

TRANSPARENT

FOR & BY BLACK TRANS WOMEN

WINTER ISSUE

A Black trans woman, Princess Von Dutch, is the central figure on the cover. She is wearing a vibrant, strapless pink dress with ruffled details and a long, flowing train. She is also wearing high-heeled sandals with bows. She is posing with one hand on her hip and the other pointing towards the camera. The background is a colorful, abstract wall with large, overlapping circles and stripes in shades of purple, pink, green, and blue.

PRINCESS VON DUTCH

Cover Model

OWNING THE FEMININE WITHIN

A Conversation with Brodderick Roary

LOVER GIRL

Soft power meets hot girl energy

LOVE SO BIG

Johna'e Wright & Traviondre Gibson



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Contents

- 04 STATE OF EMERGENCY**
Facts and statistics
- 06 A LIFE OF DEFIANCE, COMPASSION & REVOLUTIONARY LOVE**
Ms. Major Griffin-Gracy
- 10 FEMGIRLS**
Remembering Vanity Williams
- 14 PRETTY & PETTY**
Zelihaanna Torres
- 18 PLAYING GAMES**
Audrey Nicole
- 22 AFTER HOURS**
Johna'e Wright
- 26 LOVER GIRL**
From the House of Von Dutch: Carolinas Mother Princess Von Dutch, Icon Camil Von Dutch, Aspen Von Dutch
- 32 A CONVERSATION WITH BRODDERICK ROARY**
Owning the Feminine Within
- 38 REV. DEBRA HOPKINS ON AGING AND THE POWER OF BECOMING**
Grace in the Mirror
- 42 APOSTLE CASSANDRA JONES SHARES HER FAITH, IDENTITY AND SECRETS TO SPIRITUAL FREEDOM**
Q&A with Apostle Cassandra Jones
- 48 LOVE SO BIG**
Johna'e Wright & Traviondre Gibson
- 58 THE HOUSE THAT PRINCESS BUILT**
Q & A with Mother Princess Von Dutch

Editor's Note



*“Our liberation
is intertwined.
Our stories,
bound together.”*

I have a confession. There was a time — some years ago — when I harbored biases I didn't even know I had. Though I proudly identified as a Black gay man and worked tirelessly for my community, I hadn't yet done the deeper work of examining how my own perceptions of gender shaped the way I saw others. It was during my years helping to co-found Charlotte Black Pride and South Carolina Black Pride that the mirror was held up to me. In serving a diverse spectrum of LGBTQ+ people, I was forced to confront a truth I could no longer avoid: if I was to truly serve my people, I had to serve all of my people — including my Trans and gender-nonconforming siblings.

Through those early years of organizing, I forged transformative relationships with brilliant, resilient, and extraordinary individuals whose courage redefined my understanding of self, love and liberation. The more I listened, learned and worked alongside them, the more my cultural competency — and compassion — expanded. I began to see that what connects us runs far deeper than what divides us. That realization grew into an unshakable love and reverence for the gender-diverse community that continues to shape who I am as both an artist and advocate.

As a Black cisgender man and fierce Trans ally, I stand in solidarity — knowing that the same systems that target Trans and gender-nonconforming people are the very ones that seek to diminish me. Our liberation is intertwined. Our stories, bound together.

It is in that spirit that I proudly serve as co-senior editor and welcome you to the Fall 2025 Edition of (Trans)parent Magazine — a powerful, necessary platform where Black Trans Women lead, speak, and shine on their own terms. May these pages remind us that when we see one another fully, we move the World closer to freedom.

*Jermaine Nakia Lee
Co-Senior Editor, (Trans)parent Magazine*



“The American Medical Association has called the surge of Trans Women of Color murders an ‘epidemic.’ SOE is committed to addressing the social determinants that put Trans Women of Color at-risk.”— Rev. Sonja Lee, SOE Executive Director

BLACK TRANS WOMEN ARE LIVING IN A

State of emergency

Top 3 Issues Challenging the quality of life for Trans Women of Color

Results from The National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force’s recent study.



HEALTH

Health disparities due to systemic racism and transphobia. BTW face staggering rates of STD infection, lack of primary care and high rates of suicide. SOE seeks to increase opportunities for physical exams, purchase of medication and nutritious food, transportation to doctor visits.



ECONOMICS

Trans Women of Color bear the economic consequences of discrimination - high rates of poverty and unemployment. BTW are likely to live in extreme poverty earning under \$10,000 a year, with Latina Trans Women facing 7x and Black Trans Women facing 8x the poverty rate of the general U.S. population.



SOCIAL CAPITAL

Trans Women of Color experience frightening levels of physical violence. This is particularly true among Trans Women of Color working in sex work and other informal economies. Brutal murders of these women occur with alarming regularity, often with little response from law enforcement. BTW led-strategies and social gatherings foster community relationships that serve as support systems for this marginalized community.

WHAT IS SOE?

STATE OF EMERGENCY (SOE) is an online and in-person coalition of LGBTQIA & Allied citizens committed to improving the safety, quality of life and upward mobility of Black Transgender Women (BTW) in the Charlotte NC area through peer support, community capacity building and providing access to (or creating) psycho-social, medical, educational, financial, personal care and housing resources.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Despite the notable progress of the Transgender movement in the last decade, resulting in greater public awareness and significant legal victories, Trans people continue to face blatant discrimination, high levels of violence, and poor health outcomes. Trans people of color (especially Trans Women of Color) endure dramatically worse health and economic outcomes as they navigate multiple systems of oppression.

51% OF BLACK
TRANS WOMEN

REPORT EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS
AT SOME POINT IN THEIR LIVES

49% OF BLACK
TRANS WOMEN

HAVE EXPERIENCED A SEXUAL ASSAULT
DURING THEIR LIFETIME

47% OF BLACK
TRANS WOMEN

REPORT BEING FIRED, NOT HIRED, OR
DENIED PROMOTION

What we're doing about it.

HEALTH

Racial Equity in the area of Health - SOE is in partnership with a comprehensive network of primary care, mental/emotional health and hormone therapy providers. SOE will create a state of the art, interactive website and accompanying glossy publication of healthcare resources for BTW. The website will feature a quarterly updated resource list of primary care, mental/emotional health and hormone therapy resource listings especially tailored for BTW.

By expanding access to quality health care resources, we will improve outcomes in the areas of health and wellness. BTW face staggering rates of STD infection, lack of primary care and high rates of suicide. SOE seeks to increase opportunities for physical exams, purchase of medication and nutritious food, transportation to doctor visits.

ECONOMICS

The SOE state of the art, user-friendly website will also feature a weekly updated NOW HIRING job listing of TWOC affirming and available employment opportunities in the Charlotte area.

In addition, the portal will boast a monthly updated resource list of BTW affirming, local, state, faith-based and not for profit organizations that assist with food, personal care items, housing, transportation and emergency assistance funding.

Moreover, the website will highlight The SOE EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE FUND - an active portal where local BTW can request emergency assistance for food, healthcare/meds, personal care items, transportation and housing.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Building community is a key part of SOE. While efforts are underway to strengthen hate crime legislation and bar the use of the so-called gay or trans panic defense for people charged with attacks, SOE aims to do our part locally. SOE understands safety doesn't just relate to physical harm but secure social capital as well - there is safety in numbers - there is safety in a synergized community.

The SOE website serves to build and strengthen social capital amongst TWOC. The SOE website will feature beautiful and affirming images of Charlotte area TWOC spokesmodels, Q&A/Networking portals, updated news topics related to TWOC, feature visual artists/music/poetry by TWOC and direct contact info of TWOC affirming organizations.



MS. MAJOR GRIFFIN-GRACY:

A life of defiance, compassion & revolutionary love

by (Trans)parent Magazine

On October 13, 2025, the world lost one of its fiercest freedom fighters. Miss Major Griffin-Gracy—affectionately known as “Mama” to countless queer and trans kin—passed away peacefully at her home in Little Rock, Arkansas. She was 78.

Her transition marks not only the close of a monumental chapter in LGBTQ+ history, but the continuation of a legacy that will echo for generations.

CHICAGO BEGINNINGS: BECOMING MAJOR

Born in 1946 on Chicago’s South Side, Miss Major was a child of resilience long before she became an icon. Her father worked for the postal service, her mother owned a beauty salon, and even as a young person, she knew she was different—brilliantly, beautifully different.

When she came out to her parents as a teen, the world met her truth with rejection and institutionalization. Yet Miss Major refused erasure. She found sanctuary in drag balls, underground sisterhoods, and the intoxicating freedom of the stage—performing with the legendary Jewel Box Revue and embracing her identity with courage that defied the era’s cruelty. She added “Griffin” to her name in honor of her mother, merging her roots with her revolution.

STONEWALL AND THE BIRTH OF A FIREBRAND

In the late 1960s, New York’s queer nightlife became both haven and battleground. Miss Major was there—at the Stonewall Inn on that fateful June night in 1969 when Trans women, sex workers, and queer folks of color

refused to bow to police brutality. She was arrested and beaten during the uprising but emerged emboldened.

Even as history books sidelined trans women of color from Stonewall’s legacy, Miss Major made it her mission to ensure their names—and their courage—were never forgotten. Her fire burned through poverty, incarceration, and relentless discrimination. During a five-year prison sentence, she met Attica activist Frank “Big Black” Smith, who sparked her political awakening. From then on, her survival became her activism—and her activism became an art form of love.

CALIFORNIA DREAMING: BUILDING A MOVEMENT

By the late ’70s, Miss Major had moved west, channeling her grit into service. From feeding the hungry to supporting those battling HIV/AIDS, she became a lifeline for San Francisco’s trans community during its darkest hours.

In 2004, she joined the Transgender Gender Variant & Intersex Justice Project (TGIJP)—eventually serving as Executive Director.

MODEL: MISS MAJOR GRIFFIN-GRACY

PHOTOGRAPHER: WHITTEN SABBATINI/

THE GUARDIAN

Her advocacy for incarcerated Trans people stretched from state prisons to the United Nations. She often reminded others: “Even if we’re not all behind bars, this system still keeps us locked up.”

Yet “Mama” wasn’t just a warrior—she was a wellspring of care. She mothered generations of activists, creating circles of mentorship and survival where love was strategy and joy was resistance. Her 2023 memoir, *Miss Major Speaks: Conversations with a Black Trans Revolutionary*, captured her wisdom in her own no-nonsense voice—raw, radical, and radiant.

