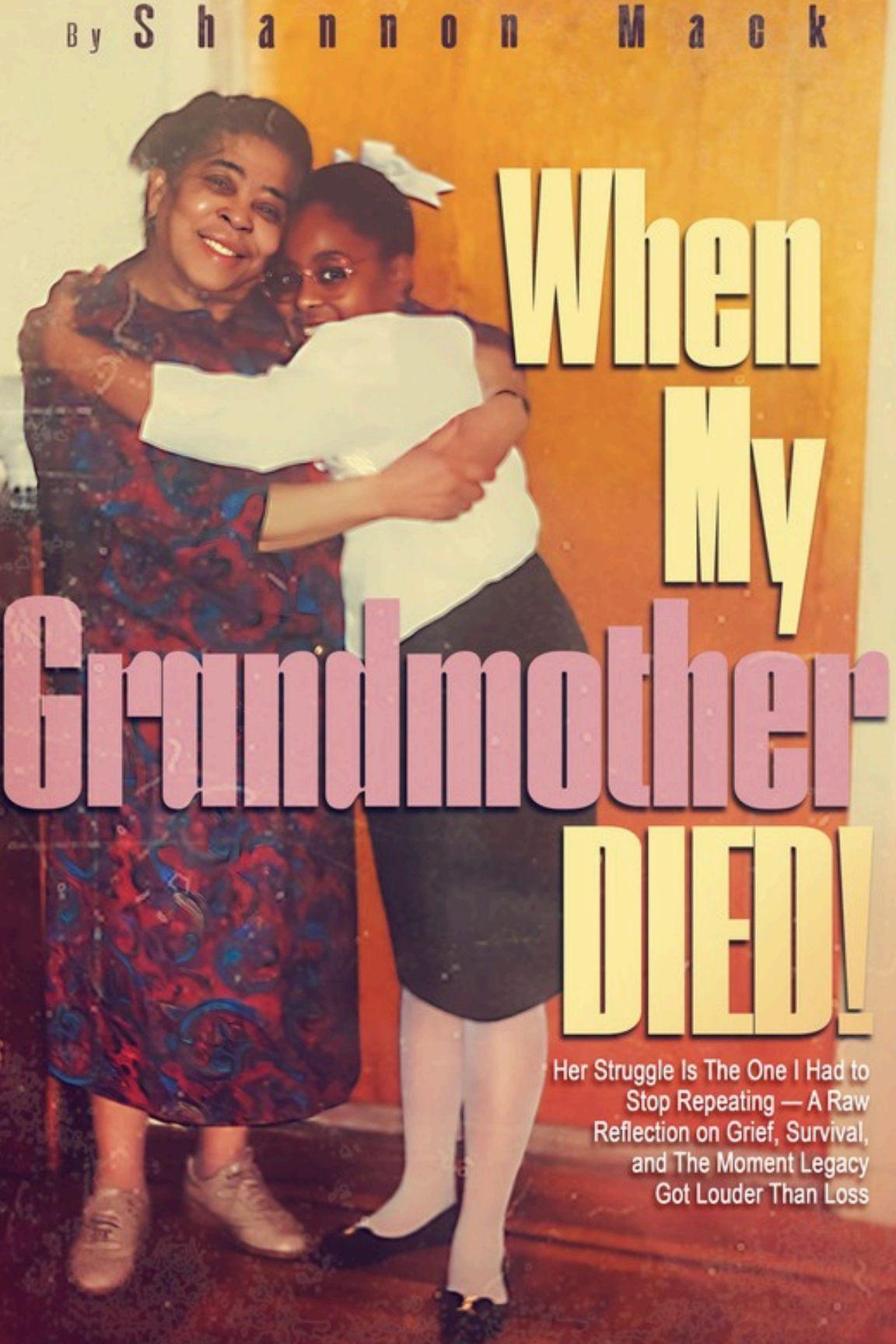


By S h a n n o n M a c k



# When My Grandmother DIED!

Her Struggle Is The One I Had to  
Stop Repeating — A Raw  
Reflection on Grief, Survival,  
and The Moment Legacy  
Got Louder Than Loss

**When My Grandmother Died!**

*Her Struggle Is The One I Had To Stop Repeating—A Raw Reflection of Grief, Survival.  
The Moment Legacy Got Louder Than Loss*

**By Shannon Mack**

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This is a work of nonfiction. Some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

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**For my mother—**  
who picked up the torch without hesitation  
and lit the path that I now walk.

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## FOREWARD

This isn't a how-to.

This isn't a self-help book or a guide to healing in five easy steps. It's not wrapped in perfection or polished with a bow. It's raw. It's messy. It's painfully honest.

And it's mine.

I started writing this because my grandmother died—and something inside me broke wide open. For years, I had been moving through life on autopilot, wearing survival like a second skin. I was doing all the things—building brands, chasing dreams, pretending I was okay when I wasn't. But when she passed, something shifted. It was like the silence I had been carrying for decades finally demanded to be heard.

It took losing her to finally see the pattern. I realized I wasn't just tired—I was trapped in survival. And I couldn't figure out why I kept operating that way...until I looked at her life, and my mother's, and then my own. That's when it hit me: I wasn't just grieving her death—I was grieving everything she had to carry to survive. And without realizing it, I had been carrying it too. Her sacrifices. Her silence. Her strength. It lived in me. And writing this book became the only way to finally set it down.

What you're about to read is not just a tribute to her—it's a reckoning with me. It's about grief, yes. But it's also about survival, legacy, and the cycles we don't even realize we're repeating until life forces us to stop and look.

Over the next 15 chapters, I'm telling the truth. Not the curated version. Not the filtered one. The truth about what I inherited. What I endured. What I finally chose to put down. You'll meet my grandmother, Lena aka Miss Laurel—the woman who taught me what love looked like when it had no words.

You'll meet my mother, my aunts and a few of my cousins, my chosen family. You'll hear the parts of my story I never planned to say out loud—the homelessness, the heartbreak, the hustle that damn near broke me.

## FOREWARD

But more than anything, you'll witness what happens when a woman finally gets honest with herself.

This book isn't here to impress you. It's here to reach you.

So if you've ever lost someone you loved so deeply it changed the way you see yourself...

If you've ever felt like you were made for more but kept getting stuck in the same loops...

If you've been the strong one, the silent one, the cycle breaker, the big dreamer with no backup...

This book is for you.

I don't have all the answers, but I do have this truth:

Grief cracked me open. Legacy showed me who I really was. And love—real, unapologetic, generational love—is what's guiding me now.

Welcome to the story.

Take what you need.

Leave what you don't.

But whatever you do, read it like it's yours.

Because in some way, it probably is.

—Shannon

## CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS SURVIVAL MODE?

Survival mode is when your body keeps moving because your soul doesn't have time to rest. It's when your to-do list is longer than your joy list. When your days blur together because every moment feels like you're running behind.

When you're living, technically—but barely breathing.

Survival mode isn't always dramatic. Sometimes it's quiet. Sometimes it looks like grinding instead of grieving.

Sometimes it sounds like: *"I'll be okay,"* even when you know you're not.

**Technically speaking**, survival mode is a physiological response to stress. Your brain and body begin to prioritize immediate survival over long-term wellness.

You hyper-focus on what's urgent. You suppress what's unresolved. You stop dreaming, stop resting, stop reaching—because survival doesn't leave space for softness. It hijacks your nervous system. It tells your body don't relax, and your mind don't trust. It convinces you that exhaustion is normal and joy is optional.

That peace is a privilege for people who have time.

And you never do.

*But this isn't just science. This is personal.*

Survival mode for me looked like knowing I had a million-dollar brand, but still chasing breadcrumbs.

It looked like driving Uber in between business meetings.

## CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS SURVIVAL MODE?

It looked like pouring everything I had into others—because that’s what I was raised to do.

It looked like short-term hustling because I couldn’t afford long-term planning.

It looked like *now* money, not wealth-building—because I was always trying to fix what was already on fire.

It looked like wearing strength like armor and hope like a liability.

It looked like taking care of everyone else while falling apart in silence.

I didn’t know it had a name.

I just knew I was tired.

**And in 2023—I cracked.**

*I had a nervous breakdown.*

Because everything I was building? It still wasn’t stable.

I had wins. I had moments. But I had no peace. No sustainability.

Just more pressure. More debt. More expectations.

I looked around and realized: this isn’t what I wanted.

Not financially. Not spiritually. Not emotionally.

We’ll get into that part later.

But just know—it was real.

And it was survival mode that pushed me to the edge.

But here’s what’s wild:

Even after I broke down, I kept moving.

I kept building. I kept pushing.

Because that’s what survival teaches you—how to keep going, even when everything inside you is collapsing.

You would think the breakdown would have changed me.

But it didn’t.

## CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS SURVIVAL MODE?

At least not fully.

The real shift didn't happen until later.  
Not until my grandmother died.

That's when the question hit me.  
The one I had been too scared to ask:  
*Why do I keep ending up here?*  
Broke. Burnt out. Brave on the outside, but barely breathing inside.

That was the true beginning of this healing journey.

I wanted to elevate so badly.  
But I kept finding myself in the same exact mindset.  
Same cycle.  
Same scraps.

And when I slowed down long enough to look at the pattern, I realized:  
God wasn't punishing me.

He was trying to teach me something.  
There was a lesson I hadn't learned yet.  
A cycle I hadn't broken.  
A mindset I hadn't healed.

So I went looking for the root.  
And what I found?  
Was my grandmother.

I started watching old videos of her.  
The ones where she talked about sacrifice. About leaving her children.  
About surviving.  
And I saw myself.  
Clear as day.  
Different generation. Same pattern.

That was the moment everything made sense.

## CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS SURVIVAL MODE?

I wasn't just living in survival mode.  
I inherited it.

But survival mode doesn't only live in entrepreneurs.  
It lives in women who never had the luxury to dream.  
In women who were forced to grow up too fast—parenting their siblings,  
holding the weight of entire families, learning strength before they ever felt  
safe.

It lives in women who show up to jobs that drain them, homes that depend  
on them, and lives that rarely leave room for their own needs.

It lives in the women who raised me.  
Survival mode looks like choosing stability over passion, because losing  
what little you've built feels too risky.

