

# SW

SMOOCHES WOMAN MAGAZINE

Lets Get Moving!  
TRAP CARDIO

STAMPED  
Dokimos  
Apparel

QUEEN  
PLUSHY  
JENICA'S RISE

AUDRA  
CUNNINGHAM  
The embodiment  
of N.O.W

VERZUZ, CLUB  
QUARANTINE  
The changing shapes of music

RISE  
A COVID  
SURVIVOR  
STORY  
ALISA  
BOYKIN

COVER GIRL  
**ANNA LEE**



smoocheswoman.com



SUMMER 2021

ON YOUR MARK, GET READY, SELF-CARE!

# SMOOCHES WOMAN MAGAZINE

THE LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE FOR THE CURVY WOMAN

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# *Are you ready to take off your MASK?*

## A NOTE FROM THE **EDITOR**



**CHANTE M. BRADLEY**  
(Founder & Editor-in-Chief)

**W**ith the entire nation being vaccinated for COVID-19 and the numbers of infected Americans going down, more masks than ever are being removed.

But are we ready for our masks to come off?

This got me thinking: Do we need to take off more than just our COVID-19 masks? What other masks have we been wearing and hiding behind?

Just like the masks we wore to protect us, some of us tend to wear imaginary facades to protect us from failure, judgment, shame, and fears. Some of us wear these masks to brag and to exaggerate what we have or accomplished.

Some use these imaginary disguises to make us appear more attractive and accomplished to the world, the same way we use the filters on social media. And, just like the filters, these masks allow us to appear as if we are living our best lives when sometimes we are struggling to survive.

Our lives are more than just the moments we capture on social media, the moments where life looks so picturesque. Let us learn to appreciate and unveil the behind-the-scenes struggle of what it took for us to get to those moments.

I hope the pandemic taught us what is most important in life and to appreciate health, family and living life to the fullest. So, what life doesn't always look glamorous. The truth is life is a mixture of peaks and valleys. Life is short, sometimes we do not have all the time we thought we would have. We do not have time to wear masks that hide how we really feel and prevent us from being our true authentic selves.

Life is not perfect, and we do not have to pretend that it is. So, let us take off these imaginary masks and throw them away with our COVID-19 masks when it is time.

Just like the masks worn for COVID-19, we will all have to learn to feel comfortable and confident venturing back into the world without them.

*Chante M. Bradley*  
Editor-in-Chief

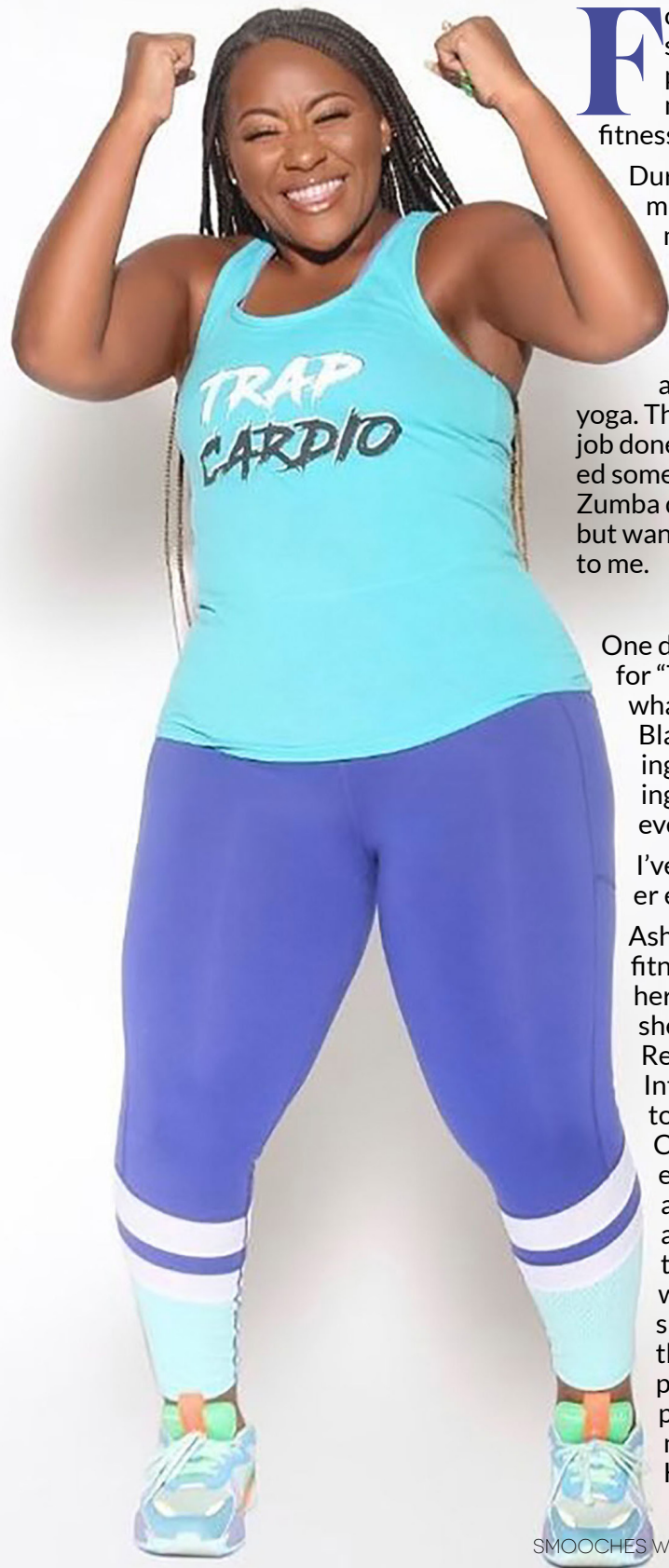


Photographer for Photos:  
**Virgil Odell**  
(IG: @virgilodell)

# Lets Get Moving!

with Ashley Redwood Owner Of Trap Cardio

By: Deja Bradley



**F**or me, *Trap Cardio* was serendipitous. It happened on a whim in the midst of my pandemic fitness journey.

During the quarantine months, YouTube became my best friend for guided workouts. I danced Hip-Hop workouts, tried high-intensity interval training (HIIT) and endeavored beginners yoga. Though the classes got the job done, I still felt like I needed something more. I enjoyed Zumba dance workout classes, but wanted music more relatable to me.

One day, I searched YouTube for “Trap Cardio” just to see what would come up. I saw a Black curvy woman teaching upbeat classes to trending hip-hop songs. She was everything I was looking for. I’ve been a fan and subscriber ever since.

