

## President's Letter

One of the greatest privileges of my life has been serving as the 46th President of Black Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles, Incorporated ("BWL"). I am honored to have been given the opportunity to lead BWL and to join the ranks of the 45 amazing women who have previously led BWL. BWL is an important legacy of Black excellence in the city of Los Angeles and despite the challenges we faced as a result of the ongoing pandemic, this year we exceeded expectations in terms of fundraising and in our commitment to the community at large. I am extremely thankful for my 2020-2021 Board of Officers ("Board"), Committee Chairs and every individual who contributed to BWL and participated in our programming this year. The success of BWL depends on a team effort, and I was blessed to have a network of individuals willing to make sacrifices and put in the work necessary to ensure that BWL's legacy continues.

As the 2019-2020 BWL year came to end, it became apparent that the pandemic was not subsiding, but was instead taking a turn for the worse, with Los Angeles becoming one of the hot spots of the country. Despite this reality, plans needed to be made for BWL's annual summer retreat and installation of officers, not to mention all of the other traditional events and services that BWL is known for providing. Without missing a beat, we got to work!

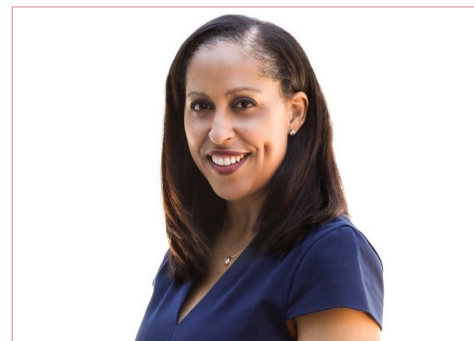
### Highlight – 2020 BWL Virtual Annual Retreat

We started the transition with a reinvented 2020 BWL Annual Retreat (the "Retreat"). For this event, we created a virtual trip to Napa Valley, which was our intended destination prior to the pandemic. In advance of the Retreat, each registrant received a specially curated gift box that

included BWL swag and special treats. The Retreat started with a virtual welcome reception/party on Friday evening. We relaxed as DJ DeVoux, DJ Teddy and MC Rock played music and entertained us with their comedic timing. Thank you to Michelle Johnson (MJ) at Let's Play Ultimate Events for helping us plan the perfect start to our Retreat weekend.

On Saturday we moved on to the business of BWL and left feeling invigorated and ready to get to work. I especially want to thank our generous sponsors for supporting this first ever virtual Retreat: Fly Mommy Chronicles, Dansby Law Group, Benefield Law Corporation, Equal Rights Law Group, and Demetria Graves.

Finally, I want to say a special thank you to the 2020 BWL Annual Retreat Committee.



**Michelle Kazadi, Esq.**  
2020-2021 President

### Highlight – 2020 BWL Virtual Installation Ceremony

The next event we had to tackle was the BWL Annual Installation and Awards Dinner. Clearly, we would not be able to have a live event and the question quickly became how we were going to reimagine the installation on a virtual platform. This year, we decided to "host" a fully recorded 2020 BWL Virtual Installation Ceremony (the "Installation") and not select any honorees, because we didn't want them to lose out on the in-person experience of receiving an award.

Thank you to Brand Quality Media for making our vision come to life better than we could have ever imagined. The Installation turned out beautifully and will inevitably serve as a reminder of how BWL always finds a way to shine, even when the only thing certain is uncertainty.

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## President's Message

Continued.

Thank you to Donald Hayes for his special arrangement and performance of Lift Every Voice and Sing, featuring vocalist Anthony Saunders.

Thank you to Supervisor Holly Mitchell, Hon. Kevin Brazile, Hon. Eric Taylor, Hon. Brenda Penny, Hon. Patricia J. Titus, Capri Maddox, Chambord Benton-Hayes, Alma Graham, Nyanza Shaw, Tamara Benefield-Faulk, Past President Nicole Hancock Husband, Past President Camille Townsend Granville, Past President Rosezetta Upshaw, Past President Hon. Tara C. Doss, and Past President Syna Dennis for their participation in the Installation and for their words of encouragement as we embarked on the 2020-2021 Board year.

Thank you to Hon. Yvette D. Roland for swearing in the Board, and to Hon. Patricia J. Titus for swearing me in as President.