It looks like making sure everyone else is okay while quietly falling apart  
inside.

It looks like sacrifice being your love language—because no one ever  
taught you how to receive.

It looks like love without boundaries. Responsibility without relief.  
It looks like surviving instead of living—and calling it strength.

That's why I wrote this book.  
Because grief cracked me open.  
Because survival damn near killed me.  
Because I finally realized I wasn't just tired—I was carrying.  
Carrying my business. Carrying my mother's story. Carrying dreams,  
trauma, pressure, and pain like it was noble.

You wonder why you're exhausted.  
You wonder why you're angry.  
You wonder why you can't enjoy anything you've built.

But no one tells you:  
Survival isn't strength. It's conditioning.

## CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS SURVIVAL MODE?

And it's time to break it.

That's where this story begins.

With the woman I inherited it from.

The woman who taught me love, but also silence.

The woman who helped raise me, and the pain I didn't know she passed down.

*What I didn't know back then was that survival mode wasn't just a season—it was a system. And I had been running on it my whole life.*

## CHAPTER 2: WHO WAS MY GRANDMOTHER?

My grandmother, Lena May Ogilvie, was born on May 15, 1928, in the hilly parish of St. Mary, Jamaica. She grew up surrounded by the rhythms of the Caribbean—tradition, faith, hard work, and family. The kind of place where your name held weight, your reputation mattered, and your strength wasn't optional—it was expected.

She trained as a seamstress.

She worked in food service.

She raised six children.

She cooked like a chef, prayed like a warrior, and moved through the world like a woman who had *seen some things*.

At 41, she made the hardest decision of her life:

She left her children behind in Jamaica and immigrated to the United States—*alone*.

She didn't come to America with luxury or comfort.

She came with mission.

She came to make a way where there wasn't one.

She came so her children could have more.

That kind of sacrifice leaves a mark—on the body, the heart, the legacy.

I didn't witness that part of her story.

I wasn't there when she was folding laundry at Long Island Jewish Medical Center or crying into meals she couldn't bring herself to eat because her kids were oceans away.

## CHAPTER 2: WHO WAS MY GRANDMOTHER?

I was born long after that part.  
But the energy of that sacrifice lived in our home.

It lived in the way she ran her house:  
With rules. With discipline. With a quiet power that let you know she  
didn't play.

It lived in the way she loved us—not through constant affection, but  
through structure, food, and presence.

She lived in the Bronx for 47 years, and everyone knew her name.  
She was the church woman. The baker. The no-nonsense matriarch.  
She was a member of the Altar Guild, Lamplighters, and Adventurers  
Club.

She was St. Mary, Jamaica in a pair of comfortable shoes and a pressed  
blouse, holding the door for someone while telling you about how “either  
you do or you go.”

She had her favorite priests. Her favorite hymns.  
And her legendary sweet potato pudding.

If you knew, you knew.

To some, she was Miss Lena.  
To others, Miss Laurel.  
To most, she was simply *Grandma*.

And while I didn't see all the pain she carried, I lived in the structure it  
created.

Her survival became the foundation our family was built on.

That's who my grandmother was—on paper, in the world, in the church,  
in the eyes of everyone who respected her.

But in a future chapter, I'll show you who she was to me.  
Same woman.  
Different lens.

## CHAPTER 2: WHO WAS MY GRANDMOTHER?

A little softer. A little louder. A little more complicated.  
And even more unforgettable.

Because sometimes the version of someone the world sees...  
Isn't the whole story.

### CHAPTER 3: THE WOMEN WHO RAISED ME

When my mother broke up with my father, I was eight years old. She made the decision that would shape the rest of my upbringing—she moved us into my grandmother’s house. That’s when survival mode became our language, and my grandmother became my second mother.

My mother worked two jobs to keep things afloat. And while she was out working, it was my grandmother who stepped up—disciplining me, loving me, and raising me. She didn’t sugarcoat life. She didn’t over-explain or coddle. But she showed up. She fed me, she prayed over me, she expected excellence from me.

But to really understand who I am, you also need to understand her second daughter, my Aunty Shirley. Because this story cannot be told without her.

Aunty Shirley was the glue. If it wasn’t Grandma (or my mom), it was Aunty Shirley. Her house was where we went after school. Her arms were wide, her home always full. Her presence was powerful—in our family and especially in our church. She worked in my elementary school, so most people thought she was my actual mother. In a way, she was.

She got me involved in Girls Friendly Society and other church activities at St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, where she was deeply rooted.

She made sure we were always present, always participating, always held to a higher standard. She was structured, committed, and full of grace, even when life tested her relentlessly.

### CHAPTER 3: THE WOMEN WHO RAISED ME

Her husband, my Uncle Trevor, built their home from the ground up with his own hands. They were a working-class family with a dream and a prayer—and they made it work. We had our Thanksgiving dinners at her house. Backyard barbecues. Family moments that mattered.

And her daughter Kenisha and I? We were raised like twins. People swore we were sisters, and in many ways, we were. We still are.

Some mornings, I'd show up at Auntie Shirley's house for school and Kenisha would have the same hairstyle my mom gave me the night before—or we'd be wearing the same outfit. That's how close we were. We did everything together. Slept over. Ate meals. Got in trouble. Laughed until our stomachs hurt.

She's two years older than me, and I always looked up to her like a big sister. I admired her even as a kid—her strength, the way she held herself together even when things were hard. And now? After losing both her parents, I admire her even more. She's still that strong girl I've always known, and I'm so proud to have grown up beside her.

Auntie Shirley was a walking example of sacrificial love. So much of what I learned about responsibility, strength, and womanhood came from her. I watched her pour herself into her children, her marriage, her church. And just like my mother, she did it all while carrying everyone else.

She was in survival mode her whole life—there's no denying that. We all saw it. The way she prioritized Uncle Trevor over herself.

The way she pushed through exhaustion. The way she smiled even when you could tell she was tired. She wasn't just surviving—she was stretching herself thin for the sake of everyone else. And it made her unforgettable.

She passed away in March of 2019 from complications of Parkinson's Disease, and not a day goes by that I don't feel the echo of her absence. Sometimes I feel like the stresses of life that she carried contributed to that diagnosis.

I didn't get to spend much of my adult life with Auntie Shirley—at least not the way I wanted to.

I moved to California in 2007, and she passed twelve years later. But even with the distance, her presence in my life never faded.

The day she died is burned into my memory. I was driving Uber in Long Beach when my phone started ringing—first AJ, then Sammy, and then Tracy, who used to be Kenisha's best friend. I usually don't answer calls while driving, but when I saw Tracy's name come across my screen, I knew something was wrong. I picked up, and her voice was gentle, almost hesitant: "Mrs. Brown passed away."

I lost it.

There was an older teenage boy in the backseat of my car, and I was just minutes from dropping him off. I barely held it together the remainder of the ride—he was sweet and offered his condolences like he somehow knew the weight of what had just hit me. As soon as he shut the door, I broke down. I cried the entire ride back to Glendora, an hour-long drive that felt like forever.

Even in death, Aunt Shirley's impact was undeniable. Her funeral had over 500 people—standing room only.

Cars double parked for blocks. You would've thought a celebrity passed away, but that was just the kind of woman she was. Quietly powerful. Widely respected. Deeply loved.

She cared for Uncle Trevor with a kind of dedication you rarely see. He battled strokes, aneurysms, dialysis—you name it. And every single meal, every medication, every moment of his care, she handled with grace. She loved him through it all. And even though we thought he'd go first, he outlived her by a year before passing from COVID. That man had nine lives. But Aunt Shirley? She was the steady one. The caretaker. The woman who poured and poured and poured until she couldn't anymore.

Her love was a blueprint. Her life, a lesson. And the mark she left on me is forever.

So yes, while my grandmother gave me structure and survival, and my

### CHAPTER 3: THE WOMEN WHO RAISED ME

mother gave me love and resilience, Aunty Shirley gave me grounding. But the truth is—what all three of them gave me was shaped by survival. Even the nurturing came from a place of lack. Even the love came with exhaustion. And that's why I'm writing this.

Because survival doesn't always look like struggle. Sometimes, it looks like strength. But it can still be the same story, passed down through generations.

These three women—my mother, my grandmother, and my Aunty Shirley—weren't perfect, but they were pillars. And while each of them taught me different lessons, they all shaped the woman I've become.

## CHAPTER 4: MY GRANDMOTHER, THROUGH MY EYES

I didn't grow up seeing my grandmother as a woman who made sacrifices. I didn't know the full weight of what she left behind in Jamaica. I didn't see her as someone who once had dreams of her own or heartbreaks she didn't speak about. I saw her as the woman who kept the house warm, who never let anyone go hungry, who always had something wise to say about life, and who sat in the kitchen with ripe bananas softening on the table, waiting to become the best banana fritters I've ever tasted.

That was my grandma.

The way I saw Grandma in the house, she was no-nonsense. If you needed to be told about yourself, she would do it—quick and sharp. She didn't sugarcoat. But she also wouldn't let you suffer in silence. If something was wrong, she'd ask you until you told her. "What's wrong?" "What happen?" "Tell me nuh." She wasn't gonna let it go. That was her love language—persistence, care, presence.

She didn't say "I love you" often, but I felt it everywhere. In the meals she made. In the roof over our heads. In how she'd call out my name and ask if I'd eaten. In how she'd beam with pride when I told her what I was working on—even if it scared her.

Grandma never liked the idea of me being an entrepreneur. It worried her. She came from survival. From safety first. From play-it-safe-and-pray.

But when I'd update her on my progress, she'd look me in the eyes and say, "Mi proud a yuh, dawling." And she meant it. Every time. God, that stayed with me.

She was the safest place in the world for me. Emotionally, spiritually. I could talk to her about things I didn't feel comfortable sharing with anyone else. There were things I told her that she took to her grave—well, most of them. She was old, so sometimes she slipped. But even in the slips, it was always rooted in love. There aren't many people in this world who give you that kind of safety just by existing, just by sitting across the table from you and asking, "Yuh aw'right?"

I never saw my grandmother with a man. Never saw her dating. Never saw her need or chase a partner. And the older I got, the more I realized: she gave up love. She poured all of that energy into the family. That's the part I think we don't talk about enough—the emotional sacrifice. She loved us so much that she didn't leave room for anything else. And in that way, I see my mother in her. Another woman who chose her child over companionship. Another woman who carried it all, even when it broke her down.