Ashley Redwood began her fitness journey after she had her son eight years ago, and she has not looked back. Redwood left her job at the Internal Revenue Service to commit full time to Trap Cardio, a space she created for curvy black women and men to get moving and feel community even through the screen. Redwood takes pride in the space she created, with the goal of progress, not perfection, and pushing people to enjoy their journey to their best selves. Her energy is infectious,

her journey is admirable and her classes are something that should be showcased to the world.

Aside from being the leader of a channel that amasses thousands of viewers taking virtual classes each month, Redwood is a wife and mother to three. Redwood wears multiple hats, but she still considers herself an “around the way girl geek.”

Trap Cardio is growing daily. *Smooches* sat down with Redwood to discuss her business, which is changing people’s health and lives each day.

**When did you begin your fitness journey? What made you start your fitness journey?**

I started my fitness journey after I had my son eight years ago. My highest weight was 325 pounds, and I did not have any gym confidence at that time. With that, my personal journey began with the Zumba at home on the Wii. I then began to lose some weight and gained some confidence which led me to taking Zumba classes. I became the star Zumba student, and eventually the Zumba instructor suggested that I get certified to teach Zumba. I then got certified to teach Zumba, but even with that, I still feel like I could not find my lane. It was comfortable being a student, but not for me being an instructor, and that is where Trap Cardio emerged. And once I started teaching dance fitness, I got down to 275 in 2018.

Me and my friend from California suggested we do an event for the community. We were advertising “Trap Zumba” everywhere and Zumba said “Oh, no baby, we don’t have any affiliation with trap music,” and they gave us 24 to 48 hours to fix the advertisement. We had to come to the decision to go the Zumba route or the unknown lane and I decided to bet on me, and that is where Trap Cardio started from. With this leap, I realized that I can’t lead people if I’m not at my best, and here is where I restarted my weight loss journey at 275.

### **What makes trap cardio unique?**

Trap Cardio is a judgement free zone. We’re about being raw, authentic, and accept people as they are. What I think is great is that we have a lot of men and women that have these corporate jobs where they have to pretend to be someone else and code switch, and here they can just be themselves. We tell everyone that the class is not about perfection, but about progress and we just want you to love

who you are now while becoming your best self. Our journey is from the inside out, versus just the outside.

### **What is your mission with Trap Cardio?**

Though we are an inclusive environment, my goal is to bring health and wellness to the African-American community. I want you to love yourself to be better and we are going to love ourselves as we are now. I have been plus size all my life, and my family has always been big on, “if this is you, love you, and if you aspire to be greater, still love you in the process.” Ultimately, my mission is for you to love yourself as you become your best self.

### **Trap Cardio seems to appeal to a specific demographic, why?**

Trap cardio appeals to the forgotten demographic. The world is so caught up in image, and especially in the health and wellness field, they tend to neglect the people who aren’t educated in health and

wellness. I didn’t know anything about exercise growing up or knowing how to eat well, and I believe that the health and wellness world is focused around people who already know these things. My goal is to get the forgotten people. The people who are in the food deserts who don’t know that this side of the world exists. I have people who found me on YouTube thinking my show was a reality show, and they ended up losing 10 pounds. I am for the people that everyone forgets.

### **What has been your most memorable moment since starting your business?**

When people started hitting me up internationally, that was surreal. Though I know the classes are on YouTube, I still never understood how grand the reach is. People are literally sending me messages that I have to go to google translator for. That just amazes me. I teach in a building that has other businesses and they suggest that I should switch up my music, but why would I change my music when I have people in France telling me to keep doing what I am doing? This is awesome. The other biggest moment was when I was able to step out on faith and do my business full time about 9 months ago.

### **How has trap cardio grown over time? How many YouTube viewers are you averaging?**



I had a memory pop up today that said we were almost at 1,000 subscribers a year ago. We are now at 68,000 subscribers, all because people wanted to feel some sort of fellowship during the pandemic. (Editor's note: Trap Cardio had more than 76,000 subscribers in May.) They truly just wanted someone that they could relate to... It's just really crazy. People are actually traveling to Richmond just to join us physically.

### **How did the pandemic impact Trap Cardio?**

The biggest impact has been when we teach in person. We used to just let anybody come [but] then we had to do class registrations to limit numbers and be compliant. So that means at the beginning of the pandemic a sister took a huge pay cut. We pretty much went fully virtual and offered our viewers the option to support with donations. But I stayed consistent in my faith walk and eventually it turned out to be great even through the pandemic.

### **With the shift to YouTube classes during the pandemic, do you hear from women about how your classes have impacted them during the pandemic?**

Yes! The craziest thing is that I assumed all the emails I would receive would be about weight loss, but a lot of the emails are about self-esteem. I can't believe that my fupa (nickname for lower gut) is changing the world! I get emails from people saying they are happy they can have someone they can relate to. They go to work and get to come home and turn on their family on You-



*if this is you,  
love you,  
and if you  
aspire to  
be greater,  
still love  
you in the  
process.*

Tube. Seeing people's confidence boost is more important to me than weight loss. If you can build your confidence up, you can do whatever you put your mind to.

### **What advice would you give to women who are just starting on their fitness journey?**

Give yourself grace. We wear a lot of hats and we have this world that constantly tells us what we should be. And give yourself the space to find out

what makes you happy. You. Not the children, not that man or woman, you. As you become happy and filled with joy and peace, everything around you will begin to get greater. And if it doesn't, then it's not meant for you anyway.

Photographer for Photos:  
**Virgil Odell**  
(IG: @virgilodell)

# STAMPED:

## A SIT-DOWN WITH THE FOUNDER OF DOKIMOS APPAREL

By Marla Fowlkes



**J** Teri Liggons Brown believes her brand was stamped by God's approval. Her affordable apparel brand Dokimos Apparel was launched just weeks before the world was shut down by the worsening COVID-19 pandemic. It's a brand that believes cost doesn't dictate style; true fash-

ion is inclusive and affordable. Brown sells originally-designed collections filled with items including t-shirts, hats, tote bags, sweatshirts; all of which don the "Dokimos" logo. Brown sat down with Smooches to talk about all things Dokimos.

**How do you pronounce the name of your apparel?**

**Brown:** It's pronounced Doe-Kee-Moes.

**What does DOKIMOS mean?**

**Brown:** DOKIMOS is a Greek term that means God's approval.

**How did you come up with that name?**

**Brown:** I first heard it from my Pastor as he was breaking down the meaning in a sermon. And it just stuck with me."

**How did Dokimos begin?**

**Brown:** I told my husband I wanted to start an apparel line. That was in April 2020. He buys me a heat press machine during the pandemic. Girl, I let that heat press sit in the box from May to November 2020. My husband kept asking me when was I going to open the box. In November 2020, I finally decided to apply for my LLC. When the LLC was approved, that's when I realized this thing was real. Then, in October my husband's mom passed away.