THE HOUSE OF GG: HOME, HAVEN, LEGACY

In 2017, Miss Major planted new roots in Little Rock, Arkansas, where she founded the Griffin-Gracy Educational & Historical Center, lovingly known as The House of GG. It became a sacred refuge for trans and gender-expansive people—especially Black Trans women of the South—to rest, heal, and dream.

Complete with guest houses, gardens, a pool, and over 80 palm trees, the space was as vibrant as its founder. In 2023, she renamed it Tilifi—short for “Telling It Like It Fuckin’ Is.” It stood as both philosophy and home, a living sanctuary where storytelling was survival.

Even as her health declined, Miss Major kept showing up—rolling into rallies in her scooter, offering fierce wisdom and laughter in equal measure.

FINAL DAYS, ENDLESS LEGACY

After decades of health battles—including a kidney transplant and a stroke — Miss Major entered hospice care and passed from complications of infection. She leaves behind her partner, Beck With, several children—biological, adopted, and chosen—and a global family that spans continents and generations.

Her impact? Boundless.

She reframed Trans liberation as inseparable from prison abolition, economic justice, and radical care. She reminded movements that “respectability” was not the goal—freedom was. Her mantra: “We only have each other.”

THE REVOLUTION OF CARE

Miss Major’s work was never abstract. She visited prisons, held dying friends during the AIDS crisis, mothered the abandoned, and built sanctuaries for the marginalized. She demanded that love be militant and that visibility mean protection.



“I’m still f—ing here,” she’d often declare—part testimony, part battle cry.

And indeed, she still is.

From Little Rock’s Tilifi gardens to global Pride marches, her spirit lingers wherever someone dares to live their truth loudly. Every safe house opened, every Trans youth mentored, every Black Trans woman celebrated is another verse in her ongoing song.

ETERNAL MAMA

We may mourn her passing, but Miss Major’s story is not a eulogy—it’s a directive.

To love fiercely.

To protect each other relentlessly.

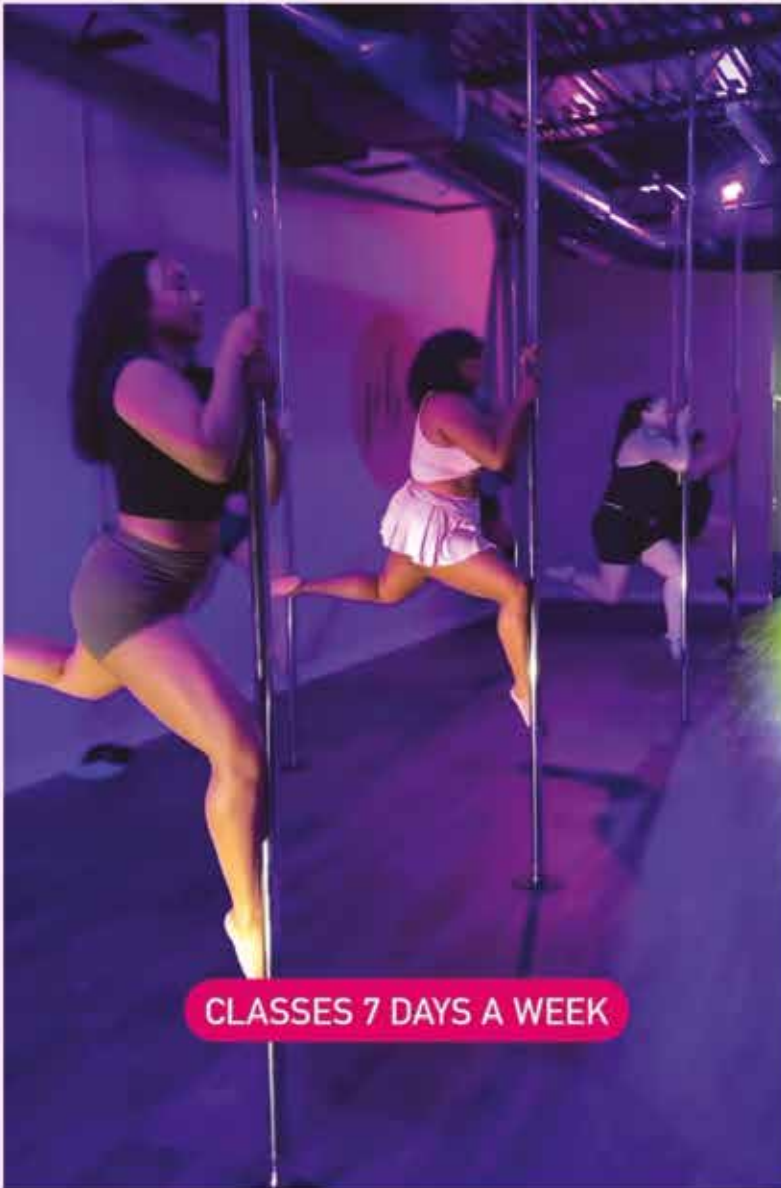
To keep telling it like it fuckin’ is.

Because as long as there are Trans women surviving and thriving against the odds, Miss Major Griffin-Gracy lives on.



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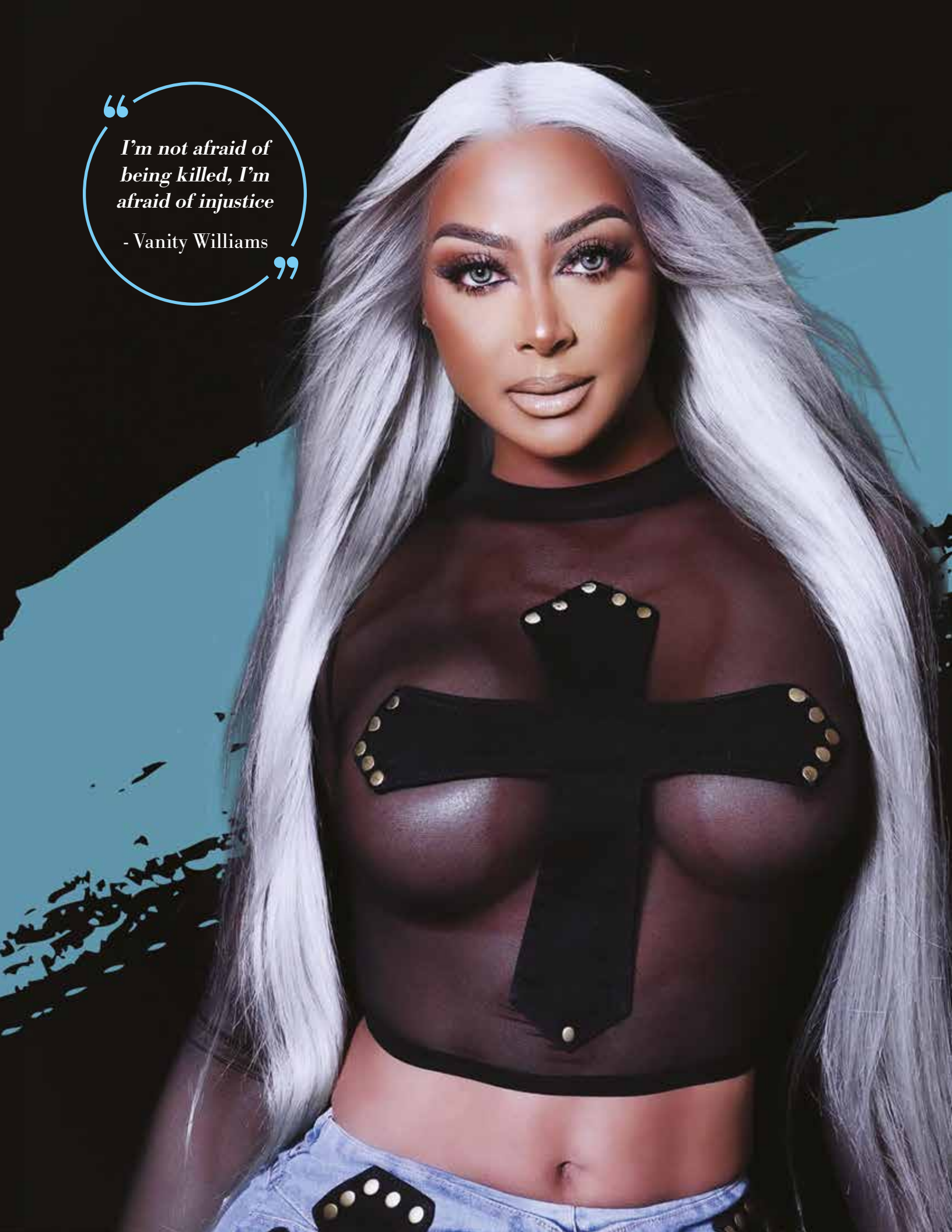


“

*I'm not afraid of
being killed, I'm
afraid of injustice*

- Vanity Williams

”



Femgirls

Remembering Vanity Williams

by Johnáe Wright

There are people who come into our lives and evoke laughter, courage and a light too bright to ever dim. For me, that unforgettable person was Vanity Williams—known to many as Vixen. On August 3, 2024, I lost not just a friend, but a sister.

We met years ago at the Blue Seafood Bar in Atlanta, through a mutual friend. I remember clocking her immediately—middle part hair laid to perfection, nails long enough to tell their own story. My first thought? She looks like the mean, stuck-up type. But when I reluctantly introduced myself—“Heeey, I’m Johnáe”—she gave me one of those polite church hugs that said, “we’ll see.” I figured that was it. But later that night, she asked, “You making plans to go somewhere after this?” A simple question, it became the seed that would blossom into one of the most transformative friendships of my life.

We went bar-hopping that fateful evening, riding around Midtown Atlanta, the city electric around us. Things got wild for a moment—some random guy tried to grab her—and I had to fight him off. That night taught me something remarkable about Vanity: even when chaos erupted, she had this unshakable calm. When we finally got to safety, we just burst into laughter. That laughter became our love language from then on.

