

FREE
ISSUE 1
MAY 2019

Today's Widowed Woman *of color*

MAGAZINE

National
Widow's Day
Nominations

meet.
onyeje
My Journey to
Victory: A
Memoir

Dating
Over 50

**Black &
Brown
Widows
DO Need Safe
Spaces**

**Meet
BET's "GAMES
PEOPLE PLAY"
Consulting
Producer,
Game Changer
& WIDOW,
Sara Finney-
Johnson**

Sisterhood

Widowhood can be lonely. Late nights and early mornings feel all the more exhausting when you're doing it alone. Sometimes a supportive community is a defining line between loneliness and sisterhood.

In this issue, you'll hear from a few black widowed sistas such as Onyeje Ijaola, Sara Finney-Johnson and LaSandra Hutchinson who discuss their lives without their husbands. One has remarried, the other is a new widow and another has been widowed for five years while maneuvering her way throughout Hollywood.

So step away from the to-do list, put those emails on hold and give yourself some quality time to dive into this inaugural 50-page issue!

Happy National Widow's Day, sis!

Sabra Robinson

Founder/Editor

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Black Women Widows Empowered (BWWE)
Today's Widowed Woman of Color

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page numbers



Today's **Widowed Woman** *of color*



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.06 My 'O' Negative Kidney Donor Journey
and Road to Transplant – Dawn Martin

.07 10 Dating Tips for
Widows Over 50

.13 My Journey to Victory Memoir
An interview with Onyeje Ijaola

.20 Black Widow Magic
Nominations

.32 \$20,020 by 2020 CROWDRISE
Campaign
crowdrise
by gofundme

.35

Widow Hacks: Beating Anxiety Disorder
By Maya Tyler

.36

**Widow Support: The
God Who Goes Before
You By LaSandra
Hutchinson**

.39

**Black Widow's Alliance &
Influencers**

.41

**An Interview with
Sara Finney-Johnson,
Consulting Producer,
Writer and Creator**

.45

**Black & Brown
Widows Do Need Safe
Spaces By Sabra
Robinson**

My 'O' Negative Kidney Donor Journey and Road to Transplant

I am a mother of 2 beautiful daughters and a "GiGi" (grandmother) to one very smart and handsome grandson. Many people that know me know that I'm not one to openly share my private life, but recently I have come to realize that it is no longer realistic to do so. I need the help of others and I need my voice to be heard.

I was recently diagnosed with end-stage renal failure due to years of diabetes and high blood pressure. In December of 2018, I received the news from my Nephrologist that I could no longer put off starting dialysis.

On Monday's, Wednesday's and Friday's my new normal consists of four long hours of dialysis to have my blood cleaned. Some days are better than others, but I try to remain positive and grateful for the life I currently have. I am on the active transplant list but have been told that the wait could be years. That is why I've decided to share my story and reach out for help in finding a donor.

I am in desperate need for a living donor kidney and am reaching out to my community for help in raising awareness. Please share my story and assist me in finding a match.

Please contact the Living Donor Office for more information about living donation and the Donor Champion Program at 704-355-3602 and ask for Yvonne.

Please share my Facebook page, A Kidney for Dawn "GiGi" Martin, and assist me in having my story heard and my prayers answered.

I sincerely appreciate your help, thoughts, and prayers.

Dawn (GiGi) Martin



10

Sabra Robinson

Dating Tips for Widows over 50



To the widow who feels aged, out-of-date or useless in the dating game:

You're not alone and here are a few tips that I've developed specifically for you.

You've grieved long enough and cried enough tears to age yourself twenty years. You may be in your tenth year of widowhood or second year, yet you feel you're ready to date. You miss him dearly but you desire a husband, a mate, your Chapter Two.

It's been too long without a date and you're getting older. You want the hand-holding, movie outing, and bear-hugging-type dates. You're an empty nester and the house is just too big (or too small) for just one person.

You're feeling lonely.

You've tried blind dates, online dating, speed dating, and even church. And nothing.

You're feeling sexy.

You've tried yoga, Planet Fitness, Home Owners Association meetings and you've even stooped so far as to rejoining bereavement groups, just for the possibility of bumping into a potential mate – and nothing.

You're now angry.

Tip 1: Be honest about your age.

Please don't feel that you have to pretend to be someone you're not. Yes, you may look a certain age, but you're not. Yes, lying about your age may give you a better chance of getting a date. Don't do it. Yes, you may feel youthful, sexy and carefree but, you're lying. What if the relationship thrives and you both fall in love? He will respect you more if you come clean. Remember, honesty in a relationship can make or break it.

Tip 2: Try dating a widower.

Widowers may 'get it' long before a non-widower will. He's already familiar with the unwanted journey so if you cry for your husband, he can relate. If you leave up his pictures, more than likely, he does too. If it doesn't work, don't give up on dating. Keep in mind that widowers are human too and although he may not be THAT guy, at least you gave it a chance. If it doesn't work, don't be dismayed; it just wasn't a match. I dated one, and it was a very good experience. He understood my cries, he understood my pain and he got me through very hard days. Would a non-widower have understood my grief? Maybe, maybe not, but I felt very comfortable around him. We were the 'cute couple' to some, but I enjoyed my independence too much. Would I give him another chance? I sure would ...when I can come out of my selfish desires of enjoying company by myself, when I can finally admit to myself that I'm ready for a long-term relationship and more importantly, when I can stop giving excuses of running away because of the overall feelings of guilt of selecting someone other than my husband. But that's not what my husband would have wanted. He would have wanted me to be happy. Before he died, he wanted me to remarry; he didn't want me to live life alone without a partner. I've dated many non-widowers but to be honest, I've never had so much fun with the only widower that was interested in me. I could be myself, tears and all – and he understood every bit of it.

W

ould I date only widowers? No, but they would be my first preference. If it doesn't work, would I be upset? Maybe, maybe not. But heck, I was upset when I was dating non-widowers, like the one who used me like a rubber band to the point where he introduced me to his married client who I befriended, only to find out he was having an affair with her (and the list goes on). Besides, I have a future podcast with a widow who married a widower so I'm excited to hear her love story.

Tip 3: Don't be afraid to step outside of the box.

Do something different than the norm. You're grown and you're not getting any younger...find a dog sitter, tell your 'still-living-at-home' adult children to find another place to mooch off of for the evening.

Tip 4: Don't settle.

Instead of allowing yourself to settle, allow yourself to grow in learning new things. Don't settle for a man who doesn't do anything for your mind or spirit. Being able to identify with someone through an intelligent, funny, and adult conversation is the sexiest thing close to sex itself.

Tip 5: Date a younger guy.