**Brown:** "I got the cricket machine for Christmas. It allows me to create designs. Then, I caught COVID the week of Christmas. Finally, I did like a soft launch of my business in the last week in January 2021. ... I ended up selling \$1,500 in merchandise just by word of mouth. I didn't have a website yet. I launched my website around Valentine's Day in February."



## In terms of your branding, what does DOKIMOS stand for?

**Brown:** “It stands for love. I wanted to launch something positive in the pandemic. Start a Movement. We don’t discriminate. Love has no color, sexuality or religion. God shows favor and love. I came up with a tagline on IG: “Tell me how you are wearing your DOKIMOS.” People are responding with whatever they believe in. For example, “I’m wearing my DOKIMOS with favor. ... My niche is Christian wear and inspiration. I am proud that my business is black-owned and wom-an-owned. Coming from a place of Love.”

## How do you think people perceive your brand?

**Brown:** ‘Some Christians have a problem with it only because they are so judgmental, but for the most part they are supportive. My family is very supportive.’

## What’s next for DOKIMOS?

**Brown:** I need to outsource, but I am not ready yet. Right now, my daughter is helping me with the pop-up shops. I am excited about the one I have scheduled for tomorrow in Wilmington, Delaware. Right now, I am waiting on the approval of my trademark. Girl, had to get a lawyer. Also, I want to do more couture for my t-shirt line. The competition is fierce on t-shirt apparel.

## How can people get DOKIMOS apparel?

**Brown:** You can order from my website. [www.dokimosapparel.com](http://www.dokimosapparel.com). I am also on Facebook: DOKIMOS Apparel, LLC. On IG, it’s dokimosapparel.



# Anna Lee Smith



PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
**ACEREEL STUDIO**

DESIGNER:  
**BESS DRESS BOUTIQUE**

MAKE-UP:  
**A BEAT ABOVE AVERAGE  
(DEVONDA DUNN)**

MODEL COACH:  
**JEANNIE FERGUSON**

# EXCLUSIVE

AN EDITOR'S EXCLUSIVE

SMOOCHES COVER GIRL: ANNA LEE SMITH



**W**hen it comes to determination, Smooches Cover Girl Anna Lee Smith exudes it from every fiber of her body and has had to constantly demonstrate it to get to where she is today.

Smith emigrated to the United States from the island of Barbados in the West Indies at 9-years-old. Today, she is a determined wife and mother who graduated from Long Island University with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Occupational Therapy and worked hard to accomplish her goals.

Her modeling career began with her dream to change the world.

Being visually impaired, and an incredibly determined person, she is a self-proclaimed go-getter. Whatever she latches her mind onto, she goes after it 100% and there is no stopping her. She is an extraordinarily strong, resilient, and confident woman who is accomplishing everything she wants to go after.

Smooches sat down with Smith to talk about her journey from emigrating to modeling, her goal to inspire the masses, and her determination to go the distance.

**We know that Anna Lee is a determined woman, going after what she wants in all areas in her life. How does being visually impaired impact your life overall and your life as a model?**

**Smith:** I have difficulty seeing. I can only see shadows and figures; I cannot see things from afar and my peripheral vision is gone. It is like looking through a tunnel. However, it does not stop me, because I am so determined to reach my goals. Whatever I put my mind to, I will try and give it my absolute best. As a model, I know that I must work twice as hard as a model who has sight. I thank God that I have people in my corner that I work with like Jeannie Ferguson and my Kurvaceous Face family that have helped me perfect my walk and poses. They make sure that

whenever I go out there to work the runway or any other opportunities that I am prepared and give it my best.

**Was your visual impairment something you were born with or is it something that happened later in your life?**

**Smith:** It is a hereditary disease. At the age of 15, I was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa, and it gradually came upon me and my eldest brother. After I gave birth to my daughter, my eyes started to deteriorate, and things started to go down from there.

**How did you get started with modeling?**

**Smith:** I always used to take pictures and put them on Facebook and Instagram. My daughter's Godmother told me I was photogenic and that I should try modeling. It was always a dream of mine, so I sent my pictures to a modeling agency and at first, they denied me. But I did not let that stop me. I went on to enter the Finding Ashley competition. However, I did not make it to the finalist and after that I resubmitted my photos to the modeling agency, and they decided to sign me. From there I did some acting and stayed with that agency, magazine for about nine months. I did the Lord and Taylor Fashion Show and Walk Fashion. Then one day I went into Ashley Stewart to return some items and a young lady in the store told me about the next Finding Ashley competition. While talking she mentioned Jeannie Ferguson and that she was in another Ashley Stewart Store not far away. So, I went to that store to meet Jeannie. After talking to Jeannie,



I decided to enter the Face of Kurvaceous competition, and I actually won 2nd runner up. After the competition, I started working with Jeannie one-on-one as my modeling coach. Since then, I have been featured in some magazines and did some fashion shows. I also had the opportunity to work with Director Omar Moore, who directed the TV mini-series *COVID Stories: The Way We Were*. The doors are opening, and it is like a domino effect.

**What steps have you taken to build your confidence to the level it is now?**

**Smith:** I've always had confidence, but when it comes to modeling and runway it's more about me having to focus and have perseverance. I must do things like counting my footsteps to help me accomplish and achieve my goals on the runway. Also, I am a firm believer in God, and I have no fear. So, I never allow fear to affect me in any way.



*Don't underestimate yourself. When you sit and doubt, you put yourself in a whole element of fear, which will make you question your self-worth and, or create self-doubt.*

**What does Anna Lee like to do when she is not modeling and handling other life responsibilities?**

**Smith:** I love to travel, and as a hobby, I love party planning. I am very crafty and love making [center] pieces and setting up tables. I love putting together colors and fabric by envisioning it and bringing it to life. I also love shopping and being around people with high energy. That is me; I am not a downer, much more of an encourager.

**What made you decide to enter our contest?**

**Smith:** I want to encourage others and show others who are struggling with issues or who may have some form of disability that they can do it, they can do anything that they put their mind to. We are in a world of change, and I want to bring that change to the modeling industry. As far as me being visually impaired, I want to shatter glass ceilings and break some windows and let people know that I am here to stay.

**How excited were you when you found out that you won our Cover Girl Contest and would be on the cover of our next issue?**

**Smith:** I found out because my husband called while I was driving in the car with my daughter. My husband played the announcement video that was posted, and I just started screaming in the car. The windows were wide open, and we were at a stoplight, and everyone around was looking at us. I was so excited. I immediately came home and got myself together and created a video thanking everyone who supported me.