Thank you to our sponsors Kirkland & Ellis LLP, Sanders Roberts LLP, City National Bank, Bergman Dacey Goldsmith, Reed Smith LLC, Jackson Lewis LLC, Gary C. Eto, Esq., Waltzer Melcher LLP, Seyfarth Shaw LLP, Munger Tolles & Olson LLP, Usher Law Group, Latham & Watkins LLP, Sanchez & Amador LLP, Judge Mablean, Hon. Marguerite Downing, Syna Dennis, Esq., The Parks Family Foundation, Jackson Lewis Foundation, Hon. Yvette Roland and Hon. Tara C. Doss.

Thank you to the 2020 BWL Installation Committee for volunteering their time and support through the production process.

Last, but certainly not least, thank you to BWL Vice President Jasmine Horton for the stellar job she did hosting the Installation. She certainly has a career in front of the camera if this lawyer thing doesn't work out!

If you missed the Installation on the livestream date, you can still find it on our YouTube channel, Facebook page and website.

### Highlight – 2020-2021 Board in Review

My theme for this Board year was, Honoring our Legacy of Resilience, Pride and Community Engagement. I believe that the Board exemplified all three elements of our theme this year with purpose and grace. I could not be prouder of the work that we have done and will continue to do this Board year.

### Resilience

Our ability to recover quickly from adverse situations was evident in BWL's ability to

pivot into the virtual space without missing a beat, and in fact, leading the path with innovative ways to present virtual programs. Notwithstanding the raging pandemic, it was important to me that BWL continued the great work we do despite all of the challenges we faced this past year. In true BWL form, we continued to provide intriguing monthly meetings and seminars, such as:

- Domestic Violence and the Impact on the Entire Family with Hon. Patricia J. Titus; Brenda C. Robinson, Esq., Ashley D. Williams, Esq., and Dennis Brown;
- Overcoming and Eliminating Bias with Professor Isabel Gunning, Justice Martin Jenkins and Justice Leondra Kruger;
- Bar Prep Seminar in conjunction with the John M. Langston Bar Association;
- Raising the Bar: Interviewing Skills Workshop with Nicole Hancock Husband and Traci Blackburn;
- History Made: Interview with Assistant Presiding Judge Samantha Jessner in conjunction with the Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles;
- COVID-19 Vaccine Awareness Series in conjunction with Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., Theta Mu Omega, and other community organizations; and
- 59th Annual Presidential Inauguration Watch Party, to celebrate the historic occasion of the inauguration of Vice President Kamala Harris, who is also a Lifetime Member of the Black Women Lawyers Association of Northern California.

The BWL Annual Thanksgiving Eve Cocktail Sip (the "Cocktail Sip"), was another signature BWL event we had to reinvent as a result of the ongoing pandemic. We called on our friends at Let's Play Ultimate Events and decided to present the event as a virtual mansion party, with seven DJs in five breakout rooms, a live band headed by Corbin Jones, a comedian, multiple prizes and special guest, Hill Harper. It was a great party and a great way to spend time with each other albeit virtually.

Thank you to our Cocktail Sip co-chairs, Pamela Daves and Sarah Clifton, the Cocktail Sip Committee members, and all of our 2020 Cocktail Sips Sponsors for helping to make the event a reality: Jones Law Firm, Marinship Development Interest, LLC, Patricia Savage, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, LLP, Trucker Huss, APC, Hotel Indigo Los Angeles, Lynette M. Jones, Esq., Pam Lumpkin Real Estate, Ackerman LLP, Adams, Esq., Warren E. Anderson, Arts Boheme, The Bella Network, Law Offices of Wanda Y. Belle, Law Offices of Michael J. Curls, DAVOH Entertainment, Inc., Equity Legal Group, P.C., Jennifer Fisher, Esq.,

Diane Spencer-Shaw, Esq., Ina Coleman, Grignon Law Firm, Harriett Buhai Center for Family Law, Friends and Family of Heather Horn, Esq., Inszone Insurance Services, Lisa McLean, Esq., and Andrea G. Van Leesten, Attorney at Law.

If you missed the Cocktail Sip, you can find highlights on our YouTube channel and our website.

### Pride

This year, we focused on honoring BWL's history and founders. BWL has a distinguished history to be proud of and we wanted to make sure that we continued to educate both the new and more seasoned members about our founding in order to continue to foster the appreciation and understanding of what makes our organization so special. We hosted a Toast to BWL at our March general meeting where founding convener, Shirley Henderson, shared stories about the beginning days of the organization. Cynthia Cannady also shared stories about co-founder Hon. Vaino Spencer.