If a younger guy hits on you, so what! If he's old enough to purchase wine, he's an adult. There is nothing wrong with enjoying the company of a youthful man. He could teach you a thing or two about the latest urban slang, the coolest emoji, and the newest Social Media app. And you may even be encouraged enough to change your wardrobe to something a bit more younger, not slutty, but try adding new accessories or even wearing dresses instead of jeans, yoga pants or slacks when meeting for a date. Try changing up your appearance and your makeup and try looking at life from a Millennial or Generation Xer's point of view (not necessarily changing yours but be an ear to theirs). *Tip 5.1: Pull out your high school or college pictures to remind you of your youthfulness.

Tip 6: Don't talk about your late husband on the first date – unless he asks.

Don't be surprised if he suddenly falls ill after you've relayed a very lengthy conversation about how you have enjoyed your blissful marriage. Gather your emotions and write down a list of 'what-nots' prior to the date. If he's a widower, remember his feelings. Your rekindled memories may spark certain feelings for his late wife – he may not want that. Certain impressions may also make or break the date.

Tip 7: Don't be afraid to date someone shorter.

Your blessing can come in all shapes and sizes. It took me a year to accept the advances from a guy who was shorter than I. He was very mature for his age and a great singer, too! Some of the most famous celebrities are married to shorter men.

Tip 8: If he's younger, don't show him your Senior Discount card (or let him know you have one).

Let's face it, you may have a medical, prescription, or even a rental discount card in your wallet. If he asks you if you own one (which would be a bit awkward), that's another story, just go with the flow. But please, do not let him know that you're a member of any senior discount card clubs – not yet anyway. I know several women who appreciate their discounts and benefits but the words: retirement, dentures, arthritis, etc. may turn him off so don't give him a reason to think beyond what you can bring to the table.

Tip 9: Get some exercise or get busy!

When he calls and asks what you're doing and you're always sitting on the sofa watching television, he may think he's dating an old lady. Get active for heaven's sake! However, if he does the same thing, then more power to you both! You both have something common.



Tip 9: Get some exercise or get busy!

When he calls and asks what you're doing and you're always sitting on the sofa watching television, he may think he's dating an old lady. Get active for heaven's sake! However, if he does the same thing, then more power to you both! You both have something common.

Tip 10: Pray.

If you're a woman of faith and are seeking to remarry, be specific in your prayers. Don't ever feel that you have to settle.

*Tip 10.1: If you're a spiritual person, ask him this question: "If I were on my deathbed, would you still be able to pray for me?" If he says yes, that's wonderful, but watch his actions.

Tell me, which tip or tips would you use?

My Journey to Victory: A Memoir Overcoming Grief and Life's Challenges



Onyeje Ijaola

Tell me about your book, *My Journey to Victory*

My book is a story of restoration, it is a memoir of my life, the journey of pain, loss, grief, Life's challenges, widowhood and Gods intervention. It is a story of how at a young age my home was destroyed by divorce. My mother left home when I was only thirteen and died when I was only nineteen from cancer, she was forty years old.

I wrote this book dedicated to my mother, to shed light on the widowhood practices in the African culture and the unfair treatment of women. I want to empower another woman no matter their race, culture or ethnicity who may have gone through a similar situation. I want them to keep hope alive, I want to let them know they have a voice, I want to help people walk into a place of freedom through forgiveness. I want women to understand the depth of God's love and how he can heal and change any situation.

At the time of my mother's death, she was working as a nurse midwife in Saudi Arabia. My siblings and I had to live through the pain of a broken home, a loss of a mother the conflict of three different stepmothers. Most of my teenage years were filled with pain not knowing who I was and not understanding what true happiness was. My book talks about my early marriage and widowhood, my transition to a new country and how I started a new life, the challenges I encountered, acculturation, the paradigm shifts, the challenges of an immigrant and returning to school to get an education.

I talked about how I remarried, what we went through together and where we are today. I am healed in my emotions to love again, I am restored, and God used my pain to open the door and made a way for me to help others in their time of grief. Having said that, I want everyone to know that grief, loss, pain, shame, rejection, and humiliation is a process, but it is not okay to park there. I believe we all have a story to tell and when we do, we may be unlocking treasures for someone else's healing and restoration.

Are you friends with other authors and if so, have they influenced you in any way?

I am not friends with any authors, Although I am an ardent reader and enjoy reading and research. My line of work is nothing close to writing, I got into writing as a process of healing and being obedient to share my testimony and my life's journey to help someone else who may or have walked the same path. One page became a chapter and a book after 15 chapters.

What was your writing process like?

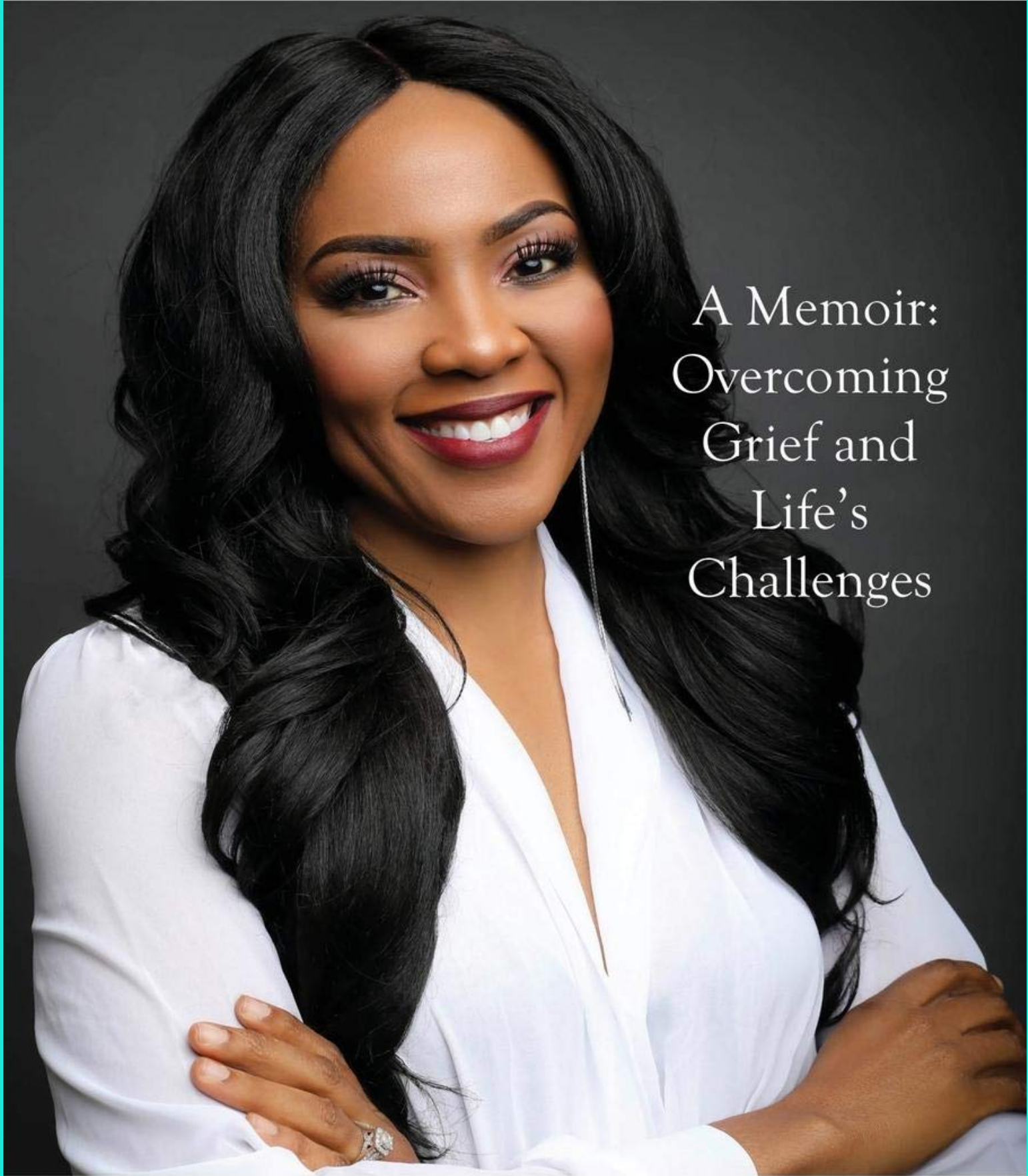
It was very challenging, I had to face my truths, I didn't know how much hurt I was carrying on the inside of me until I started to write, it was like a cleansing. I cried several times, I laughed. There were times when I gave up writing. The emotions were very raw and real. This is not fiction! It is my life story. But I knew I had to write to bring closure and move on to the next thing. I had to deal with the grief and pain to live again and release myself.