**How did you feel about all the support that you received from people over the world?**

**Smith:** My husband is from Jamaica, and I am from the Island of Barbados. Once my dad found out I entered the contest he gathered all his army friends and rallied support for me. My daughter was incredibly instrumental behind the scenes helping me to spread the word and getting me tons of support. I have family in Barbados, England and Canada who all supported me. This opportunity brought my family together and unified us and made it happen. Also, my friends and their co-workers added in the support.

**What advice would you give to women who are afraid to step outside of the box to go after their dreams or elevate to the next level?**

**Smith:** Don't underestimate yourself. When you sit and doubt, you put yourself in a whole element of fear, which will make you question your self-worth and, or create self-doubt. Even for myself, there have been moments when I said, "You can't do this" and then when I did it, I



realized that I could do it and did it better than I thought I could. That is why I say do not listen to the words in your head, the people in the background, or the noise, just do what you must do and step out on faith.

**What would you consider to be your major accomplishment so far as a model?**

**Smith:** I would say when I was being featured in Queen Size Magazine and now being on the Cover of Smooches Woman Magazine.

**What are you looking to accomplish next as a model?**

**Smith:** I want to be featured on a billboard and be the brand model for a plus size boutique or store.

**Are there any other goals you would like to accomplish in the future?**

**Smith:** I would like to start to design clothing for plus size and curvy women.



**SWM**  
**BRAND**  
**AMBASSADOR**  
**Marla**  
*Fowlkes*

*"With all that's happening and the daily stressors that life brings, don't forget to celebrate you!" - Brand Ambassador Marla Fowlkes*

PHOTO CREDIT: ACEREEL STUDIO

# RISE: NOTES FROM A COVID SURVIVOR

BY ALISA BOYKIN



**A**s I sit at my computer desk at home, I check to see what time it is on my cell phone. Yep, 11:00 p.m.; my usual time for personal reflection. As an author and public relations consultant in the entertainment industry, writing is my livelihood. I write my memoirs in these moments when there are no children asking questions, no phone calls and no sounds other than the soothing music playing from my cell phone in the background. During the late evenings, my husband and most of my children are asleep, so I am able to write down my innermost thoughts without any interruptions. There is never a dull moment with seven kids, so taking time out for myself is essential. After taking a hot shower, I dress for bed with a hot cup of tea and sit in an atmosphere that allows me to reflect. I often think back to the beginning of 2020, when I

looked at my Facebook account and saw a viral news post about a cruise ship called the Diamond Princess that was afflicted by COVID-19, a deadly virus we knew little about. The outbreak of the infectious virus reportedly started with one person and spread rapidly on the crowded ship. This, along with other countless outbreaks across the country, was the moment that our society began to change in a way that was unprecedented. The COVID-19 pandemic became a novel way of life as people engaged in routines that required them to maintain good health and financial wellness. However, in the battlefield of these health attacks, our society of women, both young and old, became victims to the pandemic. Unfortunately, millions have died. Still, there are many like myself, who survived. While countless women bear the brunt of the social and economic fallout with unemployment, they also make up the majority of single-parent households. Even in the course of national affliction, the resilience of women is phenomenal. It is our Sheroes; nurses and educators that have made a difference by putting themselves on the front line to help our society where needed.

## POSITIVE

The virus spread across the nation and even entered my own home. My husband, all of my children and even my sister tested positive for the virus a week before Christmas. Since it all happened at one time, we were unsure how any of us had caught it. It could have come from one of our trips to the grocery store, or maybe one of the several events that we attended. However, what we did know was that our home had been invaded and surviving was our top priority. My family soon all recovered with minor to no symptoms. Unfortunately, I did not. With Type 2 Diabetes, my already high blood sugar skyrocketed to stroke level and I was diagnosed with pneumonia in my lungs. After enduring excruciating pain, I was hospitalized for several days, injected with steroids, insulin and prescription painkillers. Fortunately, I began to recover enough to return home but the road to this recovery would be a journey I would never forget.

## ROAD TO RECOVERY

It was just in time for Christmas Eve when I returned home from the hospital. Although I felt better when leaving the hospital, my healing journey was just beginning. I realized that I had to make some serious changes to get better and stay healthy. Technically, wellness is a lifestyle. By practicing healthy habits every day, I attained better physical and mental health outcomes. Notably, my wellness was linked to surrounding myself with positivity and support from my family. As a survivor, I had to be intentional about what I wanted to achieve. I practiced good self-stewardship by taking care of my body with a healthy diet, proper sleep and regular exercise. I also filled my ears with inspirational music and listened to encouraging speakers on YouTube. I rediscovered myself as my survival methods propelled me into a higher standard of living.

## DIMENSIONS OF WELLNESS

The dimensions of wellness affect our life experiences based on how we think about our wellness. My journey to healing was successful because of a commitment to being actively engaged to the following:

- ✦ Physically caring for my body enough to stay healthy.

- ✦ Growing intellectually by expanding my knowledge to discover myself.
- ✦ Embracing emotions that feel positive and enthusiastic about life.
- ✦ Maintaining healthy relationships with those around me.
- ✦ Engaging with my spirituality to find purpose and participating in things that are consistent with my faith, beliefs, and values.
- ✦ Financial progression by managing resources to live within my means; making informed financial decisions, and setting goals.
- ✦ Understanding how social, natural and built environments affect my health and total well-being.

## THE NEW NORMAL

After a few months, my health got better. I discovered that in order for me to be my best for my family and others, I have to first be my best self. Also during this time period, the rate of virus infections decreased in our country. Signs of recovery rose due to social distancing, wearing masks, and vaccines being administered nationwide. I was truly impacted by developing healthy eating habits, ingesting fruits and vegetables daily, and drinking lots of water. I was also taking supplements such as turmeric, apple cider vinegar, vitamin c, elderberry, and drinking white horehound tea.





I started exercising regularly and lost 80 pounds. Regular visits to my doctor confirmed all of the progress I was making. Even in the midst of my pain and tears, I nourished my body and my soul to achieve wholeness.