Our connection deepened through social media—Twitter Spaces, Clubhouse, late-night conversations that turned into an unshakable sisterhood. Eventually, Vixen, a few other ladies and I formed a small online collective we called The Femgirls. We weren’t just chatting; we were building a movement. The internet can be a cruel place for Black Trans Women, but together we stood tall. We spoke out against the DL (down-low) culture—men who wanted to love us in the dark but deny us in the light—and that made people uncomfortable. They called us horrible names, reported our pages, tried to silence us. But we were not moved.

Our sisterhood was defiant, loud, and unapologetically feminine. And at the heart of it was Vanity. She was our president, our anchor, our comedic relief and our philosopher. Her wit was razor-sharp, her intellect magnetic. She had that rare combination of beauty, brains, and bravery. And when she said your name—stretching it out with love and mischief—she made you feel seen.

Beyond the internet, our friendship blossomed in real life. We visited each other's homes—mine in Charlotte, hers in Houston. She'd pick me up in her sleek two-door BMW with her tiny dog, Euro, in the back seat. She cooked the kind of soul food that made you question your own recipes. I'll never forget one Thanksgiving, she made this huge pan of macaroni & cheese as a side for our dinner. My sister proudly disclosed to me her secret ingredient, "Girl, I put taco seasoning in it." We hollered laughing—but let me tell you something, it was soooooo good.

Vanity was more than just my sister in spirit; she was a force of nature. A proud Air Force veteran, a fearless advocate, a woman who refused to hide or shrink. She stood for dignity, pride, and truth. In a world that often wants Trans women to be invisible, Vanity reminded us that living out loud is a form of protest.

Every day, we step outside knowing that visibility comes with risk. But as Vanity often said, to live in truth speaks louder than to live in shame. That's the kind of courage she embodied.

I miss her laugh, her wisdom, her chaos, her light. But I also know that her spirit didn't leave with her—it multiplied. Every time one of us speaks up, shows up, or refuses to be silenced, she's there. Vanity lives on in all of us who were lucky enough to know her.

And as long as I have breath, the name Femgirl—and the sisterhood she helped build—will live on.

"I'm not afraid of being killed, I'm afraid of injustice"
- Vanity Williams

Sunrise Oct 7, 1989 - Sunset Aug 3, 2024



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SOUTHERN
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TRANS
in the **SOUTH**

A Directory of Trans-Affirming
Health & Legal Service Providers



Check out the guide at
[SOUTHERNEQUALITY.ORG/RESOURCES/TRANSINTHESOUTH](https://southernequality.org/resources/transinthesouth)





Pretty & Petty

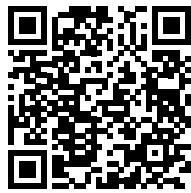
*A fierce visual celebration of beauty with bite.
Inspired by Cardi B's unapologetic anthem, this shoot
captures the art of looking flawless while keeping that
signature edge—where glam meets attitude,
and confidence is the ultimate accessory.*



Scan to listen to Cardi B — Pretty & Petty

MODEL: ZELIHANNA TORRES
PHOTOGRAPHER & CREATIVE
DIRECTOR: JERRY WASHINGTON
BEACONS.AI/JWASHPRODUCTIONS





*Scan to listen to
Cardi B —
Pretty & Petty*







Scan to listen to Summer Walker's "Playing Games" (featuring Bryson Tiller)

Playing Games

*Moody, magnetic, and emotionally raw—
this visual ode to Summer Walker's "Playing Games"
captures the tension between love and self-worth.
It's soft heartbreak draped in silk and shadows,
|where vulnerability meets power and every glance
tells the truth he couldn't.*

MODEL: AUDREY NICOLE

PHOTOGRAPHER & CREATIVE

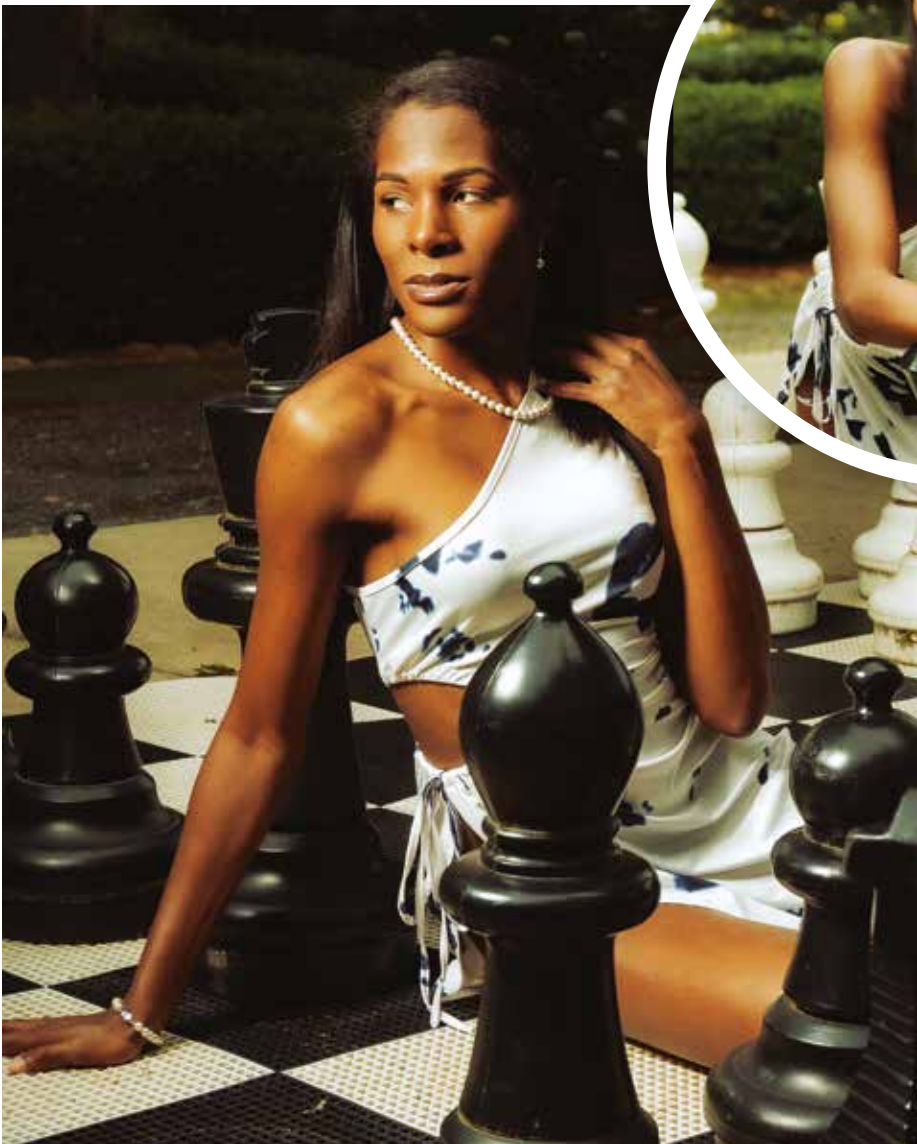
DIRECTOR: JERRY WASHINGTON

BEACONS.AI/JWASHPRODUCTIONS





Scan to listen to Summer Walker's "Playing Games" (featuring Bryson Tiller)

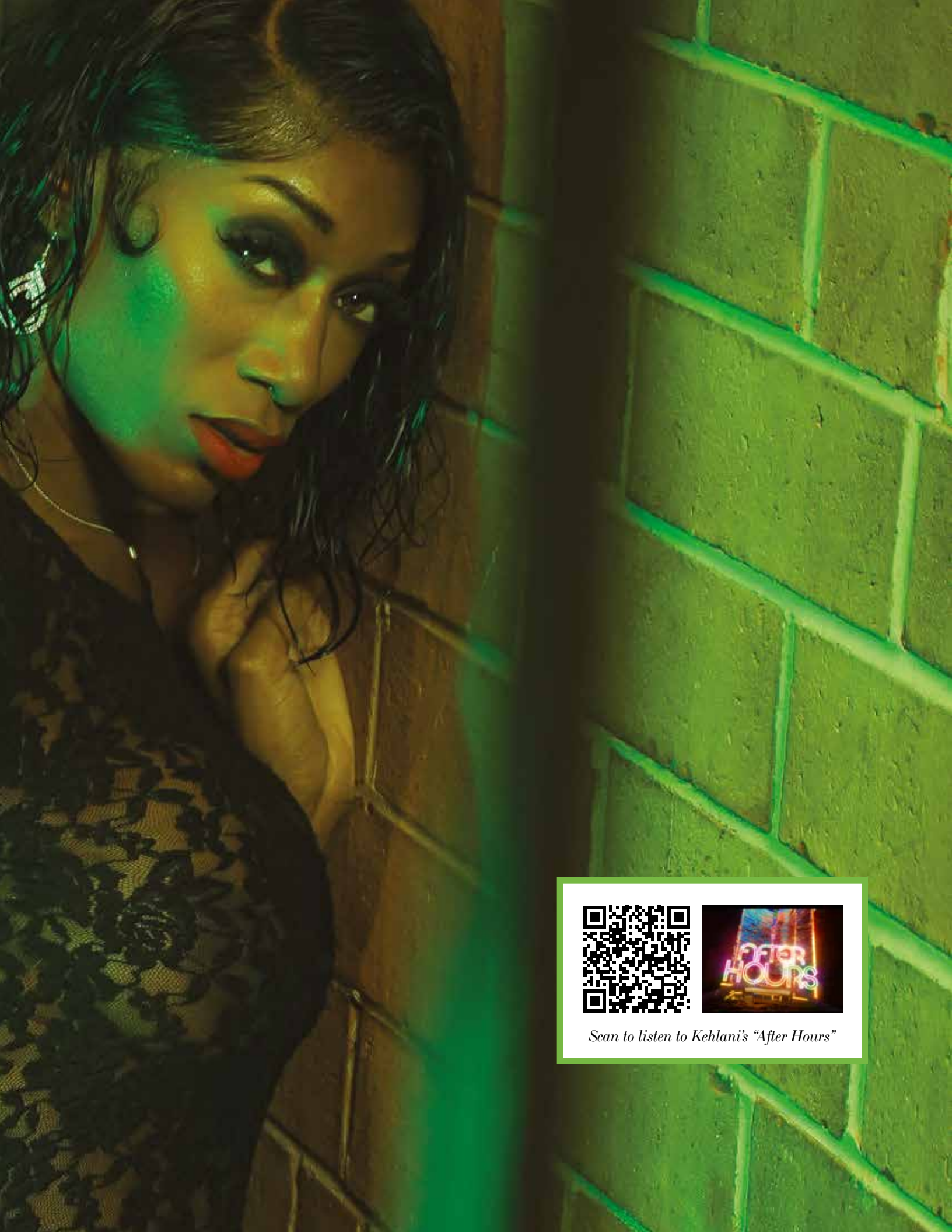




A person is shown from the waist up, wearing a black lace bodysuit. They are positioned in front of a red neon light that creates a strong glow and casts shadows. The background is dark and textured, possibly a wall or a curtain. The overall mood is sensual and mysterious.