I also want to talk about the house. Because this wasn't just a house. It was a triplex. The main floor where we lived, and two apartments upstairs. At different times, all of her children passed through those walls. Aunt Shirley and Uncle Trevor lived upstairs. So did Uncle Errol and his wife, Aunt Opal. Eventually, when they moved out, Nadine and her kids moved upstairs from downstairs.

The house was more than a home—it was a village. A place where my cousins and I would come together for sleepovers, holidays, backyard barbecues. That house raised us.

My grandmother's favorite place to sit was in the kitchen. That's where I recorded most of our videos you see on social media. If you watch them back, you'll always see the bananas in the foreground. That was her thing back in the day and still was even later on—waiting for them to spot so she could turn them into fritters, top them with sugar, and feed them to the grandkids like it was a sacred ritual. We loved them. Me, Kenisha, Taheir, Taneika, Sharifa, AJ—we were thick as thieves. A little cousin crew. I was an only child, but with them, I had siblings.

And one thing about Grandma—she was never lonely. Even as she got older, someone was always coming through to visit.

Whether it was one of her daughters or sons, an old friend, or a neighbor from the block, she always had company. Her house had a revolving door of love.

And when she wasn't entertaining a guest in the kitchen, she was on the phone—talking to the same five people on rotation like clockwork. Cousin Pearl, Ms. Inez, Enid, Ms. Pat, and her daughter Beverley—who we affectionately refer to as Auntie Boo Boo who lives down in Florida. Those calls were her lifeline, her connection, her ritual. You could always count on Grandma being on the phone, catching up, checking in, or just laughing about the same stories they'd told a hundred times before.

And listen—Grandma was never afraid to spill the tea. She knew everybody's business and could tell it in a senior citizen type of way that made you laugh and gasp at the same time.

She had a sharp tongue and a sharper wit, and that kitchen table? That was her stage. She was hilarious without ever trying, and half the time the joke was on you. But somehow, you didn't mind—because you knew it came from a place of honesty and love.

So when people ask me who my grandmother was, I can give you her obituary. I can list the titles: daughter, mother, grandmother, church member, cook, caretaker. But that's not how I knew her.

I knew her as the woman who made me feel seen.

I knew her as the woman who sat at the kitchen table, humming church hymnals under her breath, as if each note was a prayer she was sending up for all of us.

I knew her as the woman who would never let you leave her house hungry, no matter what was happening in her own life.

She was warmth, discipline and wisdom. Faith and fire. She was the steady heartbeat of our family, the anchor that held everything in place even when it felt like life was pulling us all in different directions.

That's who she was to me. Not just my grandmother, but my home.

## CHAPTER 4: MY GRANDMOTHER, THROUGH MY EYES

And even now, I hear her voice in the quiet moments—not just in the hum of an old hymn or the rhythm of a recipe—but in the advice she left behind. She was the wisest woman I knew (next to my own mother).

She had something to say about everything—God, men, life, pain, pride, purpose. She'd give you a word so true it would sit on your spirit for days. She didn't just live through life—she learned from it. And then she passed that wisdom down, like seed.

That's who she was to me: a woman who didn't just raise a family—she raised *truth*. But even a woman that wise had to make sacrifices that left a mark on all of us.

## CHAPTER 5: THE FIRST GOODBYE

Before I can tell you how I ended up in survival mode,  
I have to tell you where it started.

Not with me.

Not even with my mother.

But with a decision my grandmother made that changed all of our lives  
before I ever took my first breath.

When Lena May Ogilvie left Jamaica for America, she didn't just board a  
plane — she left six children behind.

Beverley. Victor. Shirley. Errol. Patricia. Nadine.

Six children.

One mother.

One goodbye.

The youngest was just eleven months old.

The oldest, twenty-one.

And in the middle of that line was my mother, Patricia — only eleven years  
old at the time.

A child, suddenly carrying the kind of responsibility  
that no child should ever be expected to hold.

At first, Nadine — the baby — was sent to live in the country with Uncle  
George.

But after a few visits, my mother and her siblings saw that she wasn't being cared for properly.

They asked their mother — my grandmother — if Nadine could come back to live with them.

And she did.

From that point on, all six children were back under the same roof.  
No parents.

But survival doesn't wait for permission.

Aunt Shirley stepped in like a *second mother*.

She made sure they were fed, washed, dressed, and ready for whatever each day brought.

She ran that house with care, with discipline, with structure.  
Even then, her spirit was maternal.

Uncle Errol became the *protector*.

He was the one who made sure no one messed with them,  
the one who kept an eye out,  
the one who showed up with that big-brother presence  
that made everyone else feel a little safer.

And my mother — Patricia — she was the *heart*.

The sensitive one.

The feeler.

She was only eleven years old, but she became Nadine's primary caregiver.

She changed her, fed her, bathed her, held her.

She carried that baby like it was her own.

And she did it while carrying the ache of being left herself.

They didn't have money. They didn't have supervision.

But they had each other.

## CHAPTER 5: THE FIRST GOODBYE

And they did what needed to be done —  
cooking meals, washing clothes by hand, fetching water, cleaning the  
yard, walking to school together, figuring out life as they went.  
This was Jamaica in the '60s and '70s.

There was no luxury.

Only survival.

Beverley and Victor were the oldest, but it was Shirley, Errol, and  
Patricia who truly held things together.

They were the ones who stepped up.  
They were the ones who carried the weight of the house.  
The younger ones, but somehow... the strongest.

The first time my grandmother left, she was gone for nine months.  
Then she left again — and that time, for six years.

Eventually, she sent for them one by one, starting with Aunty Shirley.

But by then, the pattern had already begun. The rhythm of survival had  
already taken hold.

Roles had been established. Scars had already formed.

It's easy to look back and say what someone should have done  
differently.

But my grandmother didn't have the luxury of options.  
She had no college degree.  
She barely had an elementary school education.  
She lost her mother when she was still a child.  
Her father left for England.  
She was raised by her grandmother.  
And somehow, she became a mother to six children  
and made a choice she thought would give them all a better life.

## CHAPTER 5: THE FIRST GOODBYE

She didn't leave because she didn't care.  
She left because she believed she had to.  
She sacrificed being there...  
so they could one day join her in something better.

That one decision — to leave Jamaica and come to America —  
became the moment that survival was written into our story.

It explains why love in our family is tied to labor.  
Why the women I come from give everything and rest nowhere.  
Why strength is praised, but softness feels foreign.  
Why so many of us are still trying to unlearn what was passed down in  
silence.

Because before there was my story of survival —  
before the hustle, the burnout, the breakdowns...

There was *this*.

There were six siblings in one house —  
three of them stepping up like adults  
when they were still supposed to be children.

This is where it all began.  
The caretaking.  
The self-sacrificing.  
The stretching.  
The silence.  
The strength.

It started with the first goodbye.

## CHAPTER 6: MY SURVIVAL STORY

You ever look back and realize your whole life has been a fight to stay above water—but the real danger wasn't drowning, it was forgetting you were born to swim?

I have to tell my full survival story before anything else in this book can make sense. Because how do you understand a breakthrough unless you know what I was breaking out of?

In 2015, I quit my six-figure job—not because I had a master plan, but because I knew I couldn't stay in a place that was suffocating my spirit. The job paid well, but it drained me. So I left, thinking I could piece things together while I figured out what came next. I started driving Lyft to keep myself afloat, telling myself it was temporary. At first, it felt like freedom—flexible, fast cash, no boss. But little by little, that freedom started to feel like a trap. I wasn't building anything. I was surviving. I just didn't realize it yet. I picked up Uber. Then Postmates. I even rented out one of my bedrooms in my apartment on Airbnb until it became unsafe. I was constantly hustling—stacking scraps into something that might eventually look like a dream. But I wasn't dreaming. I was just trying to breathe.

By 2017, the hustle started turning into hell. My car got repossessed.

Lyft shut down my account without warning—after I'd been driving exclusively for them. Uber had slashed their pay so bad I felt like I was working for pennies. I was running out of options fast.

## CHAPTER 6: MY SURVIVAL STORY

Even Airbnb turned on me. My last guests were a couple—Julian and Maddie—and that man beat her ass in my apartment.

I remember being on an Uber ride over an hour from home when I got a call from LAPD about Maddie. I had to pick her up from the emergency room. She had a fat lip and finger imprints around her neck. I had to bring her back to the apartment, and the next thing I knew, he showed up again, ready to finish what he started.

And baby, I was ready to fight. It took everything in me not to lose it right there. That was the moment I realized survival wasn't just exhausting—it was dangerous. I was living in chaos, doing everything I could to stay afloat, but the water was rising fast.

In 2018, while still driving Uber, I landed a hosting gig at HipHopDX. It paid—but not barely enough. I was interviewing celebrities by day and picking up strangers by night. Still, something about it felt like alignment. The producer at the time pulled me aside and said, *"You've got something. You should be doing your own show."* That's when *Pedis & Mimosas* was born.

I had \$300 to my name at the time. And with that \$300, I produced the first of 6 episodes of Season 1. No team, no big funding. Just Uber money, favors, faith—and a vision. I was making it happen... barely. And just as the momentum started to build, so did the costs. The nail salon raised their rates. The crew started asking for more. I realized something painful: I couldn't afford to keep chasing my dream and survive.

### **Survival won.**

I started planning. At the time, I had already been thinking about how to cut down my living expenses so I could keep pursuing *Pedis & Mimosas*. Then, almost like divine confirmation, a flood hit my apartment—Thanksgiving 2018. Half the place was left unlivable. Maintenance ripped up the floors, left a giant industrial machine running to suck mold out of the wall, and never came back to fix it. The minute it happened, I knew. *This was my way out.*

I told myself: *This* is the sign. You're not crazy for wanting more. Now's the time to go. That's when I reached out to a church sister I knew from The Bronx who happened to live up the street from me in LA. She had once asked me to help her turn the den in her 3-bedroom house into an Airbnb, so I offered to be her guest instead. I even told her, "Girl, if I gotta sleep in my car, I'ma sleep in my car. But I'm leaving."