## SELF-EMPOWERMENT

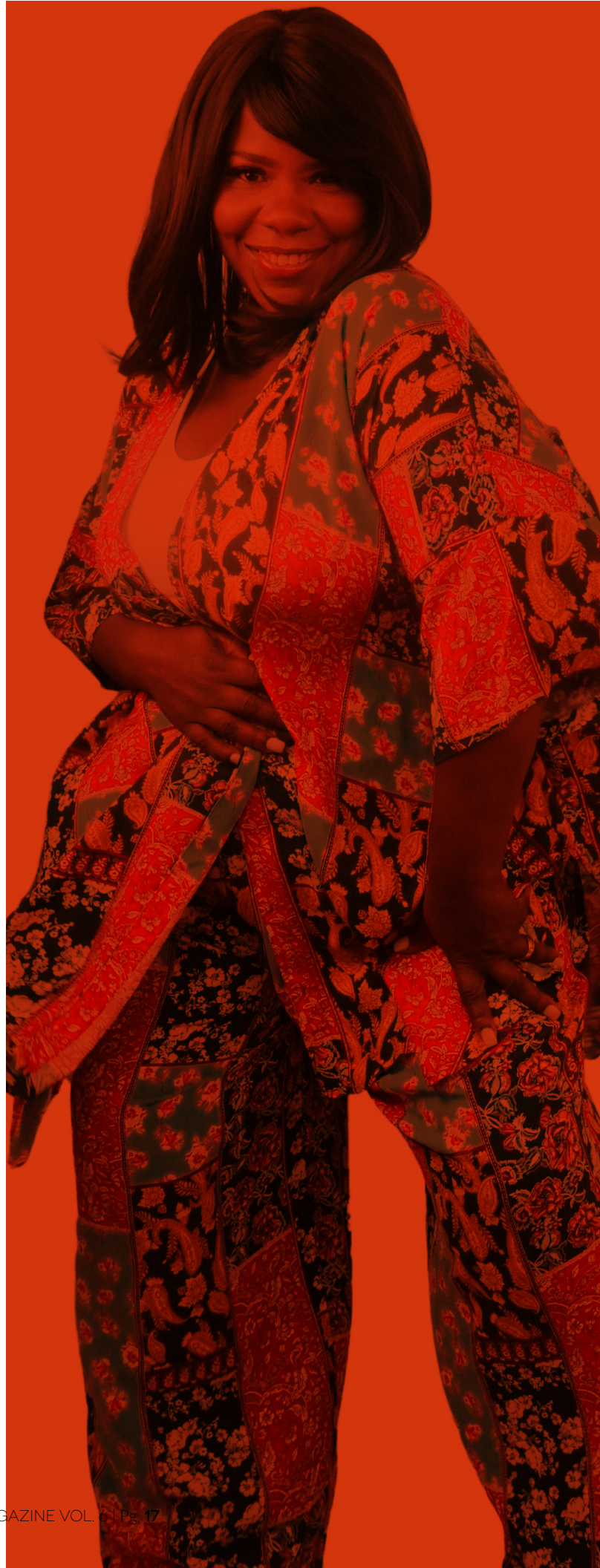
What I leave with my curvaceous women around the world is to be empowered by having a positive mind, a healthy heart, and a soul that radiates with good energy. We must combat the health risks of diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and other ailments by loving our inner dwellings as well as our exterior physique. My battle cry of personal victory is best stated in an excerpt of “Still I Rise” by Maya Angelou: “Up from a past that's rooted in pain, I rise, I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide. Welling and swelling I bear in the tide. Leaving behind nights of terror and fear, I rise, Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear, I rise.”

It's the power of words in a letter that can become a written edifice that documents timeless experiences. The survival of the fittest is now a staple for women, stemming from our deep biological roots, impacting culture and sociable behaviors. With this, our stories enable us to speak our truth and unite our societies as the queens we were destined to be. Words that shape our world come from influencers who see beyond themselves. The light at the end of the tunnel becomes brighter each moment as we constantly remind ourselves that we have so much to live for. So rise my sisters, rise.

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### CREDITS FOR PHOTO

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**SWM**  
**BRAND AMBASSADOR**  
**SETORIA KEY**

*"If you're not living your best life,  
what life are you living?"*

*Setoria*





# Verzuz, Club Quarantine

## AND THE CHANGING SHAPES OF MUSIC IN THE FACE OF COVID

BY  
**SETORIA KEY**

**W**hen Harlem-bred DJ D-Nice whipped out his turntables in March 2020 to blast classic music hits across decades from artists ranging from The Gap Band to Rihanna, it was a turning point for entertainment in the pandemic.

Similar to other businesses, the entertainment industry was devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The spread of COVID led to an abrupt halt of all live performances, canceling planned

tours and special appearances nationally and internationally. Annual events were called off. Intimate concerts and large festivals with screaming crowds were gone, both impossible under new social distancing and gathering restrictions. Restaurants and entertainment venues were closed en masse, which caused many musicians, artists, DJs, and other entertainers to seek more creative ways to stay connected with their fans.

Soon, the resilience of the industry was on full display.

DJ D-Nice's "Club Quarantine" set rocketed from about 200 viewers to 100,000 viewers in less than a week. He played hours-long party sets from his Instagram Live and crowds, both celebrities and fans, gathered in the comments to celebrate and party together virtually. Viewers would dance, join in on the chat and release the stress and fear that pervaded the early months of the pandemic. The quarantine months birthed a new level of online music concerts, performed to an audience of streamers, as well as online DJ

performances to bring the party to our homes. In March, D-Nice performed a 24-hour long DJ jam session as a celebration of his one-year Club Quarantine anniversary. He also raised money for 1,000 Black Girl Books, a book drive to showcase more black female representation in children's books.

Beyond the Club Quarantine set which became a staple, producers Timbaland and Swizz Beats created "Verzuz," a virtual DJ set competition where artists compete by playing their best chart-topping hits, with the virtual audience deciding the ultimate and unofficial winner.

Club Quarantine and Verzuz were both spaces created during the pandemic that offered the Black community a respite in turbulent times. Now, as many people receive vaccinations and more music festivals release their lineups, the impacts of quarantine on the entertainment industry are still being felt.

Timbaland and Swiss Beats launched the official Verzuz battles in March of last year, following a few unofficial Instagram setlist battles between popular musicians. It was a chance for fans to see their favorite artists on stage again. Two artists from similar genres and eras gathered in a location — a blend of studios, clubs and other meaningful places — and played their best hit records. Verzuz's popularity increased with each battle. Battles have ranged from gospel with Kirk Franklin and Fred Hammond, to dancehall reggae with Bounty Killer and Beenie Man. In early June, Miami's Trina and Philly's Eve broadcast a Verzuz from separate locations that featured Ciroc bottles on the stages and small crowds in the venues.

*"Beyond the Club Quarantine set which became a staple, producers Timbaland and Swizz Beats created "Verzuz," a virtual DJ set competition where artists compete by playing their best chart-topping hits, with the virtual audience deciding the ultimate and unofficial winner."*

Although no official winners are selected, some media organizations have declared winners. Billboard Magazine released scorecards and breakdowns of each battle.

The battles were healing for viewers stuck at home, and also seemingly for artists, some of whom settled longtime beef on the Verzuz stage.

R&B singers Brandy and Monica embraced each other in August on the Versus stage in front of more than 1 million viewers, a healing step for the longtime once-upon-a-time feud between the two. By the end of their battle, there was a total of more than 4.2 million viewers.