After Hours

Steamy, electric, and drenched in midnight allure—this Kehlani-inspired visual turns desire into art. Neon lights meet soft skin, confidence meets craving, and every frame pulses with the thrill of what happens when the night belongs to you.



Scan to listen to Kehlani's "After Hours"



Scan to listen to Kehlani's "After Hours"



MODEL: JOHNA'E WRIGHT
PHOTOGRAPHER & CREATIVE
DIRECTOR: JERRY WASHINGTON
BEACONS.AI/JWASHPRODUCTIONS



Lover Girl

Soft power meets hot girl energy. Inspired by Megan Thee Stallion's "Lover Girl," this visual story glows with sensual confidence, tender strength, and unapologetic self-love—a celebration of passion wrapped in pink satin and pure finesse.



Scan to listen to Megan Thee Stallion's
"Lover Girl"



MODEL: FROM THE HOUSE OF VON DUTCH
CAROLINAS MOTHER PRINCESS VON DUTCH
ICON CAMIL VON DUTCH
ASPEN VON DUTCH
PHOTOGRAPHER & CREATIVE
DIRECTOR: JERRY WASHINGTON BEACONS.
AI/JWASHPRODUCTIONS



Scan to listen to Megan Thee Stallion's
"Lover Girl"





Scan to listen to Megan Thee Stallion's
"Lover Girl"



OWNING THE FEMININE WITHIN:

A Conversation with Brodderick Roary

By (Trans)parent Magazine Content Staff

Our rigid societal norms often demand Trans people to look a certain way in order to be seen as who they are, Brodderick Roary offers a refreshing and necessary perspective on gender identity. A South Carolina native with a long career in Public Health Administration—particularly in the field of sexual health—Brodderick has spent much of her professional life advocating for the wellness, safety, and dignity of others. Yet, her personal journey toward self-acceptance has been equally profound.

Identifying as Transgender while remaining male-presenting, Brodderick challenges the notion that femininity must be worn to be real. Instead, she embraces her inner feminine identity as an energy—something

lived, owned, and expressed from within rather than performed for validation. Grounded, introspective, and unapologetically authentic, this unrelenting Taurus radiates balance: intellect and intuition, logic and love, masculine and feminine all harmoniously coexisting.

When she's not working or serving her community, Brodderick enjoys traveling, laughing over good food with friends and family, and celebrating the beauty of self-defined living. In this candid conversation with (Trans)parent Magazine, she opens up about what it means to exist on the spectrum of Transgender identity—and how true liberation begins not in appearance, but in acceptance.



Q & A

Brodderick, you've described your Transgender identity as something deeply internal rather than aesthetic. Can you share what helped you understand that being Trans isn't limited to appearance or presentation?

Brodderick: For me, being transgender isn't about how I look—it's about an inner knowing that doesn't always match the gender I was assigned at birth. I began noticing that truth more than a decade ago, during moments when I felt most grounded in myself—whether in peace or discomfort. The turning point wasn't about fashion or image; it was realizing that my sense of self simply didn't align with expectations

placed on me as "male," even when I identified as gay in my twenties.

That awareness has followed me across every space I move through. Appearance can communicate aspects of identity, but it's not the essence of who I am. Being Trans, for me, is about honoring that enduring internal truth. And while changing one's appearance can absolutely be part of another person's journey, my transition is rooted in alignment, not conformity.

Many people associate “transgender” with visible or medical transition. What does transition mean to you personally—or not mean?

Brodderick: Transition isn't a checklist—it's an evolving process of aligning my outer life with my inner truth. It means listening closely to my body and spirit, making choices based on what feels authentic and safe, not what others expect. For me, that might look like changing pronouns, clothing, or voice when it feels right; or not changing anything at all.

My identity doesn't depend on medical procedures or public milestones. Transition is about coherence—how I feel in my body and how I move through the world with integrity. It's self-determination, not prescription.

You identify as Transgender, yet you present male. How do you reconcile—or reject—society's expectations of what a “trans body” should look like?

Brodderick: My body is my own timeline, not a public storyboard. I reject the notion that legitimacy requires a certain look or procedure. Those stereotypes are social constructs, not truths.

My focus is internal: living in ways that honor who I am, choosing what feels true and safe each day. Sometimes that means blending in to protect myself; other times it means standing in visible defiance of expectation. Either way, my identity isn't invalidated by how I present. There is no singular “trans body.” There are only Trans lives, each authentic in their own form.

What does femininity mean to you when it's expressed from the inside out rather than through physical transformation?

Brodderick: Femininity, for me, is an inner current—a harmony between strength and softness, logic and intuition. It's how I carry myself when I'm fully present with both vulnerability and courage.

It shows up in how I nurture, how I listen, how I hold space for others and for myself. It's not about conforming to beauty standards but about living with emotional literacy and compassion. Even without altering my appearance, I express femininity through energy, rhythm, and care. It's a self-defined truth, not an imitation.

How do you navigate spaces where others misinterpret or challenge your identity because your aesthetic doesn't align with their assumptions of Transness?

Brodderick: When people misread me, I start with clarity and calm. I correct what needs correcting and move on. My identity isn't up for debate—it's my lived reality.

I set boundaries early and clearly, protecting my peace when curiosity turns invasive. If a space feels unsafe, I disengage. I've learned that my energy is better spent with those who see me as whole. Over time, simply existing authentically becomes its own quiet form of education for others.

In what ways has embracing your inner feminine identity shaped your confidence, creativity, or relationships?

Brodderick: It's given me freedom. Confidence now comes from inner alignment, not external approval. I trust my intuition more and second-guess myself less.

Creatively, it's opened new doors—I allow vulnerability into my art and my work, seeing beauty in nuance and imperfection. In relationships, I show up more authentically, which invites deeper connection. Embracing my femininity has expanded my capacity for empathy, expression, and joy.

There's often pressure—even within LGBTQ+ spaces—to “fit” into certain gender presentations. Have you felt that pressure, and how do you resist it?

Brodderick: Absolutely! Even in queer spaces, expectations exist—about how Transness “should” look or sound. I resist by grounding in my truth: I don't owe anyone a performance of gender.

When spaces feel limiting, I choose distance over distortion. My safety and mental health matter more than validation. I seek and help build communities that honor nuance and diversity, where we can all exist without explanation.

How do you define authenticity in the context of gender? What does living authentically look like for you day-to-day?

Brodderick: Authenticity means harmony between how I feel inside and how I move through the World. It's waking up and choosing what feels right for me that day—language, style, energy—without apology.

It's honest communication, gentle boundaries, and care for my well-being. Some days authenticity looks bold; others it's quiet and self-protective. Either way, it's rooted in truth, not performance.

You've said that accepting one's Transness is more about internal alignment than external validation. Can you expand on that idea?

Brodderick: Internal alignment is knowing and honoring your truth, even when others can't see or affirm it. External validation can be comforting, but it's fragile—it changes with

people's opinions.

When you root your sense of self internally, you become less dependent on outside approval. It's a practice of gentleness: listening to your body, setting boundaries, and allowing your truth to unfold at your pace. Authenticity doesn't need permission—it needs patience.

What would you say to young trans or gender-nonconforming people who feel uncertain about whether they “qualify” as trans if they don’t desire physical transition?

Broderick: You don't need surgery, hormones, or any particular look to be trans. If your inner sense of self doesn't match what was assigned at birth, that's real and valid.

Take your time. Experiment safely with names, pronouns, or styles that feel affirming. There's no deadline or template for authenticity. You deserve safety, community, and self-acceptance exactly as you are, wherever you are in your journey.

How do you envision the future of transgender representation—one that includes more voices like yours, existing beyond the binary and aesthetic expectations?

Broderick: I imagine a future where Trans stories center humanity, not spectacle. Where gender diversity isn't rare or sensationalized, but ordinary and respected.

Representation should reflect the full range of Trans lives—our families, work, laughter, spirituality, and contradictions. True inclusion means Trans creators shaping their own narratives, not just appearing in them. My hope is that one day, we won't have to prove our legitimacy to exist—we'll simply be seen as whole and unfiltered.





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GRACE IN THE MIRROR:

Rev. Debra Hopkins on Aging and the Power of Becoming

By (Trans)parent Magazine Content Staff

In the Carolinas, few voices embody faith, resilience, and authenticity quite like Reverend Debra Hopkins—a pioneering Black Transgender woman whose ministry, advocacy, and lived experience illuminate what it means to endure and evolve with grace. As both a spiritual leader and truth-teller, Rev. Hopkins has spent decades bridging the sacred and the human, urging her community to see the divine reflection in every stage of life—especially as

one grows older, wiser, and more self-assured in identity.

Her latest book, *Look in the Mirror – Surviving Life’s Challenges, Aging & Transgender* (October 2025), takes a powerful, introspective look at what it means to age as a Black transgender woman in a world that too often denies both longevity and reverence to people like her. With characteristic honesty and warmth, Rev. Hopkins reflects

on self-acceptance, spiritual renewal, and the triumph of simply still being here.

This latest offering joins her acclaimed earlier works—Not Until You Walk in My Shoes (2021), Effective Spiritual Leadership for the 21st Century (2023), and Discipleship – The Call, Purpose, and Spiritual Commitment (2025)—all grounded in the conviction that survival and faith are twin acts of resistance. In this intimate conversation, Rev. Hopkins opens up about ministry, aging, authenticity, and what it truly means to “look in the mirror” with courage, wisdom, and divine self-love.



Scan to see her latest publication; Look in the Mirror: Surviving Life's Challenges, Aging, & Transgender



Q & A

I | PERSONAL JOURNEY & FAITH FORMATION

What first drew you to ministry—and how did that call evolve?

