. He then told me, Goree is a dangerous place for African-Americans. I said why? He said, “The French have learned to stay away from large groups of African-Americans at Goree. He said the history and the sight of it awakens something in them. African Americans have attacked groups of French people, grabbed their cameras and destroyed them in front of them. Now when the French see large groups of African-Americans, they keep their distance.” I said, “Really? I find that hard to believe that they would become violent with strangers.” He said, “It’s happened several times. It’s the place and the memories.” Then, I recalled how I felt when I was there. I was acutely aware of the fact that Africans facilitated the slave trade. And then, my experience of the place was being tainted by this vendor woman who believes that I have more than she does and so feels compelled to try to extort my money from me. I was ready to yell at her. It’s only because I was speaking French and not my mother tongue that I got quiet rather than loud. I knew she was a woman of humble means. But in that instance, I had no empathy for her or her condition. I was just angry that this “marketplace” that Goree has become was only making light of what had happened here so long ago. In my eyes, Goree is sacred ground. And the fact that she was de-sensitized to the history, I was naturally de-sensitized to her. It’s easy to see tourists around you at Goree who are only looking at the pictures, the prison cells, etc. and thinking about what they are going to have for dinner. So, I suddenly could relate to the fact that most likely what he described did happen. There’s certainly no mass police presence on Goree to demand that justice reign and that compensation for broken cameras be compensated. So, I could relate.

When I went back to the hotel after our 3 hour walk, I met two White Americans at the hotel who were going to the [Museum of Black Civilizations](#). They were walking away from the hotel but planned to return in 40 minutes. I was tired but endeavored to go anyway. So, I freshened up and returned to the lobby to meet them. After waiting 20 minutes, I left a message at the front desk for them and asked for directions to the museum. The receptionist acknowledged that it was within walking distance and gave me general directions. So, I slung my bag across my shoulder and prepared for another trek. When I got outside of the hotel, a vendor that I had met some days earlier matched my pace and started to walk alongside me. He acknowledged that I had not come by his shop. I agreed and said that I’ve been really busy. When he asked where I was going, I said the museum so he said he would show me how to get there. I didn’t want him to go out of his way but he said, “No problem. I am here for you.” So, I let him do what he does. As we walked, we passed this statue. He explained how it celebrates that contribution of the Senegalese soldier in



helping to defend France in the World War. He then explained how the soldiers returned home and asked for their pay for fighting. The French told them to form a line to receive their pay and shot them all. They then buried them in a mass grave not far from the location of that statue. He repeated, "The French hunh?" I said only, "It's not just the French."

When we got to the museum, I was disappointed to learn that it was not yet open. It had been unveiled but would not be opening until the 26th of December. My escort then went into negotiation mode with the guard at the gate. He told him that



I am an African-American and that this museum is here for my people. He noted, "She will be leaving on Wednesday and will not have a chance to see it. Can't you let her in?" The guard looked at me. Then, he walked us to the entrance, told the security there that I am an African-American and he is letting me come in. So, the guard stepped aside, turn on the metal detector that was turned off so that my bag could be placed on it and then we were in. I couldn't believe it! (It reminded me of when I was in Burkina Faso. The driver took me to a bi-annual international festival but because it was a national holiday, I couldn't get in. After waiting about 5 minutes, he grabbed my hand and walked me to the front of the line we were in. I heard several people kiss their teeth to complain. When at the front of the line, he told the police officer checking bags that I was an African-American and would be leaving in a few days. He asked him to let me in. The man refused saying that people had been waiting for 4

hours. The driver was very persistent, suddenly we were past the first check point. After doing this dance two more times with each check-point slightly harder to navigate, I was in. I thanked him for the experience.)

I suddenly was so glad the other ladies stood me up. If they were with me as White Americans, I realized that I would never have gotten in.



I took a few pictures and thanked the guard. My escort then placed money in my hand to give him. I said, "I can pay." But, he said, "No. Give him that." I said, "Is it enough?" And he said, "Yes." So, I did. Then as we left the museum, I said, "So, where is your shop? Let's go." And we went. I spent \$100 with the brother, and he then escorted me back to the hotel. But ultimately, he was happy, and I had a unique experience. So, it was worth it. The day ended with me having dinner

with a Kenyan couple that I met at the hotel sitting in a restaurant overlooking the sea (just behind the hotel). We talked for 3 hours and left. It was a most fortuitous day!