The nearly 2-hour battle between Jeezy and Gucci Mane in November at Atlanta's famous Magic City strip club welcomed a truce between the longtime feuding rappers. The Jeezy vs. Gucci Mane battle held over 5 million in total viewers as fans enjoyed watching the two artists show off their skills in front of a small live audience and a virtual audience of millions.

Well into its second season and second year, Verzuz is still going strong with more frequent battles of our favorite artists for various musical timeframes and genres. D-Nice, Timbaland and Swizz Beats were honorees of the 2020 BET Awards "Shine A Light" Award for Club Quarantine and Verzuz. The three music pioneers have started a culture of bringing artists and fans together that will surely last well past the pandemic.

“

*Never beat  
yourself up,  
the world  
will do it  
for free!*



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PHOTO: PLUSHY JENICA  
HAIR: LEONETTA JULES  
STYLIST: NAE STEVEN'S  
OUTFIT: VIRTUOUS CURVES BOUTIQUE  
MAKEUP: DOLLHOUSE OF GLAM  
PHOTOGRAPHY: DEVON G. PHOTOGRAPHY



## *Queen Plushy* **JENICA'S RISE**

**P**lushy Jenica is no stranger to the model and entertainment industry. A true New Yorker raised repping every borough in between, she is a mother, wife, manager, influencer, motivator and branding expert who moved her sassy flair, dedicated talent and driven, gregarious personality to Virginia.

BY: LATONYA SPATES

She is known by her many social media followers for hosting her dynamic and one-of-a-kind runway shows. The runway shows often feature models from all over the U.S. Jenica said she created her own lane in the full-figured modeling industry when she created Plushy Jenica, LLC. She said she passionately coaches plus size women and

men, free of charge, to help with self-development and assist them with finding opportunities in the modeling world. She helps people who are trying to find a place in the industry because the modeling industry can be rough, and she teaches models how to promote themselves and go for the gold. She wants to take away the stereotypes people have about plus size people.

Jenica said that she fell into modeling and didn't really think she would be a model. She felt that it was unattainable and far beyond her reach.

While growing up she participated in princess pageants and fashion shows in school. At the same time, she watched her mother feed six kids on a package of Bologna and a loaf of bread while she tried to make ends meet. Jenica hoped and prayed for better for her and her family. She said she was bullied from a young age and always made to feel different. She started to embrace that difference and love herself unapologetically as she got older. She met Vershawn London and he inspired her on the runway. He gave her the confidence to enter the Face of Kurvacious model competition. It was all a part of being in the right place at the right time that will land her a spot in New York fashion week. At this moment she felt nothing was impossible and she could be a model. Many times, she wanted to give up but managed to find strength from God and others to persevere. She wanted success badly. Being a model for Thighs Unlimited was a big deal for her, as well. It showed big girls can be classy, sassy, and sexy. When she came on the scene, she felt as though there weren't a lot of big girls or plus size models getting enough



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PHOTO: PLUSHY JENICA  
HAIR: LEONETTA JULES  
STYLIST: NAE STEVEN'S  
OUTFIT: VIRTUOUS CURVES BOUTIQUE  
MAKEUP: DOLLHOUSE OF GLAM  
PHOTOGRAPHY: DEVON G. PHOTOGRAPHY

exposure or popping off in the industry in her area. There were no handouts given to her. She didn't know a lot of things, and no one really taught her anything so it made her want to do more in the industry. She felt as though plus size models weren't getting the proper representation and were being done dirty. God kept providing her with new opportunities and people kept hitting her up for opportunities so in 2017 she did Philly Fashion Week.

Jenica moves to Hampton, Virginia, but was still trying to find her niche. Still feeling a call on her life for the plus size fashion industry from Virginia, she started searching for opportunities. She reached out to a management company and things didn't go as planned. That is when Plushy Jenica LLC was created. She tries to teach models the inner workings of the modeling industry that no one taught her. The business offers a range of services, including rebranding services, runway coaching, hosting, and reimaging modeling portfolios.

Her ultimate goal is to take her brand to a bigger level where she needs a bigger venue or a spa where everyone can just come to where she is. She wants to see the brand in different areas globally. Jenica really wants others to see what it's like to be plus size and embrace it. She wants others to feel good and be at peace with themselves no matter their weight. Jenica welcomes plus size men too. Everyone wants to feel good and accepted. It's all about how you feel about yourself and the immediate self you are in that moment that makes you want to better yourself.



**SWM**  
*Cover Girl*

**BRITTANY NEELY**

*“Every woman’s success should be an inspiration to another.  
We’re strongest when we cheer each other on.” -Serena Williams*

PHOTO CREDIT:  
KENYATTA BEARDEN



# The Curvy Evolutionist

**MARLA FOWLKES**

Brand Ambassador for  
Smooches Movement and  
Smooches Woman Magazine



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BY DIAMOND CAUL

## AUDRA CUNNINGHAM

The embodiment of N.O.W

*“No Opportunity Wasted”*

Only one person earned the opportunity to sell the campaign headquarters to President Barack Obama. Audra Cunningham is the name on the deal. That moment would be the launchpad for a landmark realtor career for Cunningham.

In June 2020, the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Cunningham was announced as executive vice president (EVP) and chief administrative officer (CAO), making her the first female senior executive for T. Dallas Smith & Company. As CAO, Cunningham is responsible for talent development, growing the firm's national corporate representation, and maintaining the firm's processes and procedures.

T. Dallas Smith & Company is the largest African American-owned commercial real estate brokerage firm in the country. African Americans make up less than 3% of the Commercial Real Estate industry. The firm represented Microsoft in 2020 as a partner supplier in one of the largest commercial real estate deals in the country. Despite the pandemic, the firm was named 2021 Alvin B. Cates award recipients by the Atlanta Commercial Board of Realtors, one of the most prestigious awards in the commercial real estate industry.

“Many people want to become athletes and entertainers, but it may be due to lack of knowledge on the ability to become a millionaire as a commercial real estate agent,” Cunningham said.

Cunningham founded No Opportunity Wasted (N.O.W) in 2006. The mission of N.O.W. is to empower women to reach new goals and support them in their success, while working in the community, encouraging each other's individual goals, and setting group goals.

N.O.W. was Cunningham's encouragement during her transition into commercial real estate. The group provides support to further education, become business owners, and invest while getting through the everyday challenges of life.

The first commercial real estate transaction Cunningham closed was President Barack Obama's

Atlanta campaign headquarters on 1080 Spring Street in 2008, two years following her creation of N.O.W. The monumental deal for a Black woman put her at the helm of a transaction that would establish the base of operations for America's first African-American president. Cunningham's historic accomplishment comes nearly 60 years after the Fair Housing Act was signed, which made it illegal to refuse to sell, rent, or negotiate based on race or gender.

