

## LATASHA CAMERON

My name is LaTasha Cameron. I lived in South Central California until [I was] 18-19. Once I got married, I moved out to Palmdale. I've been out here for about 11 years.

My story of violence started at a very young age. My childhood, to many looking in, may have seemed happy and even seemed that I was lucky, but it was far from it. A child should never have to endure the things I went through. Sexual abuse on both sides of my family. I thought I was leaving one home for a better [one], only to continue that same abuse – physical, mental, verbal, and rape from a school friend. [I was] kicked out of my home constantly because I flinched or jumped when someone touched me inappropriately.

[I was] trying to figure out how to maintain school and my sanity, had thoughts of suicide and one failed attempt at putting myself in a coma. I didn't know what I was doing, I was trying to figure out ways to let my family know that something was happening. I thought maybe if I took a bottle of pills, they would realize something's happened and [ask,] “Why would she do that?”

*‘I became an expert at hiding everything.’*

The depression was killing me. Besides dealing with that, I also dealt with being different in school. Being judged for not being Black enough. To this day, I feel bad because I started to change to seem more Black and I felt like I kind of lost some part of who I truly was by doing that. I became an expert at hiding everything.

My mother and father were unable to raise me due to dealing with their own demons. I was left with my grandparents. My mom was on drugs and she tried to do her best. My dad was a [drug] dealer, so I ended up staying with my mom's mother when I was around four or five. My grandmother wasn't abusive, but her boyfriend was. Abuse on my mom's side of the family began with games. Tickle games, playful fighting. That's how it started. It escalated to a little bit more. I was so little. I didn't know what was happening. I didn't know you're not supposed to tickle there. I was told, “You better not say anything. I'll cut your tongue out.” But again, I didn't know anything.

I moved from there to my dad's parents where I was until I graduated high school. I was seven, eight years old [at the time]. The sexual abuse there started with drinking. [My grandpa] would drink and that's when these things would happen when no one was around. As things were happening there, I was thinking, *I don't think this is supposed to be happening.* I didn't know how to fight back or anything. I numbed myself. I pretended to be asleep. I was scared, *what if I move or do something? What can happen?*

I was scared. I had already been hit in the eye and was told to stay home because they didn't want the school to ask questions of why this little girl have a black eye. I mean, [I was] literally socked by a grown man in the eye. In high school, my friends were so scared for me. They were trying to be there, talk to me, help me, because they knew something was going on. I've always had this protector instinct. Instead of protecting myself, I felt it was more important to protect the family. I thought, *what will happen if I say something? What if he gets taken away? Everyone's going to hate me. I'll destroy the family.* These are my thoughts.

As a kid, I'm dealing with this on my own. I had no one to talk to. I would go to my grandmother and say, "Granny, can you check on me and tuck me in?" This is my way of trying to get help, hoping maybe she would catch on without me saying something. I was like 16. I would always sleep on the far side of the bed, closest to the wall to give me time to jump up when I feel someone touch the bed. I had to sleep with one eye open most of the time. It's stressful.

When I graduated high school, my best friend knew how important it was for me to leave the house. My grandmother knew how important it was for me to leave the house. I don't know if she had thoughts or ideas. She never said anything. I did mention to her as I got older, "Granny, sometimes when I wake up, I'll see [grandfather] standing in the doorway." She mentioned she was scared that he would kill me. When I was able to move, she was doing everything she could to help me move out. It was hard to go stay with other family. I couldn't stay with my dad. He had another family. I never saw my mom. My best friend and I got a house together. I was 18 when I moved out.

*'It's like I had a double life.'*

Other things happened in my life where I felt safe. I used to dance on [the TV show] *Soul Train*. During those times when I would go there, I was so happy because it was my getaway. Dancing took me from this place to another place where none of what I was going through existed. I truly loved going there and dancing. I started modeling. It's weird. It's like I had a double life. I had this darkness that I was living in and going through keeping hidden from everyone. But then I also had this other part of me where I was enjoying life. And I was so happy. People would never know.

[My ex-husband and I] were friends for 19 years before we got into a relationship. I met him when I was 17. We were both on the show. We were friends forever. I loved him as a friend. But he wanted more, and I wasn't ready for that. Then things started happening with my mom. She got really sick so I had to take care of her. He was always there to help. It was a lot going on in my life and we ended up getting closer. I didn't think about things I may have seen. My mom was so excited and wanted us to get married. We got married. I thought by getting married, we would still be best friends but married. I started to realize that changed.

I did get a great job. I was making a lot of money for the first time consistently. I was on the payroll. I'm doing what I love. Once my grandmother passed away, I pulled back from the entertainment [industry]. I pulled back from modeling. I pulled back from all that and wanted to be behind the scenes. That's when I started to get into wardrobe. I was doing so great. [But] they had to close that department. I was going through a little depression and we got pregnant. I was told, "You can stay at home." I thought I could be good at the stay-at-home mom part. But the housewife part was a little difficult for me. It was all new to me. We had little issues and he started to become controlling. I had a baby, and my priorities were different. I'll clean the house, yes. But what was more important to me was providing for the little one, nourishing the little one. Educating the little one was the most important thing.

*'I never felt comfortable.'*

What was hard for me was the mental. I was like, *wait a minute. I'm a slave*. He talks to me as a child, not as a woman, not as a wife, not as a partner. "You need to do this. You better do this. I'm not going to do this until I see you do this." To be with someone that knew my past, I thought they would understand that certain things would trigger. You're talking to someone that had been through trauma, which means I have a short fuse to deal with this. I would say things back, which wasn't good. He would get physical with the wall or desk, but I knew he was close [to hitting me]. He has a lot of anger issues. I noticed that when we were in a relationship. I didn't notice that as friends. But it was more verbal, financial, mental. He did mention to me one day, "If you were ever to try to leave me, I will get the kids. They wouldn't give you the kids because I work. I make the money. You don't do nothing." I realized later, *wait a minute, he was trying to manipulate me*. The financial stuff was bad. We had good times, but then we also had bad times. I had the second [child] and then that was it.