She said she wanted to "run it by" the man she was "dating" at the time about me moving into the den because *he* was supposedly moving in—who I later found out from *his* friend that he never moved in and they weren't really seeing each other the way she tried to make it seem. Anyway, she said she'd get back to me. *She never did.*

But I had already packed. I was locked into that decision, trusting that something—*someone*—would come through. She didn't. So I left anyway. And that's how I ended up sleeping in my car. **For 43 days.** And not just "*sleeping in my car*" in a cute, TikTok-trend kind of way. I was homeless. Alone. Trying to keep this show alive while silently falling apart.

Eventually—after 43 days sleeping in my car—I found a room in Glendora. Someone's mansion. \$800 a month. No utilities.

Half of what I'd been paying before. That's what allowed me to put out Season 2. And oh, I never really told anyone until years later.

Even deep into Season 3 in 2022, I was still trapped in survival mode—sacrificing myself while saving others. We had over 20 sponsors that season. That kind of backing should've been the moment I finally poured into the crew, reinvested in the show, or even paid myself something for once.

But no—I found a woman who was homeless, and I gave it all to her. Paid her rent for an entire year. Gave her a fresh start. And while I don't regret helping her, the truth is...I left myself with nothing. I was still carrying the legacy of women who give until they're empty—and calling it strength.

That's what survival mode looks like — when giving feels like purpose and empty feels like normal. You pour out because that's all you've ever seen. That's all you've ever known.

## CHAPTER 6: MY SURVIVAL STORY

I didn't just learn that from my grandmother. I learned it from my mother, too — not because she was financially broke because she was not, but because she carried the same instincts. The same patterns. She gave until she was empty, and I inherited that without realizing it. That's how survival passes down: not always through poverty, but through the belief that sacrifice is the only way to be strong.

Just like it found my grandmother—Miss Lena, who left Jamaica and her six children to build a better life in The Bronx. I didn't see the part where she sent money home or skipped meals or prayed through tears. But it was in the air I breathed.

And that's the part people don't see. They don't see how deep the survival programming runs. They don't see the patterns.

That's why Pretty Smack—my cosmetics brand—took longer than it should've to become profitable. That's why I was constantly chasing a thousand ideas instead of stabilizing two. Because I was repeating inherited habits without even realizing it.

I didn't slow down. I didn't pick one lane. I couldn't. Over the years, I cycled through anything I thought could buy me time, freedom, or survival.

Airbnb. Uber. Lyft. Postmates. Match in a Minute. Smack Urban Radio. Pedis & Mimosas. Pretty Smack. Pedicares, Inc.

I was doing everything—because in my blood, everything was the only way to stay alive.

And maybe that's what makes grief hit harder—it doesn't just make you miss someone. It forces you to look at your own reflection and realize... You've been her all along.

My grandmother. My mother. Me. That's how we got here.

## CHAPTER 6: MY SURVIVAL STORY

That's why this book exists. Because the survival story had to be told first.  
The patterns had to be named. The truth had to be faced.

Yes, I've had success. But not sustainability.

And until you decide to get honest with yourself...  
It will keep. On. Repeating.

## CHAPTER 7: THE BREAKDOWN I ALMOST DIDN'T SURVIVE

There's something people don't talk about enough when they glorify the grind, the build, and the dream: how the dream can take you under.

Mine almost did.

By July of 2023, I was running on fumes. The kind of fumes you can't smell until you're choking. I had just pulled off what was, on paper, the most successful season of *Pedis & Mimosas* to date. Season 3 was beautiful—undeniably my best production. It was also the most expensive, the most exhausting, and the most emotionally abusive experience I had ever endured as a creator.

We shot *Pedis & Mimosas: LIVE* in April 2022 at the El Portal Theatre in North Hollywood. I had over 20 sponsors. It was a six-figure production. I hired a 30-person crew with my own two hands and scraped everything together to make it happen. I should have felt proud. I should have felt powerful. But nothing about that experience made me feel powerful. It broke me.

The manager of the theater treated me like I was disposable. I emailed him with a question about the bill, and he responded by showing up to my set uninvited and publicly threatening me in front of my entire crew.

I was humiliated. But instead of shrinking, I called him to the stage during a live taping.

They handed me the mic and I calmly addressed the disrespect—every word laced with clarity, dignity, and fire. The whole room applauded.

That moment should've healed something in me. But it didn't.

I had also hired a publicist who completely dropped the ball. The audience was nearly empty—just 15 people in the crowd, even though it was supposed to be 100. The RSVP form didn't work. She was hired to bring on 10 celebrity guests and only delivered four. She fumbled media, forgot key deliverables, and made me clean up the mess. We later joked and called her “No Good Publicity” stemming from a play on part of her actual name. I still don't say her real/full name though out of respect. She gave me half the money back. But the damage was done.

The stress of that production wrecked my nervous system.

To make matters worse, the sponsor I'd been working with for over a year—the one that helped me eat, pay bills, and keep the dream alive—pulled out of the deal that June. They had been my lifeline, and just like that, it was gone. No explanation. Just silence. No one from the company ever answered another email from me thereafter. I was left feeling used and discarded.

At the same time, I was trying to hold together my team. But the cracks were showing. My best friend at the time—someone I deeply loved—walked away from the production prematurely. The people who helped me build it all just... disappeared. The company I'd worked with for a year and a half? Gone. My income? Gone. My support system? Shaky.

And to make things worse, I had started talking to my ex again—Jermaine. A man I had no business circling back to. That relationship was toxic in ways I still don't have words for.

To add salt to an already gaping wound, I had just given a homeless woman her first apartment—paid the rent for an entire year using sponsorship money from the show. And that story didn't end the way I hoped either.

She gave me such a hard time, the follow-up production flopped, and the emotional investment I made in her didn't yield what I imagined. I'm still proud of what I did. I would do it again. But I won't lie—her response cut me so deeply.

Everywhere I turned, something was unraveling.

We filmed the show in April. The first episode didn't air until June. And we didn't finish airing all of the episodes until December. I had hoped to align a few of the episodes with Mental Health Awareness Month in May—but missed the mark completely. The timing felt cursed.

Right after the production wrapped, I moved back in with my mother in The Bronx for four months. I needed a reset. But even that was hard. I wasn't used to sharing space. I wasn't used to people being in my business. And I wasn't used to feeling that small again.

I eventually moved back to LA in October of 2022, hoping to put myself back in position and rebuild in silence. But by the time July 2023 came around, everything hit me all at once.

The breakdown didn't happen in my mother's house. It happened in my own. It was sometime around 1 or 2 a.m. The apartment was dark.

I was sitting at the edge of my bed, crying silently. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't think. I couldn't find my way back to myself.

I walked into the bathroom, turned on the shower, and sat down on the shower floor in the dark with the water pouring down on me balling crying! I stayed there until the water started spilling out of the stall and onto the bathroom floor. I was beyond exhausted. I was severely depressed.

I felt ashamed for even feeling that low.

Because how could I?

How dare I?

I come from greatness—a mother who provided everything. A grandmother who survived what most people wouldn't have. Women who never buckled.

Who never complained. Who gave and gave and gave. And here I was: empty, broke, exhausted, and so emotionally far from God that I couldn't even pray.

I remember the moment it all snapped.

I got out of the shower, dripping and weak, and stumbled into the kitchen. What happened next is something I've only ever told one person: Brian.

We've known each other since 7th grade. He's been my best friend in adulthood, and he's one of the smartest, most grounded men I know. Deeply spiritual. Steady. Safe. When I finally opened up and told him what I had gone through, I hysterically cried to him. He didn't save me that night—but in the months that followed, he became a lifeline. He helped me navigate the guilt, the shame, and the questions I didn't have answers for. And whether he knows it or not, he helped me see that my life wasn't over—it was just overdue for a reset.

But in that moment—what truly pulled me back—wasn't logic or therapy. It was love. It was the thought of my grandmother. And it was Tanaya.

Tanaya is my second cousin—Taheir's daughter. Unfortunately, her mother's emotional presence has been inconsistent at best.

So a few years ago, I asked if I could be her godmother. Not in a church ceremony kind of way, but in real life. I took on that role because I chose her. And she loves me for it.

She was only 14 at the time. But that little girl looks at me like I'm magic.

And in that moment, sitting on the edge of the bed in the dark, I thought about what it would do to them if I gave up. About what message that would send. And I couldn't do it.

I couldn't leave them. I couldn't leave me.

That night, I picked myself up.

Not all at once. Not perfectly.  
But I started over.

I started seeing a therapist every Friday at 4 p.m.  
And I've kept that promise to myself ever since.  
Two years strong.

Because the truth is—what I went through wasn't just a breakdown.  
It was the crash landing of survival mode.

Every decision I made leading up to that night had been rooted in one thing: survival.

Pushing through pain.  
Carrying what wasn't mine.  
Saying yes when I had nothing left.  
Overdelivering. Overextending.  
Under-rested. Under-supported.  
Trying to outrun poverty, fear, and the shame of not having "*made it*" yet.

I wasn't chasing my dream—I was dodging the feeling that I didn't deserve it anymore.

And it almost cost me everything.

That's what survival mode does.  
It builds you up just enough to keep going, but never enough to actually live.  
It teaches you to hustle through heartbreak.  
To numb what hurts and glorify the grind.  
But beneath all the wins and work ethic, I was slowly dying inside.

I'm not ashamed anymore.  
Because now I know—  
that moment didn't destroy me.  
It saved me.

It stripped me down to nothing so I could rebuild from truth.

## CHAPTER 7: THE BREAKDOWN I ALMOST DIDN'T SURVIVE

It reminded me of who I am.

Of who I still want to be.

And of everything I still have left to do.

Because I don't want to survive anymore.

I want to live.

## CHAPTER 8: THE MOMENT I GOT HONEST WITH MYSELF

The breakdown didn't change me.

Not the way you'd think it would.

It shook me, cracked me open—but I still went back to familiar patterns. I still chased income like air. I still spiraled. I still tried to outwork the weight I was carrying.

But something else was happening underneath it all—something I couldn't explain to most people. Because around that same time, the synchronicities started getting louder.