Rev. Debra: Hymns were my first altar. As a teenager I joined The Voices of Spirit, a community chorus started by a friend. We sang spirituals and gospel up and down greater New York—once even off-Broadway in the '70s. I remember standing in a tiny backstage corridor, hands shaking, and feeling the music settle my spirit like a prayer. That's when it clicked: sound could be service.

Mentors in my church noticed that same light in me and nudged me toward Bible college. Study gave language to what the music had already taught my heart: ministry is where art and purpose meet.

When did your transgender identity intersect with your spiritual call?

Rev. Debra: In Atlanta—married with children, in Bible college, serving as a youth educator. Life looked tidy on paper, but inside I was in disarray. The theology I heard was rigid, and the mirror asked questions my church didn't have space for. I tried to be two people: the leader everyone expected and the woman I knew myself to be. Eventually I realized my identity and my calling weren't rivals; they were two lanes of the same road God had me on.

How has living as a Black Transgender Woman shaped your view of God?

Rev. Debra: It taught me resurrection in real time. Every step toward authenticity—Black, woman, parent, partner, pastor—expanded my capacity for grace. Scripture stopped being theory and became breath.

How did you reconcile faith and identity?

Rev. Debra: Slowly—and sacredly. The turning point came during a leadership retreat in the Smokies. A lecturer opened Matthew 19:12, and it felt like God leaned in: You are seen. You are not a mistake. I carried that text to my 1997 Watch Night service and preached it as I resigned my first pastorate—my public reclaiming of freedom. My counsel to others: be patient with yourself, find an affirming community, and remember God's love isn't provisional.

Who encouraged you to walk boldly?

Rev. Debra: My first country church in the early '90s didn't have the language, but they had love—and they gave me grace to keep showing up. In Charlotte, Bishop Tonyia Rawls, (he wife) the late Mother Gwen Rawls, and the Sacred Souls Community Church family wrapped me in affirmation when I was rebuilding. And legendary activist Miss Major—at The Oasis in Little Rock—looked me dead in the eyes and said, “Debra, don't shy away from that mess in Washington. Walk boldly so the young ones can follow.” That sentence still straightens my spine. I try to pass that courage forward through my non-profit organization There's Still Hope of the Carolinas—mentoring, preaching, listening, and building rooms where people can fully exist.

II | LEADERSHIP & MINISTRY

How do you define effective spiritual leadership today?

Rev. Debra: Vision that lifts people beyond themselves—and character sturdy enough to carry it. Integrity, compassion, humility never go out of style. I tell leaders, “Model the work you preach.” Use your gift to empower others. Choose community over hierarchy. Transformation over mere performance.

How does your ministry break traditional molds?

Rev. Debra: In many churches you must believe before you belong. I reverse it. Belonging opens the door to honest questions, healing, and ultimately belief. Pastoral care looks like presence—sitting with families, blessing LGBTQ+ gifts in ministry, and turning inclusion from a policy into a posture. That isn’t modern; it’s the Gospel.

How do you walk with people reconciling faith and identity?

Rev. Debra: I start with listening, not lecture. We approach scripture as a well, not a weapon. Because I’ve sat in those pews wondering if God still wanted me, I can meet people without judgment. That’s where reconciliation begins: when a person feels seen and still loved.

Greatest joys and greatest challenges as an openly Transgender faith leader in the Carolinas?

Rev. Debra: Challenge: rooms that close, pulpits that go silent, and the internal tug-of-war between tradition and truth. Joy: watching lives stabilize. Over 7½ years, *There’s Still Hope* has helped roughly 76% of the Transgender adults we served move from homelessness toward stable housing—alongside financial literacy, employment, and restored dignity. We built that on prayer, compassion, communication, and forgiveness. The work is centered in love.

Advice to young LGBTQ+ people of faith who feel called to lead but fear rejection?

Rev. Debra: Trust the whisper. Build a circle that sees you on the days you can’t see yourself. Lead with presence, not perfection. Don’t wait for permission to be who God already said you are.

III | WRITING & PUBLISHED WORKS

What sparked *Look in the Mirror – Surviving Life’s Challenges, Aging & Transgender*?

Rev. Debra: A grocery-store checkout line. Folks ahead of me

were blaming everything but their own choices. I heard my old sermon title ring in my head: *Look in the Mirror*. I’ve long told people to stand before a full-length mirror—just you, your reflection, and God—and ask, What role have I played, and what am I willing to do next? The book makes space for that conversation: honest questions, gentle accountability, and grace.

How does it build on *Not Until You Walk in My Shoes and Effective Spiritual Leadership for the 21st Century*?

Rev. Debra: ‘Shoes’ invited empathy through my story. ‘Leadership’ offered tools for service. *Look in the Mirror* turns the lens inward so readers can practice the same courage: accountability without shame, truth with tenderness.

What was the inner journey of writing it?

Rev. Debra: A pilgrimage. Drafting chapters became prayer. I revisited rooms I’d rather keep closed, and God met me there. I finished lighter and more aligned with my call.

What does “survival” mean to you now—especially with aging?

Rev. Debra: In my youth, survival meant pushing through the noise. Now it means living with intention—turning pain into wisdom, advocacy, and joy, especially for our Trans elders. Hope is slower, steadier; I find it in ocean walks, a hymn hummed in the kitchen, the ordinary mercies of a quiet morning.

Which work reflects your truth most?

Rev. Debra: *Not Until You Walk in My Shoes*—my first courageous publication—and my forthcoming *There’s Still Hope: Finding Faith, Healing & Identity Through Life’s Storms*—my settled voice. Together they trace the arc from survival to resurrection.

IV | COMMUNITY, ADVOCACY & HEALING

How should faith institutions evolve to meet LGBTQ+ needs?

Rev. Debra: By returning to love and justice. Celebrate us as part of God’s design; reflect that in theology, language, leadership, and care—ordination, marriages, pastoral support, and equitable structures. Policies matter, but hearts must soften or nothing sticks.

What misconceptions must the Black church confront about gender and sexuality?

Rev. Debra: That queerness and faith are incompatible. That confusion grew from trauma, patriarchy, colonial readings, and respectability politics. Our tradition is liberation; to live it, we must affirm God's image in every body and recover our prophetic voice.

What practices keep your peace amid turmoil?

Rev. Debra: Prayer first. Scripture for re-centering. Worship and community for lift. Writing as a form of prayer. And music—jazz, classical, old hymns—when words won't reach. I also protect my stillness; for instance, sometimes turning off the news is holy.

How do you make space for Debra, the woman?

Rev. Debra: Boundaries and rest. Journaling. Ocean air. Small joys like a good hymn or a little shopping. I'm honest about longing for a committed, loving relationship; until it arrives, I practice loving myself well and staying true to my ministry.

When readers finish *Look in the Mirror*, what do you hope reflects back?

Rev. Debra: Scars and strength. Permission to forgive themselves. The courage to grow through what tried to break them. Above all, the unmistakable image of God—whole, worthy, radiant—staring back.

What do you hope your life's work means to future generations?

Rev. Debra: After stepping back from daily leadership, I felt adrift—too much quiet, not enough purpose. I dusted off old journals and found a doorway back. Since then I've written eighteen books—children's titles, poetry, novels on Trans life and faith, a memoir, study guides, and a full-length play—nine already out in the world, with hopes for three audio books by the end of 2026.

*Relevance, I've learned, is relationship, not recognition. Writing became my new pulpit—the place I could keep saying what my people need to hear: *Be a Voice for Change. Brighter Tomorrows Begin With You.**

My anchor remains 1 Samuel 16:7—God looks at the heart.

That scripture has guided my steps, my sentences, and my service. If future generations inherit anything from me, let it be that hope is a durable thing—and there's room in God's house for them to be their authentic selves.



*Scan to see her latest publication; *Look in the Mirror: Surviving Life's Challenges, Aging, & Transgender**



Apostle Cassandra Jones shares her Faith, Identity and secrets to Spiritual Freedom

Q&A with Apostle Cassandra Jones

Where conviction meets courage, Apostle Cassandra Jones stands as a radiant testament to authenticity and progress. As the Founder and Presiding Prelate of the Spiritual Education Experience — a progressive, non-denominational movement rooted in inclusivity, empowerment and spiritual truth — Apostle Jones has devoted her life to reconciling two worlds often seen as irreconcilable: the sacred and the self-affirmed.

Born and raised in the Northeast, Apostle Jones's journey has been one of faith, transformation and fearless leadership. Her rise to Bishop, and now Apostolic authority, is not simply a personal triumph — it's revolutionary. Through Spiritual Education Experience, she has created a ministry that defies dogma and embraces divine diversity, offering refuge and restoration to all who seek God beyond the confines of tradition.

Her story is one of breaking barriers within the church and redefining what the church can be: a sanctuary that welcomes, uplifts, and celebrates every expression of God's creation. Through her message and ministry, she has become a shepherd to those who have been silenced, a healer to those who have been cast aside, and a fierce voice of inclusion in spaces that once denied her very existence.

In this intimate conversation with (Trans)parent Magazine, Apostle Cassandra Jones shares her path to spiritual leadership, the purpose behind Spiritual Education Experience, and what it means to walk in divine alignment as a Black Trans Woman of faith. She reflects on her calling, her community, and how she continues to minister love, liberation, and truth in every space she enters.

Q & A

Can you share a bit about your early life — where you grew up, and what your relationship to faith and spirituality was like as a child?

I remember being about five years old, playing with my siblings, when my older sister suddenly paused and said, "Stop acting

like a girl." Without missing a beat, I replied, "I am a girl."

She snapped back, "No, you're a boy," and began explaining the difference between the sexes. I looked at her and said matter-of-factly, "Well, somebody made a mistake."



She marched off to tell our parents. A few moments later, they came into the room and began to talk to me, asking questions, explaining things in that careful parental way. When they finished, they asked, “Now do you understand?” I said, “Okay,” though nothing inside me really felt okay.

My parents were devout members of the Church of God in Christ—COGIC through and through—and they shared the conversation with their pastor. The following week, he asked to speak with me. Even at that young age, something about him didn’t sit right with me; his words and spirit felt...off.

A few days later, my parents and I sat with him again. He told them, “Your child is just a little too emotional. Boys don’t need to be that way. He’ll grow out of it—don’t worry.” My parents nodded and we left, but I remember that moment vividly.