We owe so much to BWL's visionary co-founder, Hon. Vaino Spencer, that we have created an endowment at her alma mater, Southwestern Law School, to provide scholarships and support to African American students interested in careers in the judiciary. To find out more about this endowment please visit BWL's website.

### Community Engagement

This year, we made it our mission to be a strong presence in the community given the historic level of need as a result of the ongoing pandemic. We partnered with organizations like Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and various other community groups to educate the community about the candidates and initiatives on the ballot for the 2020 November election cycle, as well as how to organize and participate in community engagement. Thank you to all of our partner organizations for joining us in the fight for social justice and equity.

To further our mission of promoting charitable, educational and community-based services, this year, we also gave directly to community organizations. We were fortunate to be in a position to give to the following organizations over the course of the year:

- School on Wheels – An organization that provides free tutoring and mentoring to children from K-12th grade living in

shelters, motels, vehicles, group foster homes, and the streets of Southern California.

- SRO Housing Corporation – An organization dedicated to building a vibrant community for homeless and low-income individuals. They pursue their mission of community revitalization by providing clean, safe and affordable housing; managing public spaces; and administering needed supportive services.

- My Friends House, Inc. – An organization that works to end hunger and promote healthy living. They serve the homeless, seniors, women and children, veterans, unemployed, underemployed, the most needy and vulnerable in our community.

- Power Girl Ministries – An organization that seeks to encourage, inspire, and validate young urban women to help them make wise and healthy choices in their lives.

- Kids Managing Conflict – An organization that teaches students conflict management skills to enrich their lives into adulthood.

- Drew Child Development Corporation – An organization whose mission is to prepare the children of Watts-Willowbrook, Compton and South Los Angeles to succeed and thereby strengthen our community's future.

- Making Choices Mentoring Program – An organization that mentors girls in 7th through 12th grade in Los Angeles, Hawthorne, Compton and Long Beach. The organization mentors in the areas of leadership, education, self-confidence, integrity and community service.

- Diamond in the Raw Foundation – An organization whose mission is devoted to empowering and transforming the lives of foster care at-risk teen girls between the ages of 12-18 through S.T.E.A.M. education.

- Summaeverything Community Center, Inc. – An organization that provides free organic produce box donations for Watts and South Central Los Angeles. This is a wonderful nonprofit organization that has been providing food for Watts and South Central the entire pandemic.

In addition to BWL's direct donations to the above organizations, we also provided our annual Thanksgiving donation of food and gift cards to Prototypes, an organization that rebuilds the lives of women, children and communities impacted by substance use, mental illness and domestic violence.

Further, in lieu of throwing the BWL Annual Holiday Party this year, we instead spent the allocated funds in our budget to purchase toys for children in need. We donated toys to Prototypes and Shelter Care, an organization located at Edmund D. Edelman Children's Court that supports unaccompanied children awaiting their hearings in dependency court.

We also participated in the Cozy Coats Drive with the Crenshaw Family YMCA and other community organizations. Here, BWL raised over \$700 and purchased over forty coats for the event. Additionally, BWL, along with our sister bar organizations in Los Angeles, Woman Lawyers Association of Los Angeles, Latina Lawyers Bar Association, and Asian Pacific American Women Lawyers Alliance, donated winter gear, gloves, scarves and beanies to the Los Angeles Mission.

I'm excited to say that one of BWL's most important accomplishments this year was the roll-out of our new pro bono initiative, Learn, Help, Do! This project, the brainchild of BWL's Pro Bono Committee co-Chairs Betty Norwind and Heather Horn, allowed BWL to partner with the following three organizations, whose missions are dedicated to improving the lives of vulnerable persons of color:

- Alliance for Children's Rights – An organization that aids youth and families in the foster care and related systems;
- Housing Rights Center – An organization that addresses discrimination and other barriers to fair housing rights; and
- Jenese Center – An organization that helps domestic violence victims prepare for their domestic violence restraining order hearing.

I am beyond proud of my Board for helping BWL accomplish so much this year. I am grateful to everyone who stepped up and sacrificed their time, talents and treasure to ensure the continued success of our beloved organization. Thank you for trusting me and for allowing me the privilege and honor to lead BWL through the ongoing global pandemic.

I will always cherish this experience!



## Letter From the Editor

Katuri Kaye, Esq.