My spiritual awakening had actually begun years earlier, in 2017, though at the time, I didn't fully realize what was unfolding. All I knew was that I kept seeing repeating numbers—first 7s, then 8s, then 4s and 5s. It started subtly, almost playfully, like the universe was nudging me, whispering that there was more. But I wasn't ready to decode the messages just yet. I was still chasing dreams with my head down and my spirit in survival mode.

Years passed, and the signs continued. I saw 7s everywhere: on receipts, license plates, hotel rooms. But it wasn't until my grandmother died that the full picture snapped into focus. It was like someone turned the volume up on my soul. Everything got louder. The grief, the clarity, the messages. It wasn't random. It wasn't coincidence. It was divine timing.

I was revising her eulogy for my mom when I realized I was the seventh grandchild. The seventh. About to turn 42. Entering the seventh 7-year cycle of my life. I froze. That number had been chasing me for years—and now I was standing at the intersection of all its meanings.

And then I remembered that video I saw from KRS-One. It was posted in February 2025, just two months before my grandmother passed. I didn't know at the time how much his words would shape me, but when I replayed them after her death, they hit me like a prophecy:

"In a weird way, when family members pass, it means something great is about to happen in your life, and you need guidance from the other side. When someone on the other side is outside of space and time, you now have access to something bigger. What a privilege that is."

That was it. That was the shift I felt but couldn't name. My grandmother had become my guide.

Suddenly, the weight I'd been carrying for years made sense. The pressure. The patterns. The survival mentality. I saw my life like a movie, and for the first time, I wasn't just the main character—I was also the narrator, stepping outside of the struggle to finally see the struggle.

I saw how long I had been stuck in survival mode, even while achieving. I had spent nearly a decade building things: Pretty Smack, Pedis & Mimosas, Smack Urban Radio, Pedicares, Match in a Minute. Every time something showed promise, I'd launch it, hustle hard, then either pause it out of circumstance, shift away from it out of misalignment, or keep it going quietly when I didn't have the resources.

And I got real about something else too: I didn't believe I deserved to win without struggle. I didn't believe I could thrive without sacrificing myself for someone else. And that belief? That's not just about me. That's legacy. That's lineage. That's what was passed down to me—quietly, consistently, generationally.

It's what my grandmother lived. It's what my mother lived. And it's what I kept replaying, even though I swore I was doing things differently.

But again, Lena's death cracked something open. The mirror she held up became impossible to ignore. I started hearing her in my dreams. I started catching signs that felt too specific to be coincidence. I started realizing that I wasn't meant to carry the struggle—I was meant to break it.

And to break it, I had to get honest with myself.

I had to admit that my constant pivoting wasn't ambition. It was fear. It was unhealed trauma masquerading as reinvention. I had to admit that my need to prove myself was rooted in pain, not power. I had to admit that I didn't feel safe unless I was grinding.

But most of all, I had to admit that everything I needed... I already created.

The brands, the story, the relationships, the purpose—they were already there. I was the one delaying the blessing by refusing to fully own what I had built.

That's what grief gave me. Not just sadness. Not just absence. *Clarity.*

Her death forced me to see that I can no longer live small. I can no longer beg for crumbs when I was called to build tables. I can no longer stay in cycles that were meant to be broken by me.

Because the seventh grandchild, in her seventh cycle, didn't just lose a grandmother.

She inherited an assignment.

## CHAPTER 9: THE LESSONS SHE LEFT (AND THE ONES I'M KEEPING)

There's this thing that happens after someone you love dies.

You start replaying everything. Every memory. Every moment. Every lesson—spoken and unspoken. You start asking yourself, What did she really leave behind? Not in the will. Not in material things. But in spirit. In example. In legacy.

When my grandmother died, it felt like someone yanked the anchor out from under me. But once the dust settled and the grief stopped screaming, I could finally hear the quieter truths. The ones that had always been there. The ones she never said out loud.

My grandmother left behind so many lessons. But they weren't always the ones I wanted to keep.

She taught me strength, but sometimes that strength came at the expense of softness.

She taught me sacrifice, but I watched it drain her dry.

She taught me how to carry a family, but I never saw her put the weight down. Not once.

And when I looked at my own life—the giving, the grinding, the going without—I realized: I was keeping all of it.

Even the parts I didn't want. Even the parts that were never mine to carry.

I had to make a decision.

Because grief is one thing, but grief with awareness? That'll change you. That'll force you to look at the patterns, the choices, the generational echoes—and decide what gets passed on and what stops with you. So I started sorting.

There are some things I'm keeping. Like her work ethic. That part is non-negotiable. My grandmother didn't play about showing up, about doing what needed to be done. I carry that with pride.

I'm keeping her generosity. Her ability to feed and nurture and make everyone feel like they belonged. That's a superpower, and I want to lead with it too—but with boundaries now. I know better.

I'm keeping her faith. The quiet kind. The kind that hummed church songs in the kitchen while cooking. The kind that didn't scream in church but lived in every gesture. I'm not religious like her, but I feel God in my bones the way she did. That's ours.

But I'm letting go of the silence.

The way she never really said when she was tired.

The way she never asked for help.

The way she never showed us how to fall apart and still be worthy.

That ends with me.

I'm letting go of the idea that survival is the goal. That just making it is enough. That being the strong one means dying with secrets and sacrifices nobody even knew you made.

I'm letting go of the urge to pour from an empty cup and then call it love.

## CHAPTER 9: THE LESSONS SHE LEFT (AND THE ONES I'M KEEPING)

I'm letting go of the fear of disappointing people, especially when the only person I end up disappointing is myself.

Because if I don't make different choices, I'll end up living her life twice. And that's not legacy. That's a loop.

I want the women who come after me—my goddaughters, my little cousins, even the women who follow me online—to see something different. To see a new blueprint. One that says you can be soft and strong. You can be bold and vulnerable. You can give without losing yourself in the process.

So when people ask me what my grandmother taught me, I'll say: she taught me how to survive.

And when they ask what I'm teaching now, I'll say: how to live.

## CHAPTER 10: IF YOU'RE GRIEVING YOUR GRANDMOTHER TOO

Ever since I started posting about my grandmother, I've gotten DMs from strangers that don't feel like strangers at all.

They say things like,  
"She reminds me of my grandma."  
"I see my nana in her."  
"Thank you for sharing her—it brought me back to mine."

And every time I read one, it makes me pause. Because what they're really saying is: I miss her too.

It's this unspoken sisterhood that none of us asked for—but here we are, tied together by loss, and memory, and love so deep it still shows up in the room even after she's gone.

So if you're grieving your grandmother too... I want to say this to you directly:

I know how strange it feels to walk through the world without her voice in your ear.

I know what it's like to reach for the phone and realize there's no one to answer on the other end.

To hear a song, or smell something sweet, or pass by a photo and feel your whole body stop.

I know the guilt—the wishing you had asked more questions.  
The ache of knowing she would've understood you when no one else did.  
I know the way grief steals your appetite, your words, your momentum.  
And I know how grief can look like silence.  
Like numbness.  
Like carrying on when all you want to do is fall apart.

But I also know this:  
She's not gone.

She's shifting.

She's in the way you move through your day.  
She's in the way you laugh unexpectedly.  
She's in the things you protect and the people you pour into.  
She's in the softness you're learning to give yourself, even now.

If your grandmother was anything like mine—no-nonsense, deeply  
spiritual, rooted in sacrifice—you might be just now realizing how much of  
your life was shaped by her.  
How much you inherited.  
How much you want to keep.  
And how much you don't.

And maybe your grief is bringing that to the surface.  
Not just sadness—but clarity.  
Not just loss—but a kind of remembering.

A remembering of who you are.  
Where you come from.  
And what parts of her you want to carry forward, with love.

If you've been following my journey, you already know—I'm not just  
grieving my grandmother.  
I'm redefining what I do with the legacy she left behind.

You get to do the same.

## CHAPTER 10: IF YOU'RE GRIEVING YOUR GRANDMOTHER TOO

You don't have to become her to honor her.

You don't have to live in her shadow to walk in her strength.

You don't have to survive the way she did just to prove you're worthy.

This chapter is your permission:

To cry.

To laugh.

To talk to her like she's still listening—because she is.

To thank her.

To question her.

To heal in your own way.

Because when you're grieving your grandmother, what you're really doing is learning how to carry love in a new form.

And I promise you... she's still here.

You're not alone.

Not even a little bit.

## CHAPTER 11: THE WOMEN WHO ARE STILL HERE

This part is for the ones still coming up—the girls who are watching me now, just like I used to watch my mother and my grandmother.

Alliyah. Tamia. Tanaya. TT.

You are the women who are still here. You're the great grand daughters and goddaughters who inherited a lineage you didn't ask for—but I need you to know that I see you. I think about you every single time I make a decision now. And while I may not be perfect, I promise you this: everything I'm doing, I'm doing to make sure you don't have to survive the way I did.

I spent most of my life learning lessons the hard way. Navigating a world that taught me to pour from an empty cup, to stay quiet, to "be strong" at the cost of being soft. I've carried shame I never earned. Burdens that were never mine. I've tried to outrun pain I didn't even cause. And the hardest part of it all? I didn't even realize I was doing it.

But I know better now. And because I know better, I'm doing better—for you.

I don't want you to wait until you're 42 to figure out how free you're allowed to be.

I don't want you to spend your prime years proving your worth to people who never saw you.

I don't want you to get so used to pain that you start calling it strength.

That ends with me.

So when you see me fighting for my business, or telling the truth online, or walking away from old patterns, I want you to understand: this is legacy in real time. This is me loving you loud, before you even realize how much it matters. I'm building something that has room for your dreams, your softness, your power. I'm building something so you don't have to break yourself to build a life.

And don't let the generational pressure fool you—you're allowed to want more. You're allowed to ask for help. You're allowed to be both healed and healing, both tender and tough. You're allowed to build a life that feels good, not just looks good.

If you remember nothing else, remember this:

Your worth is not measured by how much you can endure.

Your softness is not weakness.

And your voice was never meant to stay quiet.

The world will try to convince you that being "too much" is a problem. I'm here to show you it's a superpower.

So take up space.

Ask the hard questions.

Rest when you need to.

Choose yourself early and often.

And when you feel the pull to pour into others, don't forget to keep some for you.

Because legacy isn't just what we leave behind—it's how we love the ones still here.

And I love you. Loudly. Intentionally. Always.