I talked about how I remarried, what we went through together and where we are today. I am healed in my emotions to love again, I am restored, and God used my pain to open the door and made a way for me to help others in their time of grief. Having said that, I want everyone to know that grief, loss, pain, shame, rejection, and humiliation is a process, but it is not okay to park there. I believe we all have a story to tell and when we do, we may be unlocking treasures for someone else's healing and restoration.

You were a widow. Do you mind telling the readers a little about your story?

With the conflict in my home growing up, I married the first man I met to escape from my home; but not too long after my marriage, my husband died in a motor vehicle accident and I became a widow at the age of twenty-three with a nine-month-old daughter to care for. African culture is hard on women. I went through the barbaric traditions of their widowhood practices. I lost my self-esteem and self-worth, I lost everything, and I did not have the will to live. The cultural practices were rough, I was in my final semester in college I could not go back to school because I had a 6 months mourning period that I could not go outside or be seen by anyone, my hair was shaven with a blade and I wore 2 dresses in 6 months. I went through depression and at a point contemplated taking my own life but didn't know how. I have it all detailed in my book. My life was slipping away but by the grace of God someone told me about Jesus and at that moment I began my journey of transformation,

MY JOURNEY TO VICTORY

A portrait of Onyeje Ijaola, a woman with long, dark, wavy hair, smiling and wearing a white blazer. She is positioned on the left side of the cover, with her arms crossed. The background is a dark grey gradient.

A Memoir:
Overcoming
Grief and
Life's
Challenges

ONYEJE IJAOLA

You're remarried now. Congratulations on your next chapter! How long have you been married and what advice would you give new widows?

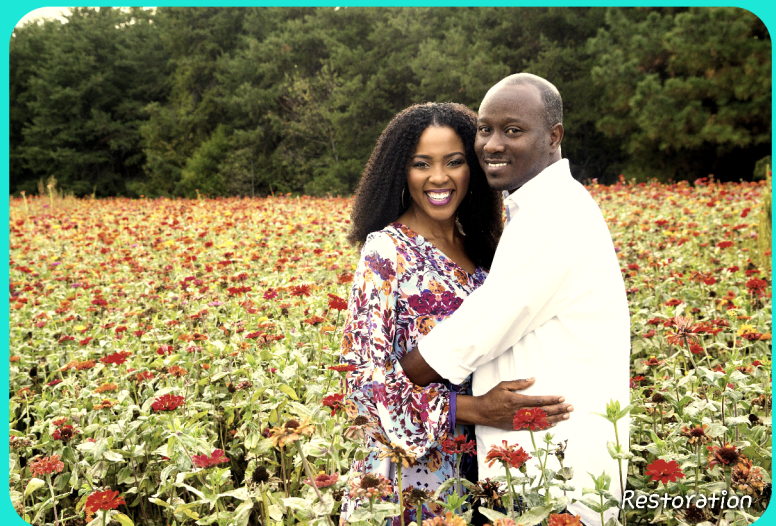
Thank you! I have been remarried now for 17 years. My advice for new widows is for them to go through their process! Do not allow anyone to tell you how long it should take you. That is why I don't share how long it took me to remarry because people use it as a yardstick or judgment. It is not an easy process, and do not believe the lie when people tell you, you are trying to replace your husband. No one can be replaced, everyone is different, and you never forget your spouse. The difference is, you don't have the hurt that comes with it when you think about him after your process of healing. There are times when you will cry and long for your husband please find a good support system. Grief is a huge spiritual force, that leads to depression and can lead to different health problems, recognize the signs. Please ask for help. Be very careful of people who will come to take advantage of your vulnerability especially the opposite sex if you're a woman and sometimes men also. Your emotions are raw, and life has just thrown you a curve ball more like a change of status. Only you know when you are ready to move on; I didn't go to counseling so I am not sure what they have to offer.