Something deep in my spirit told me it wasn’t right. What the adults were saying and what I felt inside didn’t match—and I knew, even then, that truth lived somewhere beyond their understanding.



When did you first begin to feel a sense of spiritual calling or divine purpose in your life?

Fast forward to age thirteen — I was on the youth choir, serving as a junior clergy, and learning how to address people properly, how to carry myself, even how to deliver a sermon. I’d been baptized the year before, at twelve, and by then I felt me and God were in a good place.

My faith had become my anchor. It had carried me through years of hiding my emotions, of trying not to feel “too much,” so others wouldn’t think something was wrong with me. Faith was my mask and my medicine all at once.

At that time, I didn’t yet understand what spirituality truly meant. I just believed — with all the conviction that a COGIC child could muster — that our way was the way. Everyone else, I was told, was misguided...and bound for hell.

Growing up as a Black Trans Woman, how did your understanding of God and self evolve over time?

That spring, at just eighteen, I was ordained as a Reverend in the COGIC denomination. By Fall, I was off to college — bright-eyed, full of faith, and eager to serve.

College was where everything began to shift. It was there I discovered that my “too many emotions” weren’t a flaw at all. I met others — both male and female — who, like me, felt an inner alignment with the opposite sex but had no real language to describe it. Back then, the word “transgender” wasn’t in our vocabulary. So we simply identified as “gay,” because that was the closest word we had.

None of us felt the need to perform our identity through drag — not as Kings or Queens. That just didn’t feel like our truth. What we were learning, slowly and tenderly, was that authenticity doesn’t always need a costume.

Was there a particular moment, event, or season in your life that you’d describe as a spiritual awakening or transformation?

My understanding began to evolve during college, thanks to professors who opened doors I didn’t even know existed. The moment that truly awakened me — spiritually and intellectually — came in my psychology class. My professor said something that stopped me in my tracks:

“Sexual attraction is innate,” he explained. “We are born with it. Some women are drawn to men, some to women, and some to both. The same is true for men. That’s what we call bisexuality. All forms of attraction — straight, bisexual, gay — are natural, as long as you’re honest with the person you’re involved with.”

Then he continued: “Some people are born in the wrong body. A person might be born female but feel and think more male, or born male but feel and think more female. That’s normal. Unfortunately, our society doesn’t yet have a way to help those individuals align their bodies with who they truly are, so many of them live as gay just to survive — to find some measure of happiness.”

I remember walking out of that class with something blazing inside me — a light bulb flashing. That’s it! That’s me! My best friend, walking beside me, said softly, “That’s me too.”

We sat under a tree for hours, talking, crying, breathing for what felt like the first time. The next class, we pulled our

professor aside. We told him everything — what we felt, who we were. He listened and said gently, “There’s nothing wrong with you. What you feel and how you think are valid. Your bodies just don’t match your spirit. Be careful who you tell. Be cautious about who you trust.”

We both left that conversation lighter, freer — yet also aware of the reality we faced. We knew we couldn’t safely become the woman and man we knew ourselves to be. Not yet. Not in that world. So we kept living as gay, because it was the only way society allowed us to exist.

How has your identity as a Black Trans Woman shaped your ministry and the way you lead your congregation?

Being a woman of Trans experience has graced me with ability to shape my ministry to reach those who live in the margins and intersections of religion; to remind them that their faith isn’t their religion — their faith is rooted in their souls. When Yahweh created their souls and breathed into their souls, they got the entire Trinity. Thus, they can never be disconnected from Yahweh.

What does it mean to you personally — and spiritually — to carry the title Apostle?

I feel honored and blessed to be the 1st dually consecrated & affirmed Apostle & Bishop who is a woman of Trans experience. I also understand and recognize the weight of carrying both offices. Spiritually I realize that I am setting a limit guide for those who are currently in ministry and for those who will come behind me. I want my living legacy to say, “your dreams & goals of being in service to Yahweh through ministry are possible”. Your being an individual of trans experience is not a hindrance to your elevating in ministry,

The church hasn’t always been a welcoming space for LGBTQ+ people. How have you reconciled faith with authenticity in your journey?

For me, I’ve come to understand that my faith flows directly from my soul. When Yahweh created my soul — first in Her/ His divine imagination, and then breathed life into it — that single breath carried the fullness of the Trinity: Yahweh, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

My gender was born from that same soul — not shaped by circumstance or experience, but divinely woven into my very being. Embracing that truth allowed me to reconcile the parts of myself that others once tried to divide.

Resources like Transforming: The Bible & Lives of Transgender Christians by Austen Hartke and The Bible and the Transgender

Experience: How Scripture Supports Gender Variance by Linda Tatro Herzer helped me stand firm in my knowing — that my identity is not a contradiction of faith, but a reflection of it.

What resistance or challenges did you encounter within faith spaces as you rose into leadership — and how did you persevere?

When I came out as a woman of trans experience, I was already serving in leadership, and my senior leaders at the time were loving and supportive. Still, not everyone shared that grace. I faced pushback from some of my fellow clergy colleagues and even a few members of the congregation.

Some members said things like, “I’m leaving if she stays.” Those words cut deeply — especially because I was part of what was supposed to be an inclusive ministry. From other clergy, I heard comments like, “You’re giving up your power,” or “You’ve become less than,” and even, “You’ll never be seen as a woman.”

What sustained me through that storm was remembering that my relationship with Yahweh is not defined by the church I attend or the opinions of the church community.

I persevered because I knew my soul had given birth to my truest self — and my connection to Yahweh was strong enough to outlive every non-loving, negative word spoken against me.

How have you created a ministry that is inclusive, affirming, and rooted in love — not judgement?

When Yahweh entrusted me with this ministry, She/He made it clear that I embody divine duality. Even within the very name Yahweh, the first part — Yah — carries the feminine essence, while the second — weh — embodies the masculine. That revelation taught me that all of Yahweh’s children must feel welcome in the house: my non-binary children, my bisexual children, my trans children, my straight children — all of them.

I received specific instruction from the Spirit: a person’s sexuality, gender identity, or gender expression is never a barrier to their salvation or their relationship with Yahweh.

Because of that, I have structured our bylaws, policies, and ministry descriptions to reflect full inclusion — regardless of race, gender, age, sexuality, gender expression, or physical ability. I wanted our people to know that even long after I join the ancestors, they will always have a place of welcome at Spiritual Education Experience — a ministry rooted in love, liberation, and divine wholeness.



What led you to pursue ordination and eventually ascend to Apostle status?

I have always known that I was called to grow in ministry and to serve Yahweh with the fullness of my being. For a time, I believed that without my formal religious education, I wouldn’t have the strength to move forward. But then I remembered the faithful individuals I mentioned earlier — their courage, their endurance — and I kept my eyes on the prize, staying steadfast on the path set before me.

Along the way, I saw other women of trans experience serving beautifully as clergy and pastors, yet I never saw any who had been elevated to the office of Apostle or Bishop. That realization stirred something in my spirit. I knew I was being called to be the change — to stand as a living example that our dreams of becoming Apostles and Bishops are not only valid, but achievable.



Who were your mentors or guiding lights along that path?

Bishop Michel White, Archbishop Carl Bean, Senior Bishop Jacqueline Holland, Rev Valarie Spencer, Rev Edward Jones, Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, Rev Sonja Lee, Bishop Tonyia & Gwen Rawls, Bishop Mykal Shannon & Elder Monique Carmouche, Rev Dawn Flynn, Rev Debra Hopkins, Minister L'Trica & Kristi Chandler, Minister Troy & Jennifer Aikens, Bishop Naji Carter, Minister Linda Dixon, Rabbi Liam Hooper & Mrs. Diana Hooper.

Was there ever a time when you doubted your calling—and how did you find the courage to continue?

I felt doubt as a Minister because Yahweh was taking me outside the box and it made others uncomfortable. I had clergy colleagues lie on me, give me false information then run back to the Pastor with the lie – once the Pastor got the truth with proof he did nothing about it. No reprimand to the persons who lied on me & no consequences for them. I received no apology for the Pastor or individuals. Doing this time I was feeling like why bother! I don't need the stress or the B.S!

I was ready to walk away, and my late husband said “what about the people who need the out of the box information. What happens to them”. His words took me aback and I had to pray hard because the human side of me wanted to clap back – yet the spiritual side of me said “no just remove them from your personal & treat them as acquaintances colleagues” I began to do that and about a month later a swift happened I got questioned why aren't you hanging out with us?

Why aren't you spending time on the phone or email with us? I replied this is a church business relationship. You are not my friends you are only an acquaintance that I work with in the church. None of them took it well. Then the Pastor held a meeting where he apologized for all that had happened and asked forgiveness of those, he had wronged. I was the only one who said, “I hear your apology – however it is too late!” The lesson I learned that got me through was to not allow anyone, any situation wrap or altar who you are. When someone's behavior shows you what they are capable of, take note and adjust accordingly.

How do you define “ministry” today – beyond the walls of the church?

I am truly blessed to be surrounded by a wonderful group of people who share my heart for humanity. Their love for people compels them to take Yahweh beyond the walls of the church and into the very places where love and light are needed most.

I am honored to cover four remarkable pastors, each with a unique and powerful ministry. One leads a women's fellowship – open to cisgender, transgender, and female-identified individuals – where they gather in person to discuss life, God, relationships, finances, and personal growth.

Another pastor is deeply connected to the drag entertainment community, creating a sacred space for those who may not feel comfortable walking into a traditional church building. There, they encounter Yahweh's love in an environment that celebrates who they are.

And two of my pastors take ministry directly to the streets, offering food, resources, and words of encouragement to our unhoused brothers and sisters.

For me, ministry beyond the walls means teaching and educating people about what Scripture actually says – not what tradition or fear has told us. It's about dispelling myths disguised as truth and helping people rediscover the living Word through love, understanding, and freedom.

What role do you believe faith plays in the healing and empowerment of Black Trans women?

I believe my trans siblings must come to understand that faith is something deeply internal – a sacred truth rooted in the soul. Within that soul dwells the fullness of the Trinity – Yahweh, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit – and from that divine breath, your authentic self was born. Because of this, you can never be separated from your faith; it is woven into your very being.

Once you embrace this truth and realize that you are enough, everything begins to shift. You will know that you are beautiful

in all of your incarnations — that you are a woman worthy of love, respect, purpose, and security. You deserve employment that honors your gifts and a safe place to rest your head without having to sacrifice your body or your dignity.