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Times Magazine recently described the ongoing 2020-2021 pandemic as an event that has not only touched, but remade, every corner of society. No matter where you were situated in the world, no one was immune from this evolving reality, including the Black Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles, Incorporated ("BWL"). As such, we wanted to provide you with a 2021 Spring Newsletter that not only recognizes the realities of our "new normal," but also demonstrates that you are not alone. From pandemic reflections to health and wellness suggestions to financial forums, this year's Newsletter contributions provide a variety of tools, tips and insights for our BWL community to stay afloat and encouraged.

This is in addition to our more traditional contributions regarding events that shaped the past year, social commentary and our legal spotlights (this year on environmental, social and governance investment issues). Additionally, as a special treat, this year's Newsletter includes a Writer's Corner to highlight a few of our Black women advocates turned authors during the pandemic. For a great summation of our year, see Honoring our Legacy of Resilience, Pride and Community Engagement, by 2020-2021 BWL President Michelle Kazadi.

Even in these unprecedented times, BWL continues to provide guidance and professional support to its members, as well as charitable, educational and community-based services. This is due, in large part, to the firm foundation that the small group of Los Angeles based African-American judges and lawyers established when they founded BWL in 1975, and the African-American women in leadership that have continuously served this organization over the past 46 years.

We hope that by reading this Newsletter, you not only learn more about BWL's efforts and accomplishments, but that you also feel inspired to support our mission and share in our vision. Help BWL continue to make a difference and change our society for the better.



CURRENT EVENTS

# Celebrating the Life and Legacy of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Ruby LeMorin

UCLA Law c/o 2021

@rubylemorin (on Twitter and Instagram)

The death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, on September 18, 2020, dealt a major blow to people across the country. Often referred to as the “Notorious RBG,” Justice Ginsburg was widely loved and respected for the methods by which she shaped the law to treat women and men equally. Her tireless work and clever strategies developed to protect and expand women’s constitutional rights was inspirational, especially for many women in the legal profession. On top of facing the loss of such a regarded public figure, the news of Justice Ginsburg’s passing left many with serious concerns about the future composition of the United States Supreme Court and the impact that her absence from the Supreme Court would have on American life. Her thoughtful and insightful opinions will certainly be missed in future Supreme Court proceedings.

As way of background, Justice Ginsburg established her reputation as an ardent supporter of women’s and civil rights early on in her career. During her time as a professor at Rutgers Law School, Justice Ginsburg supported the creation of the Minority Student Program to bring more diversity to the school and the New Jersey state bar. She went on to direct the Women’s Rights Project of the American Civil Liberties Union. In that role, Ginsburg authored a brief in *Reed v. Reed* that convinced the Supreme Court to rule, for the first time, that a law was invalid because it discriminated against women in violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. A few years later in *Craig v. Boren*, Ginsburg

wrote a brief that successfully argued for the Supreme Court’s development and application of a new, heightened standard of judicial review – intermediate scrutiny – in its analysis of a law that discriminated against women on the basis of sex. More recently, Justice Ginsburg’s dissent in *Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.* inspired Congress’s creation of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act in 2009. Of course, these are simply a few of the many ways in which Justice Ginsburg passionately fought for the recognition of women’s rights.

When Jewish people die, we often say “may their memory be for a blessing.” Here, these words mean we are blessed with the memory of Justice Ginsburg’s life and work,

which continue to serve as inspiration to fight for equal rights for all people. They are a reminder for us to pick up the baton that Justice Ginsburg carried for so long, and to continue fighting to build a legal system which regards people of all identities as equals.

My wish is for Justice Ginsburg’s legacy to inspire more people, especially women in the law, to maintain hope for a brighter future and to make a greater effort to change the injustices they see in the world. In that work, Justice Ginsburg’s spirit will continue to live on. Cheers to the Notorious RBG!



LEGAL CORNER

# ESG Now Top of Mind for Fund Managers

Kendall J. Bass, Esq.

Proskauer Rose LLP

Increasingly, investors are focusing on environmental, social, and governance (“ESG”) concerns when determining how to invest their money. Only a relatively small amount of capital was aimed at investment opportunities with an ESG angle 10 years ago, whereas today, almost a third of public market capital is being invested in ESG-related strategies. This trend has started to occur in private markets as well, particularly having accelerated in 2020, when the world was focused on sustainability more so than ever before. A large part of this shift has been considered to be due to last year’s landmark events, including the pandemic, the death of George Floyd and the worldwide protests against institutional racism, as well as the wildfires in California and Australia which highlighted the issue of climate change.