Afterward: I returned to the US on December 20th in time to help my husband celebrate his birthday on winter solstice. After learning of this story about the [two Scandinavian students killed in Morocco](#), I thought it was wise to qualify my article. It is imperative while traveling or in the company of strangers anywhere to keep your wits about you. Whenever I recounted my adventures to my mother, she repeatedly said, “You are very trusting. Be careful.” I always responded, “Momma, I’m on a public street with people all around. There is nothing that anyone can do to me that others won’t witness. She never conceded. There was always the long pregnant pause. So, I would just change the subject. Some stuff you just aren’t EVER going to make your mother comfortable about. But, I’m not a blind follower.

I was with two ladies from Howard University who I met in the Dakar hotel back in May. They were traveling with a group of students. I wanted to walk after breakfast as did they, so we became walking buddies. After a rather long morning stroll, they wanted me to accompany them back to the market. I had a grant to work so I wasn’t keen; but, they really wanted a translator. I fought the desire to say “No.” (*Note: As a rule, I DO NOT shop with women. Strange but true. I am not a window shopper or bargain shopper. If I’m buying what I don’t want or need, it’s not a bargain, in my eyes. Like my mother who orders from magazines, I order online, or I know exactly what I’m getting before I walk into a brick and mortar establishment. I went window shopping with a girlfriend and her daughter some years back, and the experience was physically, mentally and spiritually painful to me. I vowed that day to never again be trapped in such a way as that.*) It was the week-end and I really needed to do something other than stay in the hotel. So, I conceded. They paid the taxi and we went to the main market in Dakar’s downtown district – [Sandaga](#). Some men latched onto us as we alighted from the taxi, as they do often in Senegal. The two ladies I was with were wearing capris and baseball caps. They looked American. I always keep my legs covered in West African countries out of respect for the dominant religion and culture, so I was wearing yoga pants. I walk through the markets mostly unnoticed. But with these two ladies, we spelled African-American which spells “M-O-N-E-Y”! So, a swarm of men approached. She talked them down to a few. I was in full observation mode so I was not taking the lead to translate. It was not so necessary because everyone was speaking to us in English. She then explained to me exactly what she was looking for—a carved elephant for her Delta sorority sister. I explained, and we were led through a maze of shops and stalls to some elephants. She didn’t like them. So, they led us to another stall not too far. She didn’t like them. Too small. So, we were led some distance to another location. This time, we walked into a market building. Textile materials, sewing machines, vendors and shoppers were everywhere. I was fascinated. But now, there were about 6 men surrounding us. “Come this way. Come this way.” And we walked through the maze of stalls. I couldn’t have navigated my way out of there easily. When we came to a stairwell, they started to lead us up. Suddenly, my “spidey senses” were on BLAST! I saw nothing but men coming down the stairs. And there were about 6 men leading us three women up. The math simply DID NOT COMPUTE!! I would not budge. The men said, “You are in Senegal. You are safe.” The ladies said, “Please come

with us.” I stayed on the floor we were on and sat down on a stool near the stairwell so that I could see them when they came back down. I was not going up under those circumstances, and strangers were simply NOT going to make me change my mind. In the end, they were unharmed but also did not find what they were looking for. It took a trek to another location to achieve satisfaction. At that point, I was fully aware: I am not a blind follower.

On another occasion some years back, I had just graduated from University (graduate school) while Lloyd had another year. I returned home, and my mother was living in Fayetteville, NC—the city formed solely to serve the needs of the US Army and Fort Bragg soldiers. Back in the day, I used to tell everyone that Fort Bragg is “the Black male capital of the world.” The reason was due to the very high concentration of Black men who are young, gainfully employed, independent, intelligent and less likely to be gay. One week-end, my brother invited me out to a club with some of his friends. I reluctantly obliged. I don’t particularly enjoy the club scene, and I am apparently not alone in this way of being. While there, I met a very handsome soldier who quickly moved in and made it very difficult for anyone else to ask me to dance. Before leaving the club, he gave me his contact information (Momma said always take the man’s information but don’t give yours.), and I promised to call later in the week. As promised, I called, and he invited me to come to the barracks to play “Spades” with others. I said, “Where in the barracks?” He said, “The lobby.” So, I agreed to go. Now there are many who would not be comfortable with this request; but my Dad was military, and I lived a part of my life on a military base. The offer felt very safe to me. Some barracks are co-ed, and military police don’t play. Most soldiers aren’t going to jeopardize their career and their paycheck on a whim. So, I went. It was a really fun evening. And I left the group in the lobby to return home after some hours. While playing, I learned that the group was being deployed to Afghanistan in a few days for Operation Desert Storm. They were clearly concerned but fully locked into their destiny. Before leaving, he asked me to come and visit him before he is deployed. I said something like, “No problem.” (P.S. He knew I had a boyfriend.)