What message do you share most often with young Trans women of faith who are searching for belonging?

Remember, God designed you exactly as you are — and that means you are good, beautifully and wonderfully made. Be mindful and careful about what you allow through your ports of entry — your ears, your eyes, and your emotions — for all three have the power to shape your thoughts, your spirit, and your behavior.

Surround yourself with people who respect and value you simply for who you are — not for what you can give, but for the light you already carry within.

How do you balance being a spiritual leader, advocate and a Black Trans Woman navigating everyday life?

I devote a few hours each day to the many hats I wear as both a spiritual leader and an advocate. As a woman of trans experience and a person of color, I move through the world with an ever-present awareness that I must first protect my physical being. Safety comes before service. I am intentional about where I go, who I'm with, and I always share my location with my children and those I trust.

Secondly, as a spiritual leader and advocate, I've learned to be clear about what is mine to do, to be concerned with, and to carry. When something falls outside my calling or capacity, I release it to those better equipped to handle it.

And third, I protect my peace — spiritually, mentally, emotionally, physically, and financially. I have a firm cutoff time of 7 p.m., after which I unplug. That time belongs to me and Yahweh alone. I say my prayer, exhale the day, and allow myself to be restored, replenished, and renewed for whatever tomorrow brings.

When you look back at your journey — the struggles and triumphs — what lessons stand out most?

1st Do not allow anyone; any situation to warp or alter who you are. When someone's behavior shows you what they are capable of, take note and adjust accordingly.

2nd I can't want more for someone than they want for themselves. Meaning no matter how much I want it for them — if they don't want it/will it there is no power of prayer can change them. That is a battle only Yahweh can fight.

3rd I must protect my peace: spiritually, mentally, emotionally, physically and financially.

**“Surround
yourself with
people who respect and
value you simply for who
you are — not for what
you can give**

- Cassandra Jones

4th When someone drops a bag, it's not my responsibility to pick up their bag and carry it. My responsibilities are to continue to pray for them.

5th Everything doesn't require a response or reply or a clap back!

6th Move quietly. Let Yahweh guide & lead. Block out all external noise.

7th Ask Yahweh for a small trusted intimate group of people to let your hair down with.

Finally, if you could send one message to the wider Black church about embracing Trans lives, what would it be?

Our Creator, Yahweh, conceived and designed our souls with divine intention — then breathed Their own breath into us. That sacred breath carried the fullness of the Trinity: Yahweh, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Within that breath, our souls were formed — complete with our gender identity, our sexual identity, and our authentic spiritual essence.

When someone grows into their truth — whether as a woman of Trans experience or a man of Trans experience — it is not rebellion against God; it is a spiritual and natural occurrence. It is the soul aligning with the divine blueprint placed within it from the very beginning of time.

And a spiritual, natural occurrence will never fit neatly into the limited constructs of religion or human doctrine — so stop trying to make it fit. Instead, lead with Agape Love and respect for your Transgender siblings and colleagues; the same love and respect you wish to receive.

Before you spread messages of hate or preach words that lack love, remember the call of scripture:

Leviticus 19:18, Mark 12:31, Matthew 22:39, Romans 13:9-10, and James 2:8 — each commanding us to love our neighbor as ourselves.





Love So BIG

Johna'e Wright & Traviondre Gibson

by (Trans)parent Magazine

Nowadays, visibility and personal authenticity can help reshape how our society defines love. Johna'e Wright and Traviondre Gibson stand as a shining example of what happens when two souls converge to forge one heart. Johna'e, a proud Black Trans Woman & recording artist and Traviondre, a Black man & successful entrepreneur, have found something rare—an unfiltered, unwavering romance grounded in truth, laughter and shared faith in the strength of true love.

Set to be married in 2026, the newly engaged couple are rewriting the narrative of Black love, challenging stereotypes and proving that genuine relationships transcend societal expectations. Their journey—from friendship to engagement—has been one of courage and deep respect for each other's respective paths.

In this exclusive (Trans)parent Magazine Q&A, Traviondre opens up about how he first fell for Johna'e, the moment he learned her "truth," and how their relationship continues to flourish despite societal pressures. What emerges is a love story that is vulnerable yet powerful, ordinary yet revolutionary—a reminder that real love doesn't ask for permission; it simply is.

Q & A

THE BEGINNING

Can you share how the two of you first met? What drew you to Johnae initially?

Traviondre: When I first saw Johnae, the very first thing that caught my eye was her style. She had on this outfit full of bright, vibrant colors—instantly I knew she wasn't from my city. And that hairstyle? Not every woman can pull that off, but she did. It was an instant turn-on for me. Beyond that, she carried herself with so much confidence, and that's a huge plus in my book. Gotta love it!

When did you discover that Johnae is a Black Trans Woman—what was that moment like for you?

Traviondre: Mmmm...ha, it was wild. Johnae and I had been talking for about four months when we decided to take a trip to Six Flags. It wasn't the best day—we got into a little argument and ended up parting ways while we were there. After that, we didn't talk for a bit, but soon reconnected. It felt like one of those "this might be our last conversation" moments.

That's when she told me—just dropped it like, "Oh, by the way..." or "while we're at it." She told me she's Trans. I was shocked. I won't lie—I felt played at first. I really couldn't believe it because she's post-op (had gender affirming surgery) and I didn't have any knowledge about that world at the time.

What emotions or thoughts came up in that moment? Did it change how you saw her, or did it affirm what you already felt?

Traviondre: Man, I had a lot running through my mind in a split second. I remember I was at work and had to keep doing my job, but I stayed on the phone with her the whole time. While working, I just kept replaying her words.

The one thing I couldn't shake was that I liked her—genuinely. I'm the type of person who doesn't change how I feel about someone just because of who they are. I value real relationships, and despite what she told me, being true to myself meant my feelings didn't change.

IDENTITY, PERCEPTION & UNDERSTANDING

How do you see Johnae—as a Black Trans Woman, as a woman, as your partner? Or all of the above?

Traviondre: Honestly? All of the above—and maybe even more. If anything, it's better. To a degree, she understands men on a deeper level than most cisgender women because of her experience transitioning. That's played a big part in how we connect. In public, I treat her as the woman she is. I don't even think twice about it. She's beautiful and she's mine.

What identity do you place on yourself, if any (queer, straight, etc.)?

Traviondre: Straight.

What have you learned about gender, womanhood and authenticity through loving Johnae?

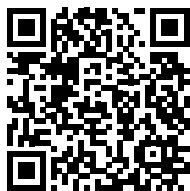
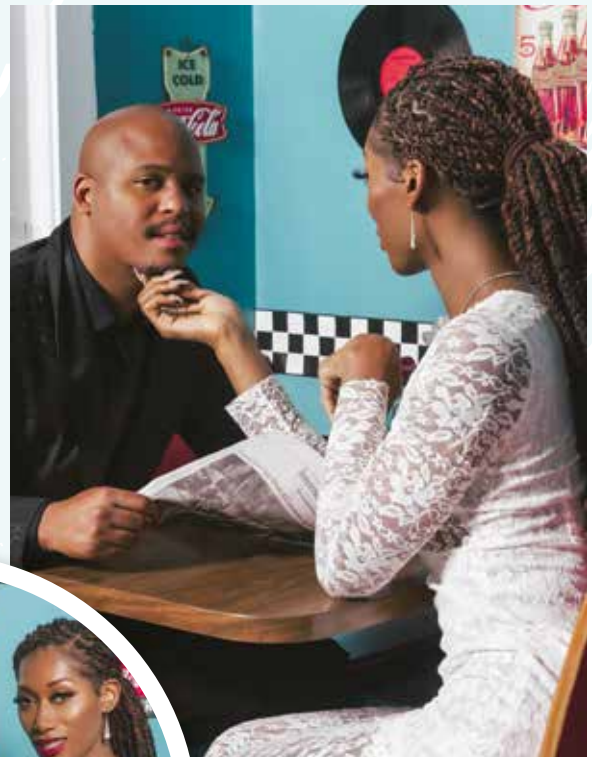
Traviondre: Loving Johnae has taught me how to be true to myself on so many levels. She's got incredible mental strength, determination and willpower to become the woman she is today. She's shown me that real love compliments who you are—not who the world expects you to be.

SOCIAL LENS & GROWTH

What was your stance on the LGBTQ+ community before meeting Johnae—and how has it evolved since?

Traviondre: Bro, I just minded my business. I didn't think too much about it because I never had a reason to. My line of work has me dealing with people from all walks of life, so I've always had to respect and understand whoever comes my way.

I don't follow the LGBTQ+ community closely, but when Johnae brings it up, I listen. We have deep conversations about it. I study Johnae—her past, her present, her experiences—and how all of that shaped the woman I know today. My goal is always to understand her better, so we can be better together. At the end of the day, it's me and Johnae.



Scan to listen to Coco Jones
"Love So Big"

Inspired by Coco Jones' soulful ballad "Love So Big," this article celebrates a love that defies limits and expectations. Like the song, Johna'e and Traviondre's bond is bold, expansive, and rooted in truth—a love that refuses to shrink for anyone.



How do your friends and family view your relationship, and how have those dynamics shifted over time?

Traviondre: My mom and sister love Johnae. I don't talk to my pops—that's a long story—but my best friend? He's solidly on my side and supports us fully.

Having those conversations with folks, though, made me realize how hard it is for some people to wrap their heads around a relationship like ours. But here's what I tell anybody: if a man finds himself in a situation like mine, he'll learn real quick who truly loves him and who his real friends are. Guaranteed.

What would you say to other heterosexual men who may be curious or open to loving a Trans Woman but feel conflicted by societal pressures?

Traviondre: Man...my advice? Don't give a damn what other people think or say. They don't pay your bills. They can't save or condemn your soul. Live your life. Easy work.

LOVE, LEGACY & THE FUTURE

What do you think makes your love story powerful or unique?

Traviondre: It's powerful because I get to be part of Johnae's journey. Being with her opened my eyes to how many Trans women and men are out here just wanting to find love—to be seen, to be cherished. In this world, the Trans community is to often frowned upon, and that makes it harder for them to experience real love.

I'm proud to say I found Johnae—and that she found me. Together, we're rewriting what love can look like

What are your dreams for the future you're building together?