## CHAPTER 12: THE MEN WHO ARE STILL HERE

This one is for Marcus and Aidan—two of Grandma’s great-grandsons that I have a personal connection to.

You are the men who are still here.

You may be young, but you carry something ancient. You carry a name, a legacy, and a responsibility that most people won’t understand until much later. And that’s why I’m writing this now—because I need you to know that even when the world forgets to talk to young Black boys with tenderness, I will not forget.

You are part of her story. You are part of mine. And you are the reason I keep going.

Marcus (15), you’ve always had this quiet strength about you—observant, protective, thoughtful. Aidan (6), your joy is loud and bright and full of light. I see you both. I love you both. And I want you to know that being a man in this world doesn’t mean hiding how you feel. It doesn’t mean toughing everything out. You are allowed to lead with love, to ask questions, to grow into men who are whole—not hardened.

You come from a line of survivors. But you also come from brilliance. And you deserve to see that reflected in the men around you.

That's why I want to tell you about someone, of course you already know him.

His name is Akeem—but we call him AJ.

He's your cousin. And in so many ways, he reminds me of me. Creative. Brilliant. Entrepreneurial. Passionate. He doesn't just dream—he builds. And he's doing it with integrity, with excellence, and with heart.

When I think about who I hope you look up to, I think about him. He's proof that our legacy is more than survival—it's vision. It's ownership. It's creating something beautiful and meaningful from scratch.

You won't always have the answers. You won't always feel seen. But I need you to remember this: you were born from greatness. You were loved by a woman who prayed over your life before you could even speak.

You don't have to carry every burden to prove your strength.  
You don't have to go it alone.  
You don't have to repeat what didn't serve us.

This is your permission to build something new.

You are the men who are still here. And I love you. Fully. Loudly. Forever.

## CHAPTER 13: DEAR GRANDMA...

You always told me how proud you were of me—even when I didn't feel like I had anything to show for it. You told me anyway. And I held onto that. Quietly. Desperately. Because I didn't always feel proud of myself, but you never wavered. That gave me more strength than you'll ever know.

I want to say thank you—but not just for the way you raised me. Thank you for the way you raised my *mother*.

You taught her selflessness. You taught her resilience. You taught her how to give everything she had to make sure I was okay. And because of that, my mother gave me everything she knew how to give. She never let me go without. And I know where she learned that from. She learned it from you.

You showed her how to carry the weight and never complain.  
You showed her how to be strong, even when she was tired.  
You showed her how to be soft, even when the world was hard.

So thank you. For all of it.

And thank you for raising a son like Uncle Errol—who to this day is rooted in family. I didn't grow up with a father figure. But watching him—how he shows up for his kids, how he protects and provides, how he still takes care of your house—I realize now: that was your doing too.

You didn't have a man helping you. That strength, that example, that work ethic—that all came from you. You told me they used to call him 'Pope' back in the day.

The first entrepreneur in the family. A man of discipline. Of direction. He built something from nothing, just like you did. And even when I was too young to understand it, I saw him as an example of what manhood should look like.

You raised that.

I think about Uncle Nuel—how he took you in when you got to New York. How you didn't come here with much, but you always made it work. I think about your sister Auntie Bev, and also Ms. Pat, Ms. Inez, Cousin Pearl, and Miss Enid—how the phone calls between you all never stopped. You had your rotation, your people, your comfort. When everything else felt unstable, those relationships gave you rhythm and warmth.

And then there are the little things I'll never forget. You always told me to make sure the front light was on every night. You wanted the curtains in your bedroom drawn closed at dusk—every evening like clockwork. You loved your crossword puzzles, always sitting there with pen in hand, sharp as ever. Those were your ways of keeping order in a world that didn't always feel safe. Those details live in me now, stitched into my everyday.

Your house was the family hub. Your presence was the anchor. And your love—your specific, unwavering love—was my safe place. Even now, I still feel you here.

I feel you when I hear music in the background and catch myself swaying. I feel you when I put on lipstick and remember that it's more than beauty—it's power.

I feel you when I hear myself encouraging someone else, knowing I got that from you.

I feel you when I finally rest and stop feeling guilty about it.

You were the first woman I saw give everything and still ask for nothing. And that's what I inherited.

From you, to my mother, to me—this generational instinct to survive no matter what. To pour even when empty. To lead without asking for credit. To love with our whole chest. I inherited the strength and the silence.

But I'm laying the silence down now.

You didn't mean to pass that part on.

You were doing the best you could with what you had.

And I honor that.

But I also know now... I can do it differently.

I will do it differently.

I will honor you by breaking what broke you.

I will protect what you never had the chance to protect in yourself.

I will love myself the way you loved me—without question, without condition.

And even though I can't call your phone anymore, I know I can still talk to you.

Like KRS-One said... when someone passes, it means something great is about to happen, and you need guidance from the other side.

I believe that now.

I know you're guiding me.

I know you're proud.

And I know you're free.

So this is my promise:

I will carry your light, not just your labor.

I will live—not just survive.

I will love big, dream loud, and show up fully.

For myself. For the legacy. For the family.

Love always,

Your granddaughter

The seventh grandchild

## CHAPTER 13: DEAR GRANDMA...

The cycle breaker

The loud one

The one who always asked why

The one who finally figured out who she is.

Shannon

## CHAPTER 14: SURVIVAL ISN'T THE END OF THE STORY

If you made it this far, then maybe—just maybe—you've been carrying something like I was.

Maybe you've been surviving so long that you forgot it was supposed to feel like more than this.

Maybe you know exactly what it's like to smile on the outside while quietly wondering when you'll get to rest. To give so much of yourself to others, you don't even know what you want anymore. To build, pour, stretch, and perform... and still feel like it's never enough.

If that's you, let me say this plainly:

You are not weak for being tired.

You are not selfish for wanting more.

And survival was never supposed to be your final destination.

My grandmother—Lena May Ogilvie—was the blueprint for survival.

She raised six kids on her own. She left everything she knew in Jamaica to come to New York for a better life. She carried pain she never talked about, burdens no one ever fully understood.

She gave, and gave, and gave, and never asked for anything in return. She taught my mother how to be selfless, how to endure, how to pour even

when her own cup was dry. And in turn, that's what I inherited too. Survival became our way of life. It became our language. Our instinct. Our armor.

But when my grandmother died, something changed significantly. At first, it felt like grief—but underneath that grief was something else: Purpose. A voice that had always been there, but had never been loud enough to hear over the sound of survival.

It took me a while to understand it. But I see it now:

The founder had to die for the legacy to live.

My grandmother was the founder. The matriarch. The source of everything we built. And her passing wasn't just a loss—it was a signal. A spiritual shift. A quiet nudge from the other side that it's time. Time to heal. Time to choose differently. Time to stop just surviving and finally start living.

I used to think that making it through the storm was the whole point. That if I could just survive—another year, another crisis, another unpaid bill, another heartbreak—that somehow I'd earn peace.

But peace doesn't come from white-knuckling your way through life.

Peace comes when you decide to stop treating yourself like an afterthought.

Peace comes when you realize that legacy isn't just about what we carry forward—it's about what we finally choose to lay down.

I'm laying down the silence. The shame. The cycle that told me I had to earn rest. I'm laying down the idea that love only counts when it comes with suffering.

Because my grandmother didn't survive all she survived for me to just keep struggling.

She survived so I could have a choice.

And now that I see it, I'm making it loudly.

## CHAPTER 14: SURVIVAL ISN'T THE END OF THE STORY

This is the part where I step back—not because the story ends, but because I believe yours is just beginning.

So close this book with your head a little higher. Your heart a little lighter.  
And your boundaries a little stronger.

Because legacy isn't just what we inherit—it's what we decide to leave behind.

And from this moment forward, I'm leaving survival behind.

You can too.

## CHAPTER 15: THE LAST LIVING THREAD

My mother never asked for recognition.  
She just did what needed to be done.

For 37 years, she showed up for my grandmother in a way that most people will never fully understand. Through every season, every hospital visit, every hard decision—she was there. Not once for applause. Not once for thanks. Just out of love, duty, and something even deeper... survival.

She is the last living thread.  
Not just of Lena's legacy—but of her strength.

While two of my aunts are still here, it's my mother who holds the rhythm of our family now. The matriarch-in-training. The one who's been holding it down in silence for decades.

I see her differently now. And not just because Grandma's gone.  
I see her because I finally understand what it costs to be strong for everyone else. What it costs to live in survival mode for so long that you forget there's any other way to live.

She gave her life to stability. So I could chase a different one.

For a long time, she didn't understand my path. The unpredictability of entrepreneurship scared her. It still does sometimes. I know she worried that I'd fail. Or fall. Or end up with nothing. And I used to be frustrated by that—like she didn't believe in me. I'd hang up the phone after telling her about a new project and feel the air leave my chest when her response was quiet concern instead of celebration.

It felt like doubt.  
Like she didn't see me.  
Like she didn't believe I was capable.

And in my mind, belief is love.  
So if she didn't believe in me, what did that mean?

I told myself I understood her fear. I told myself it was just how she was wired. But the truth is, I never fully understood the depth of it until now.

Her fear wasn't just fear.  
It was the muscle memory of survival.

When you've lived decades where one wrong move could mean no food on the table, no roof overhead, or no way to care for your mother — every decision becomes about minimizing risk, not chasing reward. You learn to make choices that guarantee safety, even if they cost you your joy. And after years of doing that, it stops being a choice. It becomes your identity.

For my mother, there was no room for leaps of faith.  
No budget for dreams with a "we'll figure it out later" plan.

She had to be the one who stayed put while the storm passed.  
She had to be the one who clocked in, paid the bills, kept the lights on.  
She had to be the one who carried the weight so no one else had to.

So when she looked at me — her daughter — jumping into the unknown, betting everything on a dream she couldn't guarantee... it didn't look brave to her.  
It looked reckless.  
It looked dangerous.  
It looked like I was undoing everything she had sacrificed to give me stability.

I used to take that personally. I thought her lack of outward excitement was a lack of faith in me. But now I see it for what it is: the language of survival mode.

She wasn't telling me I couldn't do it. She was telling me she couldn't watch me fall — because she knows how hard it is to get back up when you've already been carrying the weight of everyone else.