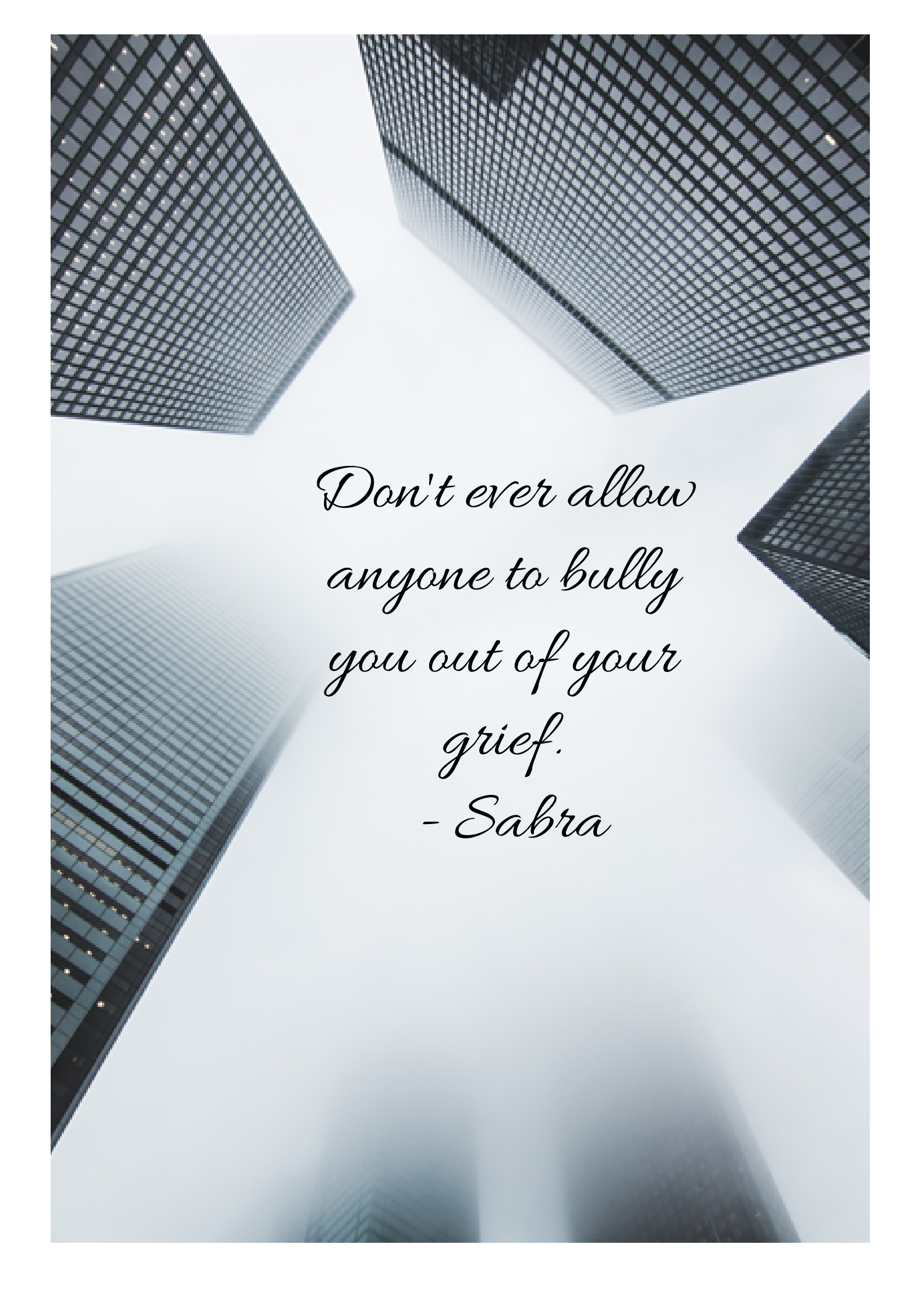
By all means, if you need it please use it but make sure it is sound and the right one for you. Do not feel guilty to have a good time hanging out with friends. Learn a new skill, find something to do. What will your spouse want for you? Your deceased spouse would love for you to be happy and healthy for your self and your children if you have any.

God was my anchor. I was not a Christian prior to my loss and grief journey but after I met a lady who introduced me to salvation, I started a relationship with Jesus taking baby steps and I have never regretted it.

And lastly, forgive your self for the Many "I love you" you missed to say while he was alive with you, give your self the permission to live again, love again.

God loves you! May God Comfort you as he comforted me and give you his beauty for ashes. Be restored forever.



A low-angle, upward-looking photograph of several modern skyscrapers. The buildings are dark, with a grid-like pattern of windows, and their edges converge towards the top of the frame against a bright, hazy sky. The perspective creates a sense of height and scale.

*Don't ever allow
anyone to bully
you out of your
grief.
- Sabra*

Coming Fall 2019

Exposing

YOUR WOUNDS

A Widow's Guide
To
Healing
& Resilience

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Sabra Robinson

Widowed, But Not Wounded

The Hustle & Flow
of 13 Resilient
Black Widowed
Women

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SABRA ROBINSON et al
Foreword by Stafford Sutton, PhD

BLACK *Widow* MAGICTM



Nominations are in!
(See pages 22-31)

Black Widow Magic is a feeling, an expression of accomplishment, and resilience for the black and brown widow who has decided that her past struggle will not define her current state. She has decided to move forward and empower others with renewed strength, zest, and faith. This woman is unstoppable and is consistent in empowering her widowed sistas. This woman is often considered a hidden gem - and does not receive the recognition that she truly deserves. Meet all of the nominees for this go-round of nominations.

As promised, nominees will be announced today, National Widow's Day for all widows state-wide. These nominations will be eligible to be voted for Ms. Black Widow Magic January 2020.

Curious if you're on the list? Check out pages 22-31 for a listing of all of the nominations for this first round of the Black Widow Magic campaign. [Click here](#) for more details about this initiative.

Announcements
to be made on
National Widow's Day,
May 3

&
Int'l Widow's Day,
June 23



Hope Okoli-Nwakwesi
BWM International Brand Ambassador

Cast Your
Black Widow Magic
Nomination Today!



Maya Tyler
BWM USA Brand Ambassador

Nominate a Widow Today!
(Brand Ambassadors are for advertisement only)

"Black Widow Magic is a feeling, an expression of accomplishment, and resilience for the black and brown widow who has decided that her past struggle will not define her current state," says Sabra Robinson, Founder of Black Women Widows Empowered

Visit Blackwomenwidowsempowered.com

shebbi eversley



"Shebbi shows care and concern for others in a special way. She is careful not to judge and she warmly considers others feelings and she exemplifies love and support that has others best interest at heart"

"Shebbi loves to lift others up. She is amazing at showing people how to be the best version of themselves. She is an entertainer and her creativity is infinite."

"Shebbi loves to empower, educate and inspire women from in home party experiences to coaching ladies on how to achieve success as an independent business owner."

"Shebbi is a woman of strength and virtue. She is a phenomenal woman, who through her successes as well as triumph, inspires others in many ways."

"Shebbi loves what she does and goes above and beyond"

"Shebbi is a woman and strength and virtue. She is a phenomenal woman who through her successes as well as triumph inspires others in many ways."

"Shebbi is a valued woman who many sees the special gives she possess. I know she could be recognized even more for tge strips she wears, the empowerment she provides, she sacrifices she makes for family and many others"

"Shebbi is always positive. Building others up to the top whenever needed. Helping others never to fail. Always only a phone call away. Any time I've ever needed her in my business, she's there to help me. She is full of knowledge and resources and simply a joy to be around."

"In her business, she addresses all types of women's issues from sexual assault and above. She must remain open to all and never judge anyone's character!"