Traviondre: I want to see Johnae living her dream life—brunching with her girls at some beachside restaurant, all of them in white, laughing, carefree, happy. I want everything under our roof to be at peace. Money steady, love overflowing. And most of all, I want her to experience motherhood—to raise a child, to have that joy. That's the dream.

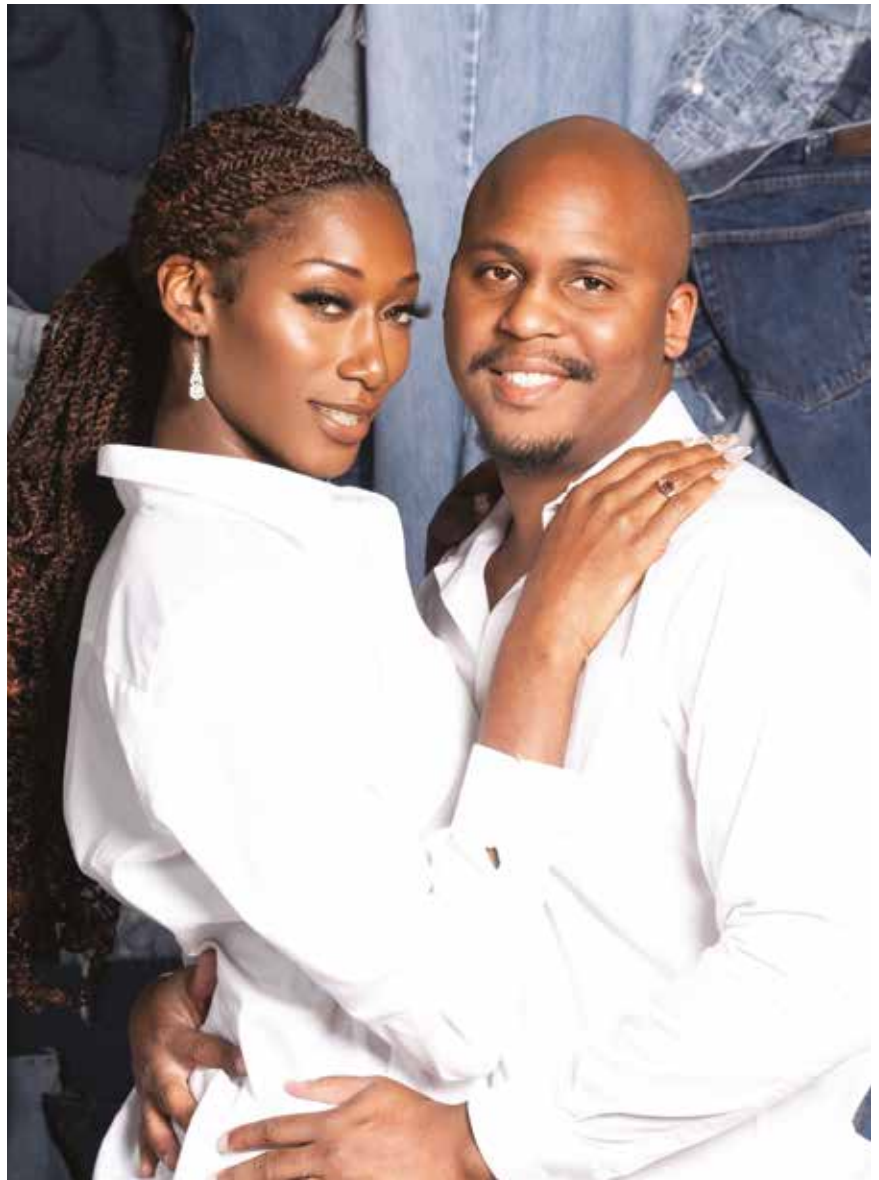


How would you describe the kind of love you've found with Johnae—in one word, and why?

Unique. Every single thing about us is unique—how we met, how we love, how we grow. Our conversations, our connection, our story. I love that about us.

I love Johnae.





Inspired by Coco Jones' soulful ballad "Love So Big," this article celebrates a love that defies limits and expectations. Like the song, Johna'e and Traviondre's bond is bold, expansive, and rooted in truth—a love that refuses to shrink for anyone.



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Get involved at equalitync.org.





The House that Princess Built

By (Trans)parent Magazine

Born out of resistance and a burning desire for self-actualization, the House/Ballroom community blossomed (in mid-20th-century Harlem) into a refuge for Black and Latino LGBTQ+ individuals shunned by mainstream society. What began as underground drag balls in the 1960s and 70s has evolved into an international cultural community — complete with its own families (“Houses”), hierarchies, and distinct art forms. These Houses became mighty kingdoms of creativity, kinship and self expression. From Harlem to Paris, House/Ballroom is now a global movement rooted in the spirit of chosen family.

Due to groundbreaking media coverage, the vibrant, ever-evolving world of House/Ballroom has enjoyed a tremendous surge in identity and popularity over the last decade. One of the forces behind that momentum (in the Carolinas) is a

truly magnetic figure, Mother Princess Von Dutch - the visionary matriarch of the House of Von Dutch. “Princess”, as she is affectionately known, blends a combination of artistry, leadership and lineage — heralding a legacy that is both fiercely original and rooted in community.

The House of Von Dutch is more than a collective of voguers, sex sirens, face & runway models; it is a movement. House of Von Dutch seamlessly blends fashion, fantasy and family into an eco-system of raw self-expression. Under Mother Princess’s direction, the House has become anonymous with innovation and artistic excellence.

In this exclusive conversation, Mother Princess reflects on the origins of her House, the power of the Ballroom community and her own hopes & dreams.



THE ORIGIN STORY

Princess, can you take us back to the beginning — how and why was the House of Von Dutch founded, and what inspired its name and aesthetic identity?

Princess: The House of Von Dutch was established in May of 2021. Founded by the Legendary Zaniyah, Legendary Yasmin, Icon Kyu and Icon Tokyo. Our House was founded to give others who didn't fit in to the norms of a House culture; for the ones who wanted to represent something different in Ballroom. The House was founded on the morals of family, hard-work and dedication. Traditionally, each House chooses a designer fashion house that represents their personality.

Von Dutch brand matches the personality of our House as it is urban, edgy, fun, fashion forward and always innovating.

So, how did you personally become involved with the House, and what moment marked your transition into leadership as “Mother”?

Princess: I became apart of the House at the establishing of the Carolina's charter in June of 2021. Von Dutch was my first Kiki house and I plan to keep it that way. The moment that marked my transition into Motherhood was December 2024 at The Red Ball. There I proudly debuted as the second Carolina's Mother of The House of Von Dutch.

COMMUNITY & CULTURAL IMPACT

Tell us, what do you believe sets the House of Von Dutch apart from other Houses in terms of performance style, community engagement, and creative innovation?

Princess: What distinguishes the House of Von Dutch from other Houses is our relentless aim for greatness, our dedication and our perfection of the craft. We strive for greatness on and off the Ballroom floor. As a House, we're always looking for ways to elevate our looks, our walks, and anything we bring to the floor. Being a 3x House Of The Year, we certainly have haters who want us to fail...but we take all that energy and turn it into motivation.

Ballroom culture has influenced everything from fashion to music to mainstream entertainment. How do you ensure that the authenticity of Von Dutch — and Ballroom culture at large — isn't diluted as it becomes more visible?

Princess: I'm serious about doing my part to make sure the authenticity of House/Ballroom culture doesn't get watered down by mainstream pop culture. My House is intentional about creating space and opportunity for each House member to represent their unique personality, style and perspective. With that approach, we help keep the heart of House/Ballroom culture raw and true.

Princess, can you speak about the role mentorship plays in your House, and how you nurture emerging talent within your family?

Princess: Mentorship is a core value of House of Von Dutch. We strive to make sure that every member has a positive role model they can trust and grow with. Matter of fact, mentors are the first persons a new member meets.

I believe in leading by example. We have to show the kids that there's more to life than just Ballroom. Goal setting, education and careers come first. All the leaders/mentors in our House stress that before any and every Ball. We also stress that each and every member can come to us about anything. We are a family...and family is there always there.

PERSONAL JOURNEY & ASPIRATIONS

As a Mother, you balance artistry, leadership, and advocacy. What personal experiences shaped your leadership style and your sense of responsibility within the Ballroom community?

Princess: My coming-of-age as a Mother in Ballroom first came by walking in my personal truth, living each day as a proud Transgender woman and always making myself available to my chosen family. Being a Ballroom parent means leading by example. I can't expect my kids to walk Balls and I'm not walking. So my journey really began with me walking countless Balls and dominating my category. I would eventually become the 1st \$1,000 performance winner in the Carolinas and the 1st to hold the title of Femme Queen Performance Of The Year (for 3 consecutive years). So I had to establish a performance legacy that my kids could be proud of and want to emulate.



Beyond Ballroom, how do your personal creative aspirations intersect with your role in the House of Von Dutch?

Princess: There is a beautiful intersection between my Ballroom life and my personal life. I am constantly asked to host LGBTQ functions, fashion shows and fundraising events throughout the Carolinas. My notoriety in Ballroom has afforded me a lot of amazing opportunities and experiences in our community. As I did, I teach my kids to use Ballroom as a launch pad; a booster to propel their dreams.

The Ballroom world is evolving rapidly, with new categories, platforms, and audiences. How do you envision the House of Von Dutch evolving in the next decade?

Princess: Hmmm...this is something I've given a lot of thought lately. In 10 years, I see The House of Von Dutch with a chapter in every region of the USA and multiple chapters internationally. I envision my House as a formidable presence, not only in the South but internationally.

One final question, if you could deliver one message to the wider World about the importance and brilliance of Ballroom culture, what would it be — and why does it matter now more than ever?

Princess: I'd say, "see us as human." LGBTQ+ people are no different than you. We have gifts and talents...and fears and dreams that the world deserves to partake of. Don't silent us. Don't count us out. We want a seat at the table.

But if you refuse to make room for us, we will definitely create our own. Trust me, the unique feast that we bring to the table can't be duplicated. You want what we're serving up.

LGBTQ+ identity is a gift not a curse. Listen, you need us... and we need you. We need each other. We are all we've got.



“Diversity may be the hardest thing for a society to live with, and perhaps the most dangerous thing for a society to be without.”

–William Sloane Coffin Jr.

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