"When I started working in D.C., I made sure my first apartment was around the corner from the White House. I wanted to walk by it every day, and be reminded of it," Cunningham said.

Since joining the commercial real estate industry in 2008, Cunningham has worked as a tenant representative at Coldwell Banker Richard Ellis and Jones Lang LaSalle (JLL), the two largest commercial real estate services firms in the world. She also worked as a landlord representative for a national health-care real estate investment trust, Physicians Realty Trust. She was recruited to join JLL at its Washington, D.C. office in 2010, but it wasn't easy, as she commuted weekly between Washington and Atlanta, her home. Once she began to network and meet people, however, adversity became opportunity.

"Working for a majority firm, I never received any type of mentorship or coaching. I had to find a way on my own," she said.

A significant amount of growth for Cunningham came from going to networking events. She was invited to the National Bar Association's annual conference one year, and used the opportu-

nity to connect with partners, managing partners, and general counsel from across the country, which she said opened many doors for her. She encouraged people who are inspired to network to invest in themselves and join organizations like CoreNet Global, a non-profit association in Atlanta where she is a board member, that represents thousands of executives in multiple countries. Cunningham said that every year they host a summit, and out of about 3,000 attendees, she estimated about 12 to 15 African-Americans in attendance. Sometimes, their company will make up half of the African Americans in attendance, she said, exhibiting the true impact of T. Dallas Smith and Company.

Cunningham said women of color are often marginalized, undermined, or overlooked in the industry, and that she is doing all she can to make changes for women in commercial real estate. It takes a lot of confidence, courage, and strength to push beyond it.

"Promotions were driven by the relationships that I took time to develop within the leadership team. I also was visible, and that got me opportunities," Cunningham said.

There are many reasons why the combined US commercial real estate brokerage industry revenue is reaching about \$112 billion, despite a persisting lack of diversity in the industry. Cunningham pointed to "The Color of Law," a book by Richard Rothstein, which she said fascinated her and taught her about systemic racism in housing.

"Developers, the federal government, the state government,



and municipalities all colluded to keep African-Americans from owning real estate in any form," Cunningham said. "Especially commercial real estate, because they understood back then how it can grow generational wealth. When I read this, it made it clear why it was so difficult to be successful, and it all comes down to money and opportunity. I grew focused on investment, being able to invest, and generational wealth. Then, I found out when I got into it there weren't many people of color investing, but that is what inspires me."

She says her goals are tied to her legacy. The goal, which she shared with T. Dallas Smith & Company, is to "not only be able to provide for our families, but create an organization where we are providing opportunities in the commercial real estate industry for generations to come," Cunningham said.



SCENTSY  
INDEPENDENT CONSULTANT

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Chromatic Warmer / A-peeling Apple



# YES!!! SHE'S DOING IT!!!

This section is dedicated to highlight women who are doing it!!! Do you know a woman who is making it happen and leaving her mark on the world? If so, reach out to find you how you can get that woman featured in our She's doing it section!!



**Nominated by: Marla Fowlkes, Independent Sales Director  
Mary Kay Cosmetics - Marvelous Momentum Unit**

## MADLINE PINKNEY-LYNCH IS DOING IT!

I would like to nominate Madeline Pinkney-Lynch for this segment. Madeline affectionately known as “Maddie Cakes” is a Senior Consultant with Mary Kay who resides in Baltimore, MD. Maddie also works for the Motor Vehicle Administration. She joined Mary Kay in August of 2018. Even though she used Mary Kay products, people always assumed she was a consultant for years because of her calm and caring demeanor. She is always kind and willing to go above and beyond to help anyone. Family is one of her highest priorities along with putting Jehovah first in everything she does. Besides the adoration of her grandchildren, Maddie loves to put a smile on a woman’s face. I have watched her grow in her business and persevere. She

is a strong woman who believes in making others feel important. Her business has thrived because she always puts her customers first. In 2020, Maddie lost her soul-mate, Stanley Lynch, Sr. in a tragic motorcycle accident. She lost a great part of her that day, but she never let that stop her humble heart of giving. When she walks in the room, there is always great energy. Maddie spreads her joy through her business and can be found locally conducting skincare events and parties. Even during the pandemic, Maddie never stopped doing facials. It was a time when women really needed her to uplift them, and she never disappointed one.

### Fun Facts about Maddie:

- She is a jovial person but can be shy at times.
- She enjoys a good Girls Night Out.
- She loves to give gifts.
- Enjoys spending quality time with her family especially her “8 is enough” grandchildren.
- Looking forward to retirement to give her ministry and her Mary Kay business her “full time attention.”
- Her favorite Mary Kay product is the Clearproof Charcoal Mask.

Maddie continues to illustrate the epitome of resiliency. And...that is required when you are in business to serve others. Great job Maddie Cakes...we love you!

# NOMINATIONS BY MICHELLE SNOW

## Platinum Connect & Vision to Performance Coach

### FELICIA SHANKEN



CEO/Founder of the Philadelphia Women's Network Connection, LLC and PWNC Foundation Inc 501(c)(3)

We help Professional Business Women and Solo Women Entrepreneurs who lack exposure in the marketplace learn how to find untapped resources to grow their business and find connections with professionals that get proven results.

#### Recognitions and Awards:

"*Fun Times Magazine*" in March/April 2020 magazine edition for being a "2020 Philadelphia Who's Who Black Women of Influence".

"*International Brainz Magazine*" in December 2020, recognized as an Influential leader and Business owner recognized for my entrepreneurial success, achievements and willingness to help others. "*VIP Global Magazine*", in 2021 recognized as a Top 50 Most Influential Women in Business. I was a Medical Professional, before becoming an solo entrepreneur full time 3 1/2 years ago.

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/VWQueenslair](http://www.facebook.com/VWQueenslair)

**Instagram:** [www.instagram.com/vwqueenslair/](http://www.instagram.com/vwqueenslair/)

**YouTube:** [youtube.com/channel/UCbFpTFe0mcmhtEbHktbHOVA](http://youtube.com/channel/UCbFpTFe0mcmhtEbHktbHOVA)

**Website:** [www.vwqueenslair.org](http://www.vwqueenslair.org)

### JOY VOLTAIRE



Joy is the founder of Trendy Educational Services LLC, a company created to assist in closing the racial wealth gap, by providing financial & educational literacy programs for black families and within minority communities. Joy has a great passion for teaching individuals and families how to save money through budgeting, strategically shopping & planning. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Special Education and is currently enrolled in the Nationally Certified Financial Education Instructor Training Program (CFEI). Joy has worked with over 100 families, through her workshops, online classes, and membership groups; helping them to reduce their household expenses and manage their money better. She is unapologetically comical in her delivery of information but serious about getting her clients and customers positive results.