"Through the devastation of losing her young husband, the transformation has left her renovated to change more lives than ever before."

Her integrity and honesty outshines in her business and our sisterhood. Always staying positive though she had an extremely bad experience. Sheb always looks for the good in people

"She empowers, educates and inspires other women."

"She always involved and gives great information, leads an amazing team of women."

"She's always a leader in her profession."

carole davis



"She is a prayer warrior and intercessor. Her prayers will move and inspire you and make you believe that anything is possible. She is selfless, and always goes over and beyond to help everyone she knows and people she doesn't know. She is such an encourager and she is a mother to all. She is always caring, nurturing and giving. To know her is to love her and her presence and words touch souls and inspires many. She is affectionally called, Mother Carole."

"Carole puts her heart into everything she does. She doesn't care what else is going on she is going to push through to make sure she completes whatever job or work she starts. She loves her work so much she gets lost in it. She is motivated and excited about anything that has to do with her work in fact what she does is not work to her but just sheer joy."

She is very creative and does all types of innovative graphics and inspirational poems, bookmarks, and creative things to inspire her group and other people. What's more invigorating and innovative about her creativity and innovation is the fact that she is self-taught.

"She exudes and displays love in all she does. She never half steps or slacks but always give full effort and attention to what she does. She will never settle; it's not in her character."

There is not a person on the earth that I can think of that knows this woman that can tell you anything else besides she is true Proverbs 31 woman that constantly walks upright and integrity. She is a role model to all who know her.

"She always stays in the background and basically works behind the scenes to make everyone else look good. She deserves recognition for her empowerment and life-changing contributions."

erika taylor ruffin



Erika is a new widow of five months and she excitedly jumped into the BWWE Life Support (Main) Group by sharing, asking questions and also supporting other posts.

Erika is the Top Contributor for this group with almost 300 posts and comments since joining and is also the Top Contributor for the BWWE Christian Inspiration group!

Crystal keeps the BWWE Black Love Secret group on their toes. She's transparent and doesn't mind receiving advice and acting on it.

Although not expected, she also provides the group updates from the advice she receives.

Crystal is the TOP contributor to this group!

crystal joi copeny pruitt



kisha taylor

Kisha routinely connects with the widows in the BWWE's Facebook closed widow's groups and the Black Love Secret Group. She is transparent, connects with the widows and supports others in the group.

Kisha is ranked as one of the Top 3 contributors in BOTH groups.



tamiko thames mccollum

Tamiko brings absolute laughter, realness, and transparency to BWWE's Secret Black Love group. Her comments are detailed and her compassion and empathy are admirable. Tamiko is ranked as one of the top 2 contributors in this group.



candice may

Candice serves as the Admin of the Black Women Widows Empowered Christian Inspiration Closed Group. She faithfully monitors group requests, welcomes new members with open arms and ensures all requests are valid. Candice also plays an active role in contributing to this inspirational group!



karen braswell ("kaybee")

Besides writing for BWWE, Karen was instrumental in helping to create the Black Love Secret Facebook group. She helps monitor member activity as well as new member selection. We can't get enough of her unique acronyms!



connie sims smith



Connie serves as the Admin of the Black Women Widows Empowered Life Support Facebook Group. She works alongside the founder of the group to ensure new members are greeted with a warm welcome and monitors all new requests.

Connie is also one of the group's intercessory prayer warriors and also plays an active role in contributing to all affiliated groups!

cheryl barnes



Cheryl is the co-founder of the Black and Widowed: A Unique Journey Facebook group where she serves as the Admin. This unique group includes widows and widowers. Cheryl ensures all new members are greeted warmly and is also a BWWE mentor for new widows, and writer for the website.

adrienne lindsey



Adrienne faithfully keeps the sistas on their toes on Saturday evenings by asking, "What you doin?"

This one question makes interaction fun and brings fellowship among the sistas!

melissa pl peoples



Melissa has recently begun blogging with BWWE. She also is our Book Discussion facilitator and soon to be a BWWE Meetup Host in her city of Columbus, Ohio

rhonda butler

Rhonda serves as a BWWE mentor to new widows, and also serves as a BWWE prayer lead



bridgett terrell

Bridgett serves as a BWWE mentor to new widows,



sabrina warwnick lewis

Sabrina serves as a BWWE mentor to new widows,

savvy brouwer- boyd csa

Savy serves as a BWWE mentor to new widows,





tryphenna c. bastian

Tryphenna volunteered to write for the BWWE website, where her article became one of the most viewed blogs on the site! She also serves as a BWWE Book Discussion lead. She also voluntarily blogs for the BWWE site!

danielle james

Danielle gives back to BWWE by selling her Paparazzi Jewelry on our website! Thank you, Danielle!



shawna davis

Shawna has written for BWWE and currently gives back to the organization by selling her widow t-shirts! Thank you, Shawna!



maya tyler

Maya helped organize the BWWE DMV meetup, she reached out to see how she could help BWWE and dove right into supporting the work of BWWE widows overall.



melody brown (aka "aria")

Melody serves as a co-host on BWWE's podcast and assistant to Sabra during Charlotte -area Meetups.



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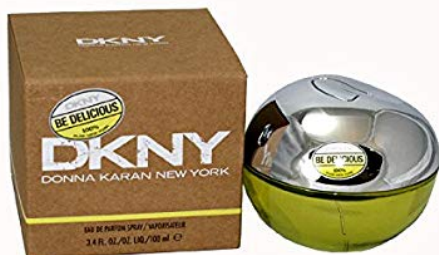


Sabra's favorite things!

Amber & Argan
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Body Works
6.3 FL OZ
\$24.99 Amazon.com



Nature's Truth
Sweet Almond
Aromatherapy
Skin Care
Essential Oil
4 fl oz
\$6.99 - Target
Great for dark
circles!



Donna Karan DKNY -
Be Delicious Pure New
York Perfume for
Women, 3.4 Oz \$32
Amazon.com

Jacqueline Elliott
Owner



Shelled Walnuts - 16 oz
Target Market Pantry
\$7.59



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notes of delicate flower
blossoms including
jasmine, violet, rose -
grounded in a very
sensual but sheer
musk
Diva \$32

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DON'T BE AFRAID TO DREAM

MAPPING YOU 2 #NEXTYOU MASTERCLASS

Moving Forward

AND FINDING PEACE

IS SO MUCH BETTER THAN

Moving "On"

THEBOUNCEBACKPROJECT.COM

On a personal note, I'd like to take some time to ask you something. How are you REALLY doing? There's a difference between moving on and moving forward. About you: Maybe you're a powerhouse providing for everyone but maybe lacking that "spark" you used to have. Your mindset? Tired, but determined. Your strategy? You don't have one! You're just going with the flow and keeping the faith. Well - faith without works is dead. I want to show you something that involves faith AND works! Maya Tyler's story is just like ours - except she's cracked the code to finding renewed purpose, healing, growth and happiness --and wants to show you how she did it!! She's got a FREE Webinar telling exactly what she did. GO HERE --->MappingU2 #NextYOU or go to <http://bit.ly/BWWEAFF> I'm rooting for you!! You can do this!