As a married woman, I'm supposed to feel comfortable with going to my husband for what I need, but I never felt comfortable... . At this point, I had girlfriends helping me with money. I felt bad about that, but what can I do? I have friends that love me, even in-laws that would help. I can't turn them away. I have children. At this point, I need to figure out what I'm going to do. I said, "Look, this is serious. I'm starting to feel the way I felt as a child when I was being abused. That feeling is coming back. That was gone for a very long time. I felt free, but you're taking me back. I'm revisiting this trauma because of the things that are happening in our home." I'm starting to get depressed. I never thought I would be thinking about suicide again. I would never do it because I have kids, but the fact that I had to deal with the thoughts.

I realized later once I filed for the divorce, after God revealed many things to me, I knew something wasn't right [from the start]. But I didn't believe in divorce, and I didn't want to disappoint God. I prayed hard. *Maybe this is the person I accidentally got with, but not necessarily the person You have for me*. I was like, "Lord,

look, I know people ask many times for signs. Open my eyes and reveal to me things that are happening because I honestly can't make a move unless I have physical proof.” Literally 5-10 minutes [later], boom. I was like, “Lord Jesus, are you kidding me?”

At this time, [my husband] was gone on another trip. Our daughter was turning four. He said he couldn't be here for her fourth birthday because he had to go on a work trip for five days. I was like, “I see an email asking for five days PTO time off for those same dates.” I'm not stupid. I see island clothes packed. These don't look like work clothes. You start to put two and two together. Once I actually saw the proof, that's when I decided to file for divorce. I feel like I've endured so much in my life, all this abuse, I'm used to this. I'm not saying it should continue to happen, but I can deal. My children – someone had to protect them. Once you start lying, once you start neglecting them, I have to stand up. *You're telling my babies you're working. Instead, you're in Brazil. You'd rather be there than be with your baby. I'm done.*

*'We have to stop the cycle.'*

At some point, we have to stop the cycle. I never really got help. Now, I do therapy. I wish I would have pushed myself to do it before, but I was always a workaholic. I had no time for that. I thought by me pushing it down, packing it away in a little corner, I was good, until it resurfaced. Little by little, it resurfaced and I didn't recognize it until later. I'm like, *oh, that relationship could have been prevented. This situation could have been prevented.*

My teenage years into my adult years, I was traumatized. I was haunted by these demons. Once I realized who the demon was, which was my grandfather, I was like, *oh my God, what am I going to do?* I had a spiritual mom at church that I opened up to, and they were like, “Tasha, you need to talk to him. You need to forgive him.” Like, what? You crazy? I decided, *I'm gonna do this. I'm gonna forgive this person.* I'm nervous. I'm scared. This person is old now. I don't want this person to have no heart attack when I bring this up. I'm always thinking of the other person. I was like, *I need to do this for me.*

I reached out to my grandfather. It's weird because we still had a relationship. I guess because I'm still trying to pull this image and not want anyone to know and keep the family together. I called him and I was like, “Look, there was some things that happened to me as a child. You did things.” I explained and he's like, “I don't remember this.” I said, “You probably don't remember because you were always drunk.” I mean, to this day, I cannot smell that particular beer. I get extremely sick. My neck closes up. “You were constantly drunk. But even when you weren't drunk, you did little things. Like you walked by and rubbed my butt.” As a child you think it's your fault. But later, I realized it wasn't my fault. I talked to him. He actually apologized though he couldn't remember a lot of the things and I didn't want to go into too much deep detail with him because it was many years of things. I'm like, “You used to play Russian roulette with

me. You put a gun in my hand. You pull on the trigger. It's one bullet in there. You were evil.” He was like, “I’m so sorry. I didn’t know.”

But the weirdest thing happened. The next day I was driving to work, and the leaves were greener. I don't know. You may have heard people say this, but I kid you not, it was like a veil was lifted. I could smell the air for the first time. I saw things in a raw beauty that I've never seen before. Since that day, I've never had those nightmares again. The demon never came back again. This is something that I want to share with other people because I know it's hard. You don't want to forgive the person. But it's for you, your peace. You have to forgive. And you have to forgive yourself.

*I have my voice.'*

I feel much stronger now. I no longer feel scared. I feel like I have a purpose. It wasn't easy to get through all the things that I've been through. I feel like I am meant to share my story with other women. It's important for me to help people to recognize signs. When I talk to my children, you don't just come out and ask. I'm like, “When you were playing with the kids was anybody touching on you? What about in the front area?” I know sometimes people don't want to have those conversations, but you have to talk to them. I tell my children, “Never, ever let anyone touch you below or have you do anything with your mouth.” I know they're young. But I have to prepare them because no one helped me. I feel like if someone had told me no one is ever supposed to touch you there maybe I would have been able to say something.

Now I need to speak. I have my voice. I need to speak about how I feel, what I feel was wrong. I have my voice. I'm going to use it now. I took a big step and filed for a divorce while being a stay-at-home mom. It was scary, but the best decision I ever made. Don't get me wrong. It is hard. But all great paths are not easy. I now have peace, joy and happiness. Just being able to support my children and myself on my own brings me such joy. I thank God for that. Knowing yes, I can do this. I will not let my past abuse – sexual, physical, mental, verbal, and financial – determine who I am. I am a mother, a soon-to-be happily confident divorcee, a multi-business owner, and a soon-to-be homeowner. Most importantly, a child of God.

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