After a few days, I was invited to come and watch movies with him, knowing that he would be deployed the next morning. (Now, my whole life, I’ve heard about men who are about to be deployed talking women into sleeping with them. I knew the argument and was unimpressed by it. All the same, I could sense his fear and wanted to be an ear to listen if nothing else.) I said, “Okay.” But imagine my surprise when he gave me the address of a hotel rather than the barracks. I said, “I thought you were going to be deployed tomorrow morning.” He said, “We are. The military is putting us in the hotel so we can be altogether when it’s time to roll.” My spidey senses went off. That doesn’t make sense. Why would the trillion dollar war machine that is the US Army pay a hotel to house soldiers when they have barracks, a mess hall and close proximity to the launch site right on base? He’s lying. In my mind, I thought, ‘And this is why he is not mating material.’ (Sorry, but it was true.) I paused, he pleaded. So, I conceded and told him what time I would arrive. After getting ready, I went to speak to my brother Earl. He was just out of the Marine Corps and I was just out of college. We were both back home. I told him what the deal was, where I would be, and what I expected who and would not happen. I then asked him to call me at the hotel room at 10pm sharp. My words were, “If I do not pick up the phone myself, and you do not hear my voice...Come.” He said, “Okay.” And it was as sure as if God Himself had

spoken. That's the relationship I have with my brother. As an ex-Marine and now a security officer, his time precision is bar-none. And while in the military, he was a sharp shooter. I knew there was a gun in the house; but, I really didn't want to think that far. I was being optimistic. I just had to have back-up.

When I arrived at the hotel to the designated room, he opened the door and there were five other men in the room...mostly Black and Hispanic." There were boxes of pizza everywhere and beer. They were laughing, playing cards and watching tv. I stood in the threshold and said, "I didn't know you would have so much company." He replied, "Oh, we just kickin' it until we deploy." My first reaction was to simply walk away and say, "I wish you the best." But suddenly, I had a dilemma. It was the early 90s, pre-cellular phone days. My brother told me he was on his way out with friends so there was absolutely NO WAY for me to know where he was or how to get in contact with him. If I was not in that room to receive his call at 10pm, things might get really crazy fast. My mind was rapidly calculating. There was no other woman in the room so I would not be comfortable and I could not eat or drink anything. They could give me a date rape drive, run a train, check out of the hotel and be on their way to Kuwait before the police report would even be filed with the CIVILIAN police. If we were on the military base, I could quickly report to the military police and they would be detained immediately. I could not put myself at risk like that. So I decided to level the playing field. I raised my voice so that everyone inside the room could hear above the laughing, the television and the general noise. "I need everyone in this room to understand something. My brother is an ex-Marine. He knows exactly where I am tonight. I gave him the hotel and the room number. He is going to call me on that phone (I pointed at the phone that I had spotted inside the room as it was visible from the threshold.) at precisely 10pm. If I don't answer that phone, he is going here with his friends. I don't know what will happen next." All I can tell you is, five men immediately rose up off the bed, the chairs, etc. with pizza and beer in hand and rolled out. Period! I never saw a group of men come to an unspoken consensus so fast in my entire life. They ALL left him alone in the room with only a "later man." His face looked visibly uncomfortable. And after I saw them safely out of the hallway, I walked into the room and bolted the door from the inside. His demeanor was no longer the confident, self-assured person that I had seen. He became whiny and child-like. I attempted to engage in light banter because at this point, he knew I was just waiting for the phone call. I didn't want to eat or drink anything in this room and didn't because in my eyes, "he had set me up." 'How dare he think he can pick up a chic with two master's degrees and think he can out game me!!' That night, he learned that educated chics learn a little more than book learning at college. At the stroke of 10pm, the phone rang. He looked at me and did not budge to pick up the phone, as if he was in my room. I went over the phone. I heard Earl's serious voice, "You alright?" "Yes, I'm okay." "You sure!" "Yes." "Do you need me to call back?" "No, I'm getting ready to leave." "I'll see you at home this evening." And soon thereafter, I left wishing the brother well.

I say all of this to say ultimately, "Don't be foolish." We live in a world of unpredictable people and circumstances. And as women, we have to be conscious of our vulnerability. The last words that my father spoke to his children were, "In this world, you have to be vigilant." I encourage you to be the same. Amen.