Widow Hacks: Beating Anxiety Disorder

By Maya Tyler

The Bounce Back Project

Dealing with anxiety disorder can be hard enough unprovoked; but when dealing with them in conjunction with lack of sleep, grief, or constant stress, it can be much, much worse. Enter: Widowhood. In my case, I was dealing with physical and mental stress, leading me to a prescription dependency, and upon my husband's death, it got 10x worse. I had to somehow get myself back together, and be able to function enough to raise two kids and work full time. Since the prescription antidepressants and 'calming' meds weren't allowing me to be alert or independent...I could not focus on work, handle the pressures of single parenting, drive for long stretches, or even simply be alone! I was so afraid I was going to die from the symptoms of each attack – and doctors couldn't do much for me other than give me more meds!

When I'd finally decided enough was enough (10 months later) and since meds were not helping proactively, only as a band-aid fix in dire situations; I had to wean myself off of them, go thru withdrawal, and then learn how to naturally cope with anxiety attacks without meds. It took some time, therapy, and a LOT of patience, but once I got a routine down, and my coping mechanisms became second nature- things got a LOT better. I got my life back.

Finally now, and for the past 6 years, I'm back at work full time, I can live alone, be fully present for my kids, relationships and even get thru my loneliness being a

WIDOW HACKS: BEATING ANXIETY DISORDER

Dealing with anxiety disorder can be hard enough.

Because so many other women go through this silent agony, with no visible symptoms and usually have no one close to them who can really relate, I wanted to share some of the techniques I was taught -that actually worked.

FIRST, KNOW YOUR SYMPTOMS!

Anxiety disorder is so hard to diagnose properly because it is the "phantom", symptom king. My symptoms could at any given time range from shortness of breath, sudden heart palpitations, numbness and tingling in my fingers and/or left arm (and yes, thinking it could be a heart attack only made the symptoms WORSE!) to sudden fatigue, chest pains, dry mouth or heartburn. I really was feeling like a

once I explained all of these wide-ranging symptoms to my therapist, it helped to know that she was familiar with them all – and they were NOT life threatening. They are "false alarm" reactions that your brain has "learned" at some point for whatever reason during some event that you've encountered as a natural reaction to mental or physical stress. The good news is, you can UN-learn that sequence of reactions with practice, patience and coping mechanisms. Read more here.

Maya
Tyler



Widow Support

The God Who Goes Before You

"I really did not quite understand the extent of protection and care I felt as a result of Kenneth being in my life."

Even in high school, we were just friends.

However, when walking around the hood, catching the 59th Street bus and Red-line for Target Hope classes on Saturday mornings, it helped to have my 6'3" friend tell me, "I will meet you on 59th and we will go together."

It helped to have someone smart and savvy to study with at the library. To have a friend who was ranked in the top 10 in the class always ask me to partner on class assignments. A? No problem.

It was comforting to know that although I was at college with no computer, I could type my papers on his. The list goes on and on when it comes to 20 years of, come what may - you know someone has your back.

The sudden loss of that kind of constant support can leave you feeling like you are out in a cold world, fending for yourself (and four little people) in my case.



LaSandra Hutchinson

So, when God shows up in mysterious and wondrous ways, I am compelled to share...

On my way to Florida to board a cruise ship to the Bahamas, I had a situation.

After only two hours of sleep, I had so much stuff in my hands as I boarded the plane, I thought it was a good idea to set my drivers license in the mesh pocket of the plane seat in front of me (just for a minute) while I got situated. Well, of course, after getting situated, your girl forgot she put it there, walked off the plane, and proceeded to baggage claim.

I realized I didn't have it and asked the airline staff to look for it on the plane. No luck there.

After almost 3 hours of having staff look and trips to lost and found, I left to try and board the ship with only a birth certificate, an old copy of a Driver's license, and a library card that had my photo on it.

I looked through my phone to see if I might have a photo of my license only to find an email Kenneth had sent to the Steve Harvey show a few years ago when I had left my license in the car and needed it to be a guest in the audience. Kenneth was at work, emailing the Steve Harvey show staff on my behalf, trying to make sure they let me in. Protecting. Looking out. Having my back.

At that point, the combination of leaving my license on that plane, my lack of sleep, and finding that email spiraled me into grief-mode.

I began to think, "I had someone who had my back and now they are gone and that is why this is happening!" I felt defeated.

To my benefit, I am going on the cruise with a group of prayer warriors. Hence, they go into full out prayer and spiritual warfare as we approach the ship. Me? I would say I was in something of a daze. Just numb.

I approach the first security check and I see the woman is very thorough in her checking of identification. She says forcefully to me, "Ma'am! I need to see your identification."

Heart in my throat, I lift up my pitiful proof of identity feeling at the mercy of God himself. All I had was a weak, "Lord, help. Let your will be done because I am SO tired."

The security guard pauses and looks up at me. Her face lights up and in the friendliest voice, she says, "LaSandra?!!! It's me —! I went to school with you! How are you?! How are the kids?! I am so glad you are going on this cruise!" She gives me a hug and wishes me well on my trip.

My friend's jaws are now on the floor.

I am bewildered. "What just happened?! Am I in a dream?!"

At the next security check, they tell me that they need me to sit and wait for a supervisor to approve my going any further.

The supervisor goes back and forth, asking me a lot of questions, making lots of phone calls and in the midst of it takes my hand and says to me; "I am trying to see what I can do for you. Don't give up your faith."

I'm just thinking "Whaaaauuut?!"

She finally comes back and tells us that I am approved to go on the ship and that she will meet me when I get back to go through customs.

I kept thinking, "Lord, this is the craziest situation. What is the lesson? Are you talking me to me through this?" The scripture that keeps coming to my mind is this:

"The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

- Deuteronomy 31:8

He keeps on doing things to build my courage and to assure me that he has gone before me and already placed the protection, the support, the ways, the open doors, and the right people in my path! The Lord is so amazing!

After LaSandra unexpectedly became a widow after 13 years of marriage to her best friend, she began documenting about her experience of grace and grief through her writing, speaking, YouTube Channel and online community. Through Grace & Grief, LaSandra not only shares her transparent journey of widowhood but builds the capacity of others to grow through grief and recreate their lives after loss.

Black Widows Alliance and Influencers (BWAI)

**An extension of Black Women Widows
Empowered*

**To include Widowed
Organizations &
Influencers state-wide
(USA)**

Coming Soon!