You can find Joy, virtually speaking on any one of her social media platforms, teaching others how to budget and maximize their savings potential.

**IG Handle:** TrendySavings

**Website:** [TrendyEducationalServices.com](http://TrendyEducationalServices.com)

## KELLIE MILES



Kellie Miles is a native of Philadelphia, Pa, a proud wife to Andre Miles, mother of a blended family of four children, and a fur baby (Onyx). In addition to her deep love for and devotion to Christ, her passions are the arts, leadership development, building and maintaining relationships, challenging thought processes to encourage mindset changes, and helping women to see their value from God's perspective.

She is the proprietor of Virtuous Woman Queens' Lair LLC which is a women's empowerment group, the Founder and President of VWQL Foundation which is a 501c3 nonprofit organization, and the creator and host of a Christian Talk Show called The Queens' Lair. Each endeavor, which aligns with her passion for the arts, aims to enrich and empower members of the community through Biblical principles providing programs and resources designed to enhance personal and professional development.

Kellie Miles, Founder / CEO  
Playwright, Actress, Talk Show Host  
Just B.E.E. Women  
**Website:** [www.vwqueenslair.org](http://www.vwqueenslair.org)  
**Email:** [info@vwqueenslair.org](mailto:info@vwqueenslair.org)

## LORIE SAINVIL



My name is Lorie Sainvil and I am the owner and CEO of Adorned By Her Enterprises LLC(Parent Entity), ABH IT Academy, Love Jones Wine LLC and few more successful endeavors.

AdornedByHer Ent. was created to bring a feminine touch to a male-dominated world. Women handle each and everything with a certain touch of care and prestige. As a single mother of two children, I had to find what worked best for me while raising them. I am now working for me. From IT consulting, to wine, to real estate, I have created a lane of my own. The goal is to educate, empower and help others gain success and financial freedom.

Lastly I would like to share that I am an author- my book is called "A passion heart in a sadistic world". This book helps you redefine the struggles you've had in your life, discuss the power behind manifestations of strength and bravery. Through examples and exercises, it explains how to focus your beliefs and change your perception of your experience in order to create the quality of life that you want and deserve. The book can be purchased on my website or on Amazon, thank you!

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FB: Adornedbyher  
IG: Lorie\_adornedbyher  
#Letsworktogether

# COLOR ME SUMMER





# JIMILLE *Figaro*



---

MODEL: JIMILLE FIGARO  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY: ACEREEL STUDIO  
STYLED BY: CHANTE BRADLEY  
THEME: COLOR ME SUMMER

# JAZMINE *James*



---

MODEL: JAZMINE JAMES  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY: ACEREEL STUDIO  
STYLED BY: CHANTE BRADLEY  
THEME: COLOR ME SUMMER



## *On Your Mark, Get Ready, Self-Care!*

# 5 STEPS TO GET AND KEEP SELF-CARE ON YOUR MIND

By Darlaina Rose, Well-Being Coach, Emotion Code Practitioner

**A**re you a stressed-out, busy woman with no free time?

Odds are you answered with a resounding yes that was so loud you startled your kids, your dog and your significant other.

Women today have more on their plates than ever before, from navigating a pandemic to juggling jobs, and are natural caregivers who often place the needs of others before their own. Whether a stay-at-home mom, a social worker, or a nurse, self-care can fall out of focus as you work on healing and caring for those around you.

Self-care should be at the front of the mind at all times. It should be a habit, a lifestyle and a routine that is equally as important as caring for others' needs. Yet, we still find ourselves at the end of a week, exhausted and with no energy left to put into ourselves. The saying goes: how can you fill up a cup when your pot is empty?

Here are five steps to ensure you keep your self-care at the top of your priorities list.

### **1. LISTEN TO YOURSELF**

One of the easiest things to do is ignore your own emotional needs. Start taking better care of yourself by first actively listening to yourself. You can do this by restating your thoughts gently, out loud to yourself.

If you start feeling lonely on the weekends, for example, softly say to yourself, "It's hard to feel lonely on the weekends." This practice of active listening to self puts you in the habit of acknowledging your emotions.

## 2. TAKE TIME FOR MEDITATION AND REFLECTION

A few minutes of meditation or quiet reflection every day can help you soothe your soul. A short time silently watching the rain or reflecting on the beauty of the moment is just as good.

The best part about meditation is that the longer you do it, the easier it gets and the better you are at finding stillness and focus. Start with as little as five minutes a day and try to work up to 20 minutes. Meditation also helps reduce your physiological reactions to stress and can help you to feel better about navigating your daily life.

## 3. MAKE TIME FOR A MORNING WORKOUT

Opening the day with a workout can kick off your day and set the tone. It will make and keep you energized. While it can be easy to convince yourself that you'll go to the gym after work, most times it just doesn't happen. What does happen is that extra-large pizza from the place on the way home. The road to Hades is paved with good intentions.

Commit to working out in the morning. First, you are guaranteed to get your workout in. Second, you are going to feel amazing all day because of the post workout endorphins.

## 4. SAY 'NO'

Saying no and setting boundaries is one of the most important parts of self-care. Some have said that "No" is a complete sentence, without a need for extra explanations. You learn to honor yourself by respecting your time. Give yourself the space to say no if you can't, or don't want to do a project or a favor. Don't add stress to yourself just to be accommodating.

Learning to say no can be freeing. People will learn to respect your boundaries, and it allows you time to continue your focus on self-care.

## 5. DON'T COMPARE YOURSELF TO OTHER

Stop comparing yourself to others. When you practice constant comparisons, you rob yourself of the ability to be happy with who you are.

It is impossible to be perfect all the time. With the advent of social media platforms, we mostly see the perfectly curated images of people's lives, what they want us to see. The reality of their lives likely looks much different. When you stop trying to be something that isn't real, you learn to be happy with who you are.

With these five tips, self-care will always be at the front of your mind. It is so important to take care of yourself mentally and physically. Setting social boundaries online and offline can improve your self-confidence almost instantly. You can work to change and improve your entire perception of self. Remember, health is wealth and healing is natural.



**BY DARLAINA ROSE**

Well-Being Coach,  
Emotion Code Practitioner

# BACK 2 ME

Setoria

**NEW  
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From the pages of her diary, Back 2 Me is a smooth and jazzy tune that will surely leave you with positive vibes as you listen to Setoria's personal reflections of her own life and rediscovering her inner strength.

This uplifting and soulful piece will surely inspire listeners to use moments of reflection as tools to create a more fulfilling life journey,

**I AM...**

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**BOLD**  
**CONFIDENT**  
**BEAUTIFUL**

**XOXO SMOOCHES**

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