And in her own way, she was protecting me. But that protection came wrapped in caution, in warnings, in reminders to “be careful” — and those words followed me like shadows.

Without realizing it, I started protecting myself the same way.

I clipped my own wings before I could fly.

I stopped myself from leaping too far, not because I wasn't ready — but because I'd been taught that risk is dangerous, not liberating.

But now I understand. And now I also know what's been holding me back.

Not her — but what she had to become in order to survive.

She is the reason I can't just chase dreams — I have to complete them.

She is the reason I can't just build — I have to sustain.

She is the reason I can't live in fear — because she already paid that price.

And once I make it — and I will make it — her heart can rest.

Because all the sacrifices she made, all the years she held it together, all the days she chose duty over everything else... it'll all make sense.

It already does.

She is the last living thread.

And because of her, I now know what to do with it.

## CHAPTER 16: FROM SURVIVAL MODE TO STRATEGY MODE (HOW I FINALLY MADE THE SHIFT—AND HOW YOU CAN TOO)

So you've probably figured out by now that I've been through some things. You've seen the breakdowns. The detours that made no sense at the time. The "how did I get here again?" moments that left me staring at the ceiling at 3 a.m., wondering if I had completely missed my turn in life.

But what you might not fully know yet is how I got out—how I made the shift from waking up every day in pure reaction mode, just putting out fires, to actually waking up with a plan. A plan I could see, measure, and feel proud of. A plan that wasn't about "making it through the week," but about building something solid enough to last.

And let me tell you—this wasn't one of those cute, Instagrammable glow-up moments. There was no soft-focus filter, no perfectly lit morning epiphany while sipping on a green juice. This shift came the ugly way. The slow way. The "God, I cannot keep doing this" way.

It came in the form of last straws that snapped without warning. In the gut-punch moments when I realized I was right back in the same position I swore I'd never return to.

In those heavy silences where I sat alone, no music, no TV, just me and my thoughts—and God—wrestling with the truth.

Some days, the conversations I had with Him didn't even have words. They were just deep sighs, tears that came without warning, and the kind of tired that sits in your bones. I didn't have eloquent prayers or perfectly quoted scripture. I just had, "Please. Show me something different."

And little by little, He did. But not before showing me exactly why I couldn't stay where I was.

### **The Moment I Knew I Couldn't Keep Living Like This**

I had quit Uber a year before because I swore I was done chasing scraps. But when bills piled up and nothing seemed to be working, I found myself back out there. One night, I did an \$80 ride. The customer paid \$80. My cut? \$25. Twenty-five dollars for my gas, my time, my energy, my car, my safety. It hit me—I'm worth more than this. My time is worth more than this. My life is worth more than this.

Around the same time, I asked someone I knew—a woman I respected as a Black Caribbean entrepreneur—for a loan. \$500. And let me tell you, I do not ask for help easily. Survival mode will do that to you. It'll make you believe you have to figure everything out alone because no one's coming to save you. But I was desperate. I pushed my pride down and asked.

She told me she couldn't lend it to me, but she had another idea: she could "hire" me to come clean her restaurant and her senior citizen home. She never said "toilets," but in my head, that's exactly what I heard—come clean toilets. At first, I told her I didn't need a job, just temporary help, and I'd pay her back. Then she reframed it: "It's not a long-term thing. You'll make your money in a few days."

So I swallowed hard and said, "Okay, I'm interested."

She never responded.

And honestly? That was the last straw.

Not because I think I'm above a job—far from it. I've worked every kind of job under the sun. I've been the one clocking in before the sun came up, the one working doubles, the one taking side hustles just to make sure the lights stayed on. If push ever came to shove, I'd clock in tomorrow without hesitation. Work has never been the issue.

But in that moment, sitting there reading that offer, I felt something shift in my chest.

I realized survival mode had been playing the cruelest trick on me—convincing me that this was the ceiling, that this was the best I could ask for, the best I could attract. It wasn't about whether I could scrub a toilet; it was about why I thought I had to.

Here I was, a woman who had built multiple brands from scratch—brands with real, tangible value. I had put my creativity, my grit, my sleepless nights into building something out of nothing. And yet, I was sitting there genuinely entertaining an offer to clean toilets for a few hundred dollars, like my entire resume, my entire calling, didn't exist.

That wasn't about her offer—it was about me. About the version of me that had been worn down so low by constant struggle that I forgot what I was worth. About the part of me that had been living so long in “just get by” mode, I forgot how to stand in “I deserve more” mode. And in that instant, I saw it clearly: it wasn't my abilities that had shrunk. It was my mindset.

**And I know what you might be thinking—Why didn't you just ask your mom first?**

Not because my mother has ever made me feel ashamed, but because I already knew how much she'd done for me. This woman has shown up for me in ways I can never fully put into words. She has bailed me out more times than I can count—emotionally, financially, spiritually. She's been retired for three years, and still, if I called her and said, “I need it,” she would do everything in her power to help me.

And that's exactly why I didn't want to ask. Survival mode will play with your head like that—it'll have you sitting in a burning building, choking on smoke, but refusing to call the one person you know will run in and drag you out. You tell yourself you don't want to be a burden. You tell yourself you should have figured it out by now. You tell yourself you'll find another way because you're grown and you “should” be able to handle it.

But here's the flip side: survival mode will also have you running back to your mama every time something goes wrong, no matter how old you are. It'll keep you in that cycle of dependence because it's easier than breaking the patterns that got you there in the first place.

It'll have you leaning on her like a safety net you never learned to climb without.

I've been on both ends of that spectrum—ashamed to ask, and ashamed because I asked. And neither one feels good.

**And the truth is, neither end of that spectrum is healthy.** Survival mode convinces you those are your only two options: suffer in silence or keep leaning until the net frays.

But there's a middle ground—one I didn't understand until I started clawing my way out. That middle ground is where you stand on your own two feet but still know how to strategically accept help without falling into dependence. It's where you're building something that sustains you long-term instead of scrambling to cover the week. It's where you're not afraid to collaborate, partner, or even ask for resources—but you do it with a plan, with purpose, and with an endgame.

That middle is strategy mode.

And for me, getting there didn't happen overnight. I didn't wake up one morning and declare, Okay, I'm in strategy mode now. It came step by step, moment by moment, through changing how I thought, how I planned, and how I made decisions. It meant moving away from panic-driven choices toward intentional ones.

The first thing I had to do was get honest about the fact that I was tired—not just in my body, but in my spirit. I was tired of the same conversations about money every few months. Tired of only being “creative” when my back was against the wall. Tired of building from scratch over and over again.

So I asked myself a question I had never really stopped to answer before: *If I know survival mode isn't working, what would it look like if I actually built a plan for my life instead of reacting to it?*

For me, this is personal. I don't just want my mother to see me “make it”—I want her to feel it.

I want to repay her, even though I know she doesn't expect it, because she's my mother.

I want to give her the kind of life where she never has to even think about money again. I want to send her on vacations the way she sent my grandmother on cruises. I want her to have the best, stress-free retirement and the kind of peace that lets her breathe deeply every single day.

And here's the thing: if I stayed in survival mode, I'd never be able to do that. Because survival mode will have you too busy putting out your own fires to light someone else's candles.

So I knew I had to make a choice: keep letting life push me around like a rag doll, or grab the damn steering wheel and drive on purpose.

The first shift wasn't glamorous—it wasn't some massive financial win or a surprise opportunity. The first shift was internal. I had to start telling myself the truth about where I was and why I was there. Not the sugarcoated version, not the excuses I'd gotten used to repeating, but the real truth.

The truth was, I'd been running my life like a fire department. Always reacting. Always showing up at the last minute to put out emergencies. Always moving in chaos. I knew how to hustle in a crisis, but I didn't know how to sustain a win.

Strategy mode required me to slow down long enough to stop asking, "What needs to be fixed right now?" and start asking, "What needs to be built so I don't have to keep fixing it?"

And that's where everything started to change.

I stopped making money decisions out of panic and started making them from a plan. That meant no more chasing "quick cash" that had no connection to my long-term vision. No more burning out on projects that didn't fit the bigger picture. No more saying yes to things just because the money looked good in the moment.

Instead, I got clear on the big picture—what I actually wanted my life to look like—and I started building from there. Every yes had to match the vision. Every dollar had to have a job. Every opportunity had to lead somewhere.

Did it happen instantly? Absolutely not. I still had moments where survival mode crept back in, whispering that I was running out of time, that I needed to grab whatever I could. But now I had a filter. I could pause, check the plan, and decide if that move was strategy—or sabotage.

And little by little, that's how I stopped waking up in reaction mode and started waking up in creation mode. I wasn't just putting out fires anymore—I was building something worth protecting.

And once I started living in creation mode, I realized something—this wasn't just about making smarter business moves. This was spiritual work.

Because strategy without soul still crumbles. You can have the sharpest plan, the perfect calendar, the cleanest to-do list—but if your spirit is starving, you'll still end up making decisions from fear. And decisions made from fear will always shrink you. They'll make you cling to crumbs because you don't trust a whole meal is coming.

I knew that if I didn't strengthen myself from the inside out, I'd circle right back to where I'd been before—tired, depleted, and mistaking scraps for opportunities.

That's when prayer stopped being optional.

And I don't mean the casual kind you whisper while you're rushing to the next thing. I mean the kind where you stop everything—close the laptop, silence the phone, get still—and have an honest conversation with God. The kind where you strip away the performance, the nice words, and the “polished” version of your faith, and you pray like someone who has nothing left to lose.

I started praying for truth—even when I knew it might wreck my comfort. I prayed for discernment—because sometimes the wrong thing looks so good you can barely tell the difference.

I prayed for patience—because I knew strategy mode wouldn’t move at the speed my panic wanted.

I started giving God specifics. Ladybugs. Sirens. Anything that would make me pause and say, “Okay, I hear You.” The sirens were the most personal—they’ve been a signal for me since 2017, when I had an encounter with Archangel Gabriel, the messenger angel. From then on, sirens felt like my trumpet blasts from heaven, calling me to stop, listen, and pay attention.

But I didn’t just pray—I processed. Therapy became the other half of my lifeline. My therapist had a way of holding up a mirror so clean, I couldn’t avoid my own reflection. Every time she brought up survival mode, it was like shining a flashlight into the corners of my life I had never dared to examine.