Contact
BWWE Member Antonia Coleman
AntoniaRColeman@gmail.com
or
Empower@BlackWomenWidowsEmpowered.com

Circling the wagons to practice
Cooperative Economics & Ubuntu
for the advancement of Black and
Brown widows





"I still haven't cleaned out my husband's closet. A year after he passed, a friend told me I should. I said I'll do it when I'm ready."

BET's 'Games People Play' Consulting Producer, Game Changer & Widow, Sara Finney-Johnson

By Sabra Robinson

Meet Sara Finney-Johnson - writer, producer and co-creator of many of the black 90's sitcoms. She is known for her work on BET, UPN and CBS such as *The Game* (2006), *The Parkers* (1999) *Family Matters* (1989), *Moesha* (1996), *The Quad* (2017), *Girlfriends*, *227* (1995) and *The Jeffersons* (1975), just to name a few.

She is currently Co-Executive Producer of BET's, "American Soul" and Consulting Producer of "Games People Play". A member of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. organization, she's also a widow of five years. She was previously married to Robert Lee Johnson Jr. - a widower prior to their union - which garnered 12 years of marriage (together 17). Robert was an accomplished writer and poet, and an award-winning artist whose skill and talent showed in his drawings and paintings. He studied with African-American social realist artist Charles W. White.

Sara has been in the business for several years telling the story of the black experience, back when creating a movie on a cell phone was unheard of. I did some research and heard a recent podcast where she said that during her early years in the business, she felt that God had put her in the right place at the right time and proudly states that without God, she would not be where she is. Sara is THE ultimate sista who has it going on. Did you know that she also wrote for Sammy Davis, Jr. and Steve Urkel while she was on her way to creating *Moesha*?

I'm sitting here on my bed shaking my head as I write this article. This woman is just THAT sista who is a legend in her own right and yet she gave me the time of day to allow me to interview her. Sara read one of my tweets last year, reached out and here we are thanks to Twitter!

Readers, do me a favor, as you're sipping your mid-day tea, drinking a glass of wine with dinner or happen to be up during the midnight hour, check out what Sara has to say about how she juggles being one of the female entertainment powerhouses in Hollywood while being widowed.

TWWOC:

Hi Sara! I'm so thankful for your time. Thanks for agreeing to be interviewed.

Sara:

Hi Sabra! Yes, I saw your tweet about your organization. I read something you tweeted that spoke to me so I was very happy to see that there was a network out there for widows, especially widows of color.

TWWOC:

I do have a few questions with one being, how have you been coping these past few years since the death of your late husband?

The way I cope is one day at a time. One moment at a time. Some days are good, some not so good. The challenges are constantly in front of me, but I'm a woman of faith, so I continue to trust and lean on God. It's the only way I've gotten through this. And having wonderful kids (they're young adults) who love me and that I love has been a blessing. We have become closer and lean on each other. I'm also blessed with family and sister-friends who continue to be there for me. An amazing supportive group of loved ones who pray for me and are here for me has been a huge blessing. I had wanted to go to therapy but I didn't make the time, but I believe in it and I think one day, I will probably do it.

TWWOC:

Many widows have felt that honoring their husband's death gives them a sense of connection and gratification. Do you honor his death in any way?

Sara:

I don't celebrate the day Bob passed away. We celebrate his birthday which is July 23rd. On the anniversary of his death, I usually communicate with my kids and let them know I'm thinking about them as I remember that day and remembering the amazing man that their father was. It's still a challenging time for us.

TWWOC:

What tips would you give Widows in the entertainment industry versus those widows who are not?

Sara:

The advice I'd give widows, whether in the entertainment business or not, is to grieve in your own way and own time. Don't listen to people who tell you what you should be feeling or how long you should be feeling it. I still haven't cleaned out my husband's closet. A year after he passed, a friend told me I should. I said I'll do it when I'm ready. I tried a few weeks ago with the kids but we got very little done.

You take things out, remember them, cry and before you know it, not much is done. But that's okay. I'll probably finish it by myself. I need that time to say goodbye again -- to the things that belonged to him, that he wore, touched, used, etc. It's very hard for me to pack them away or give them away but I remind myself that he would want someone to use those items. Whatever suits or clothing items my son doesn't take, I plan on donating to a shelter for men.

A lot of these men don't have proper clothing for job interviews so I know my husband would be happy to know he's helping someone further improve their lives. So in a small but significant way, his spirit lives on by touching many lives.

I would also say, try to stay busy. Spend time with family and friends. Even when I don't always feel up to it, I make time for those I love. Whether phone calls, dinner or family gatherings. Holidays are still difficult but I push through and celebrate them, especially for my kids. I want us to always be together as a family and do the things that I know Bob also enjoyed doing with us. It's not the same, it's our "new normal" but it's all we've got. I want my kids to live and to be happy, so I feel I have to set an example and live the strongest and most positive life I can. If I have to cry, I cry but I also remember to laugh with them as well. I'm blessed to be able to continue to work. I've been working non-stop which is a blessing in my business. But even with work, there are still tough moments but because I'm so busy, there aren't as many. It's in those quiet moments that you remember. Or, sometimes it's something that triggers a memory. Sometimes the tears are hard and last forever, sometimes there's a smile. I've concluded that grieving is a process, one that is different for each person. I recently heard someone say, grief is the final act of love. How true.

I don't know if I will ever get over my husband's passing, but I am determined to get through it. It took me a long time to find the right man. But I'm a witness that good things come to those who wait because Bob was well worth the wait. I am blessed to have loved and have been loved by an exceptional man.



Loss of a Spouse

40 Real-Life Tips for the
Newly Widowed

SABRA ROBINSON



Black and Brown Widows DO Need Safe Spaces: 12 Reasons Why

SAFE SPACE

“People of color (PoC) need their own spaces. Black people need their own spaces. We need places in which we can gather and be free from the mainstream stereotypes and marginalization that permeate every other societal space we occupy. We need spaces where we can be our authentic selves without white people’s judgment and insecurity muzzling that expression. We need spaces where we can simply be—where we can get off the treadmill of making white people comfortable and finally realize just how tired we are.”(1) - Kelsey Blackwell

As the founder of Black Women Widows Empowered (BWWE) nonprofit organization, as well as its private Facebook groups (that pledges to provide a safe space for widows of color), it's no secret that at times I'm reminded of the need for our private safe haven when questioned by other widows or mourners. Not to go into details about what is discussed, just know that the support provided from like-minded widows offers a grand relief to know that we are not in this alone because other sistas get us. Yes, we get one another but unfortunately, not everyone is for it - our personal space, of course

Grief is no respecter of persons and BWWE respects all widows. We gladly promote all widows on our various platforms of outreach, such as our podcasts, Public Facebook pages, and written interviews and blogs, however, due to our historical and generational challenges, BWWE was created specifically for the black (and brown) widowed

My intent was to create a safe, online and in-person group for women of color who can identify with the unique circumstances and challenges faced in a world of intolerance while black and widowed.