We dug into my grandmother’s sacrifices. My mother’s exhaustion. The ways our family’s story echoed the silent themes I saw in comments from people sharing their own Caribbean childhoods. And I had to face the hardest truth: these patterns weren’t just “the way life is.” They were learned. Lived. Passed down. And they were running my life.

It was heavy—but it was freeing. Because once you name the chain, you can break it.

The combination of prayer, therapy, and self-awareness didn’t just anchor me—it recalibrated me. It was like my internal compass, which had been spinning wildly for years, finally found true north.

For the first time in a long time, I wasn’t waking up to fight fires. I wasn’t scanning the horizon for the next emergency. I wasn’t bargaining with myself about whether I could afford peace today.

Instead, I was making moves from a place of alignment. My “yes” meant yes, and my “no” didn’t require an explanation. I wasn’t auditioning for approval anymore—I was building for purpose.

And that’s when I realized something that shook me:  
I had mistaken urgency for ambition my entire adult life.

Urgency had told me I was being hungry, being disciplined, “on my grind.” It had tricked me into thinking exhaustion was proof of effort, and scarcity was proof of humility. But urgency is just survival mode in a fancy outfit. It’s still fear—it’s just dressed in hustle culture’s favorite clothes.

Urgency is grabbing the first lifeboat you see, even if it’s full of holes. Strategy is building the damn ship.

Urgency says, “If you don’t take this now, you’ll never get another shot.” Strategy says, “If it’s for you, you can take the time to do it right.”

Urgency made my life feel like a constant countdown clock. Every decision felt like it had to be made right now or else I’d miss my window. And in that state, you don’t ask, “Is this right for me?” You just ask, “Can it save me?”

The truth? Anything that’s truly meant for you doesn’t require you to bleed yourself dry to keep it.

That’s the power of strategy mode—it slows you down without making you stagnant. It gives you space to think, to breathe, to build without panic breathing down your neck. And once I started making that shift, my opportunities started looking different. My boundaries got stronger. My peace became non-negotiable.

And here’s the most dangerous part for survival mode: once you’ve experienced that kind of clarity, you can’t go back. Not without knowing exactly what you’re trading away.

### **The Mindset Shift: From Urgency to Strategy**

Here’s the truth about survival mode:

- It makes you reactive instead of proactive.
- It keeps you stuck in “just enough” thinking.
- It pushes people away and refuses help, even when you need it.
- It convinces you to settle for scraps because scraps feel safer than nothing.

Strategy mode is the opposite:

- It slows you down so you can make intentional moves.
- It focuses you on building for the future instead of constantly putting out fires.
- It makes you evaluate every action by how it serves your long-term vision.

I had to forgive myself for the years I stayed in survival mode—years where fear and scarcity called the shots. I had to look at the choices I made back then and remind myself: I was working with the tools I had at the time.

I had to extend that same grace to the people who quit on me or disappointed me. Most of them weren't malicious—they were just trapped in their own cycles. Some were too scared to dream bigger. Others were too exhausted to match my pace. And some didn't even realize they were in survival mode at all—they just called it "life."

But grace doesn't mean access. Forgiveness can coexist with boundaries. And sometimes the most loving thing you can do for yourself and for them is to walk away without looking back.

And then I made the hardest decision of all:  
I wasn't going back there—ever again.

Not for a person.

Not for a paycheck.

Not even for temporary relief.

Because once you've tasted creation mode—the freedom of moving from vision instead of panic—you start to see urgency for what it really is: a cheap imitation of progress. It looks shiny. It feels important. It convinces you you're moving fast toward your dreams, when really, you're just running in place on a hamster wheel, burning yourself out while the world applauds your "hustle."

Urgency had me chasing opportunities that didn't deserve me, begging rooms to let me in when I could've been building my own.

Creation mode showed me I could slow down and still win—that speed without direction isn’t progress, it’s chaos with a deadline.

And when you’ve had even a glimpse of that clarity, you can’t go back to the noise without knowing exactly what you’re giving up—your peace, your power, and your purpose.

Survival mode will fight to drag you back—but once you’ve breathed the air up here, you’ll suffocate anywhere else.

### **My Blueprint for Shifting Out of Survival Mode**

I’m not going to pretend this is some magic overnight transformation. It’s a daily choice—a muscle you build until it becomes instinct. Here’s what helped me, and what can help you:

#### **1. Prayer with Precision**

Don’t just pray—direct your prayers like a laser. Ask for signs you can’t miss. Ask for discernment so you can separate noise from divine direction. And when you pray, believe the answer is already in motion. The specificity forces you to slow down, listen, and wait for alignment instead of chasing distraction.

#### **2. Awareness**

You can’t fix what you can’t name. Pay attention to the decisions you make from fear, panic, or the need for instant relief. When you catch yourself moving from urgency instead of intention, stop and ask: “Is this survival mode or strategy mode?” Awareness turns the autopilot off.

#### **3. Affirmations That Rewire You**

Your words shape your wiring. I had to stop repeating the language of lack and start speaking in the language of abundance. Every day: I am worth more than pennies. I am building something that lasts. I am not in a rush; I am on time. When you hear it enough, you start making decisions that match it.

#### **4. Isolation & Stillness**

Survival mode thrives in chaos because chaos keeps you from thinking clearly.

Strategy mode demands clarity—and clarity requires stillness. Carve out time away from the noise: no phone, no people, no to-do lists. Journal. Reflect. Let your next move find you instead of forcing it.

### **5. Therapy & Talking It Out**

There are some things you can't see until you say them out loud. Therapy gave me that mirror. It helped me trace my habits back to the root, to see where I was operating out of old wounds instead of present wisdom. Speaking your truth aloud is how you separate the pain from the plan.

### **6. Cutting Ties with Survival Thinkers**

You can't elevate in a room where everyone's committed to staying on the ground. That doesn't mean you stop loving people—it means you stop letting them influence your decisions. If you're climbing out, you can't afford to keep letting their fear and scarcity thinking weigh you down.

### **7. 90-Day Plans**

Strategy mode doesn't try to fix everything in one sweep. Pick three things to focus on for the next 90 days and pour into those only. This forces you to stop scattering your energy and start stacking your wins.

### **8. Review & Adjust**

Once a month, check your progress with brutal honesty. Ask: "Is what I'm doing moving me forward or pulling me back into old habits?" If it's the latter, make the adjustment immediately. Strategy mode is flexible—it evolves as you do.

### **9. Boundaries Without Guilt**

One of the fastest ways to fall back into survival mode is by saying "yes" to things that don't serve you. Every "yes" is a withdrawal from your energy account—be careful where you spend it. Boundaries aren't selfish; they're protection for your vision.

### **10. Celebrate the Small Wins**

Survival mode makes you feel like nothing is ever enough. Strategy mode teaches you to acknowledge progress so you don't burn out chasing the finish line. Celebrate the invoice you sent, the day you didn't panic-spend, the conversation you handled differently. Small wins compound into big change.

### Closing

Shifting out of survival mode wasn't just about building a better life — it was about breaking the root pattern I had carried my whole life without realizing it. My grandmother lived her entire existence in survival mode, and not because she wanted to, but because she had to. She sacrificed her own dreams to keep her children fed, her household standing, and her dignity intact. My mother inherited that same pattern, and so did I.

For years, I thought my drive was ambition. I thought my hustle was proof that I was built for greatness. But underneath it, I was still playing the same game — sacrificing myself, chasing stability like it was a finish line, and believing struggle was the only way to earn my place in the world.

The truth is, I didn't just learn strategy for me. I learned it for her. For my mother. For every woman in my bloodline who deserved more than scraps but was never given the chance to choose differently. Every boundary I hold, every plan I make, every “no” to what doesn't serve me — it's me planting a new seed in soil that's been exhausted for generations.

And here's what I've learned: strategy mode doesn't just change your business or your bank account — it changes your identity. You stop asking, “How can I make this work?” and start asking, “Does this even belong in the life I'm building?” You stop chasing what looks urgent and start nurturing what feels right.

The journey here was messy. It was full of detours, breakdowns, and moments where I almost went back to what was familiar. But once I got a taste of this way of living — of creating instead of reacting — I couldn't unsee it. I couldn't unfeel it.

And now, that's my hope for you: that you won't just read these words and nod, but that you'll see the places where you've inherited survival thinking without realizing it — and decide, starting now, to be the one who ends it. Because the moment you choose creation over survival, you're not just saving yourself. You're rewriting the story for everyone who comes after you.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

By the time you reach this page, I hope you know this wasn't just a story about my grandmother. It was a story about me. About survival. About silence. About strength that looks noble but feels like drowning.

And maybe, in some way, it was a story about you too.

I didn't write this book to sound wise. I wrote it because I was tired of lying to myself. Tired of smiling through survival. Tired of mistaking pain for purpose. I had to tell the truth—even if it shook something loose. And it did.

What started with grief turned into something bigger: a mirror. Every page forced me to see myself clearer, to see them clearer, to see the legacy I had inherited and the one I still get to create. That's what writing this did for me. It gave me permission to choose differently. To stop the cycle. To finally stop bleeding for things that never healed me.

And now that it's done, I just want to say this:

If you've been carrying more than your share...

If you've been surviving for so long you forgot what thriving looks like...

If you've felt unseen, unchosen, or unworthy...

I see you. And you're not alone.

This book was my healing. I hope in some small way, it helps unlock yours too.

—Shannon Mack

**Now that you've read the story, I want you to see the faces behind it.**



Left to Right: Victor, Shirley, Beverley (Boo Boo), Grandma, Nadine, Patricia, Errol



Aunty Bev



Uncle Nuel



Cousin Pearl



**Clockwise: Grandma, Tamia, Marcus, Tanaya, Aidan, Alliyah**



**Brian**



**(Bottom Left to Top Clockwise): AJ, Kenisha, Taneika, Taheir, Me, Sharifa**



Left to Right: Ms. Inez, my mom (Patricia), Ms. Pat



Uncle Trevor + Aunty Shirley



TT



**This is just a part of the village she built.  
And I'm just one of the seeds she planted.  
May her legacy live through *all* of us.**

*Legacy never dies. It just takes new form.*