"When people of color are together, there can be healing"

Several of the widows in my groups have often relayed how appreciative they are for a space that grants a judgment-free zone on not so conservative posts, a space that offers up a positive emoji or two (or three or four) for a job well done, and space where the African-American Vernacular English can be appreciated, (when we feel like using it) and understood by our sistas, no matter how educated. Sometimes, being free in our own space allows us to, well, be unbound by the politically correct responses that are expected otherwise from other online or in-person private spaces.

Several weeks ago, a sista posted a great article to the group and it actually inspired me to (yet again) pen a response. I know, I shouldn't have to explain the need for a private gathering of black women widows to no one. But when you're questioned publicly in interviews or even privately, repeated statements such as, "Why the need for a group for widows of color?" or "Don't we all grieve the same?" tend to be a constant thorn in my flesh.

"People of color need their own spaces. Black people need their own spaces"

It can't tell you the number of comments or messages I receive about how a group like Black Women Widows Empowered has helped our widowed sistas with their journey. Many have stated that they've been searching for spaces for us by us and I'm glad they made our community their home. We're a place with no filters, a place of strength, support, humility, anger, compassion, prayer, and empathy. Not only are we a place of solace for the black widow, but we also offer laughter, dating and relationship advice, and expressed love for our black and brown widowed sistas.

12 reasons why we need our safe spaces.

Reason 1

"I was so happy and excited when I found this page, purely on accident. I am already a member of several widows groups but none were focusing on the unique issues of black widowed women (or men). Joining a group like this one has given me the freedom to be ME. This is a huge family of women who actually get it and understand what I've been through. Feeling accepted has given me the power to begin my life again and feel as though I can accomplish more. I feel safe putting my real self out there here. I am allowed to miss my beautiful Black husband here and talk about him here without judgment or reprisal. Best of all, posts and topics are very relevant to me as a Black widowed woman...something very hard to find "out there". Thank you for building this forum for us." -Cheryl B

Reason 2

"I found this group after five years of feeling like a "blue orange." I was widowed at 41, with a 10-year-old daughter and, Black, of course. I did grief counseling early in my journey. It was helpful, but I still felt alone. I needed a place to belong, and safe for me to be free to express my struggles, victories, and hard truths in this life. BWWE is that place for me. The women here lift me up and hold me down. I'm blessed to do the same." -Karen B

Reason 3

"Simply put, BWWE has helped me maintain my sanity in an insane world! Sometimes the external (and internal) pressures of loss and life can be overwhelming. This network is a safe haven in which to share and discuss those overwhelming challenges. It's therapy" -Melody

Reason 4

"It feels like my own village of sisters who know specifically what I'm going through. It has and still is helping me." -Dee Hooks-Knott

Reason 5

"A community to help and support us as we walk through this journey none of us expected. Sabra has been a great leader and protector of us." Thank you.

-Margot Scurry

Reason 6

"This group is simply a blessing to many of the most vulnerable and painful time of life's journey. It's a road map to another dimension of life and sisterhood after the loss of your husband. I highly recommend this group." -Gwen Wayne

Reason 7

"Very encouraging and uplifting." -Jessica Jackson

Reason 8

"This is a group where all widows are equal. Our common denominator is Widowhood. We love and support each other in any way we can." -Dianah Kamande

Reason 9

"When I lost my husband on 1-10-16, I had so much support by family & friends. However, if you have never lost a spouse it's a different type of loss. This group gave me the type of support that was needed. I needed the support of others who experienced first hand the pain, empty void, hurt, and anger it brought to me." -Sheila McRae

Reason 10

"It's important to have folks around you who can empathize with your circumstances. These sisters are those folks. When I thought I'd be lost forever in darkness, they helped me rediscover my light within." -Angelique Hilton

Reason 11

"Not having to explain to be understood has been invaluable. I hope you find that here if you need it." -Adrienne Leonard Pollard

Reason 12

"This group and Sabra's book has made me be resilient. I'm still in remission and

Sisterhood. Support.

Sisterhood among widows is necessary, in my opinion, especially among black and brown sisters. Support among black and brown widow sisters helps with healing.

Did you know that the heyday of black sisterhood was in full effect during the 1950s and 1960s when we had to come together during the dawn of the Civil Rights Movement? But then as years passed, so did the sisterhood.

After stumbling across Katrina Bell McDonald's book, *Embracing Sisterhood: Class, Identify, and Contemporary Black Women*, Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins writes (among other things): "...unity among black women has long been threatened by differences among them, including differences in social class." (2) Yes, the sisterhood exists but if compared to the tight-knit connection years ago, (and especially since the dawn of the Internet) can we truly say that it's still as powerful as it used to be? Do we really categorize our sistas based on social class today? Esteem and prestige are null and nonexistence in our group because unfortunately, we all share the same marital status: widowed (NOT single - there's a difference). We are all one melting pot of widows who share grief and loss and a different type of sisterhood. Our group consists of women who work in the blue-collar industry, the white collar industry, there are retirees, ministers, and educated women (let me emphasize here that our educated sistas come from HBCUs, Ivy League, technical schools, and state colleges/universities).

Community.

Black women constructed and participated in multiple communities. These communities, or webs of relationships and networks, fell under two umbrella categories—spaces or communal sites—neighborhoods, schools, churches for affirmation and solidarity; and “experiences” of nurturing, mothering, organizing, and protesting against multiple oppression. Some women constructed or shared in the development of, both forms of community as they developed their own unique expressions of spirituality to keep body and soul together and to preserve mental health. (3). Furthermore, strategic networking and cooperation characterize black women's complex relationships with each other. (4)

Many widows in the group have different stories of how they arrived into this community - from brutal murders (many unsolved), to accidents, and sudden illness. The power of our black widowed community is undeniable, especially to those who are newly widowed.

We need to see them.

We need to hear them.

We need to support them.

I'll end here with a quote taken from a black Chicago Tribune columnist in 2006 about the importance of the black community. Although not directly related to widowhood, it indirectly aligns with the purpose of our struggle:

"For some of us, it is the easiest thing in the world to idealize black women. To romanticize them, sentimentalize them. Point being, black women are the strength and succor of their community. (5)

And this is why black and brown widows need their own spaces - because they say so.

Listen to the Podcast of the Women Behind the Stories of "Widowed, But Not Wounded"

Join us for a chat with the Authors of the book.

Widowed, But Not Wounded:
The Hustle & Flow of 13 Resilient Black Widowed Women

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