In the investment fund world, this trend has resulted in an increased public consciousness and investor preference for investment strategies that focus on achieving long-term sustainability goals. Potential investors are paying attention to ESG when evaluating the general partners with whom they might invest. Private Equity International saw an 8% increase in 2020 from 2019 in the number of investors who confirmed the same. Further, 13% of investors polled by Private Equity International in 2020 confirmed they had rejected an investment opportunity due to the lack of diversity and inclusion at the general partner-level. In March 2020, 3 of the world’s largest and best-known institutional investors – California State Teachers’ Retirement System, Japan’s Government Pension Investment Fund, and Universities Superannuation Scheme Investment Management – issued a joint statement stressing the importance of long-term, sustainable growth and urged their investment partners and the companies in which they invest to integrate ESG factors into their decision-making processes. By July 6, 2020, the joint statement had gained an additional 12 signatories.

Regulators around the world have also become increasingly focused on ESG with respect to fund managers. In March, the European Union introduced the Sustainable Financial Disclosure Regulation (the “SFDR”) for asset managers. The SFDR is directed at making the European Union’s financial markets more sustainable and aims to provide a harmonized approach to investor disclosure concerning the ESG classification of products to avoid “greenwashing” of products. Similarly, the Monetary Authority of Singapore is in the process of incorporating ESG requirements into its fund regulation and Hong Kong

has proposed amendments to the Fund Manager Code of Conduct to accomplish the same. Even prior to being elected as the new President of the United States, late last year Joe Biden made it clear that ESG issues would be a focus for his administration. Since being inaugurated, Biden has pushed for businesses to meaningfully incorporate ESG into their agendas, and it appears that Biden’s presidency will continue to reveal an even greater focus on ESG investing in the United States. A formal ESG framework is not yet in place for fund managers in the United States, however, this may change in the wake of the Biden administration’s focus on these issues as well as the regulatory regimes we are seeing emerge globally.

Investor demands and regulatory requirements are not the only incentives for fund managers to incorporate ESG considerations into their investment strategies. Companies that focus on ESG can be more resilient in the long-term than their counterparts that are solely focused on their bottom lines. Better ESG performance can help improve both current employee satisfaction as well as a company’s ability to attract new talent. Governing authorities may be more likely to trust companies with strong ESG propositions, potentially resulting in easier entry to new markets and less regulatory and legal interventions. Consumers also made it clear last year that they will not hesitate to call out, or pull financial support from, a company that fails to properly address ESG concerns. Thus, investing in companies that are ESG-minded is increasingly being viewed as a smart choice for fund managers even purely from an economic perspective.

Given the changes observed and the increased focus on ESG issues in 2020, it is no surprise that ESG is now top of mind for many fund managers when determining their funds’ investment portfolios. In 2021 and the years that follow, this inability to ignore ESG will likely become the norm across broader industries, as the world takes lessons from the events of last year.

<sup>1</sup>Sustainability Shift”, Private Equity International (November 1, 2020)  
<sup>2</sup>“GPs’ ESG approaches go under the microscope”, LP Perspectives 2021, Private Equity International (November 30, 2020)  
<sup>3</sup>“GPs’ ESG approaches go under the microscope”, LP Perspectives 2021, Private Equity International (November 30, 2020)  
<sup>4</sup>“Joint statement on the importance of long-term, sustainable growth”, CalSTRS (March 2, 2020)  
<sup>5</sup>Id.  
<sup>6</sup>Kirsten Lapham, John Verwey, and Amar Unadkat, “Breaking Down the New EU ESG Disclosure Regulation: One Month to Go”, Proskauer Rose LLP (February 10, 2021)  
<sup>7</sup>“European ESG Disclosure Requirements for Asset Managers”, Proskauer Rose LLP (September 18, 2020)  
<sup>8</sup>Serge Kranczenblum, “Is ESG becoming the new normal around the world?”, Private Equity News (February 10, 2021)  
<sup>9</sup>Maria Mendiluce, “What Biden’s Sustainability Agenda Means for Business”, Harvard Business Journal (March 3, 2021)  
<sup>10</sup>Robert Bailey, Jaclyn Yeo, Lingjun Jiang and Angela Ferguson, “ESG as a Workforce Strategy”, MarshMcLennan  
<sup>11</sup>Witold Henisz, Tim Koller, and Robin Nuttall, “Five ways that ESG creates value”, McKinsey Quarterly (November 2019)  
<sup>12</sup>Margaret Childe, “Why ESG Portfolios have Proven to be More Resilient in the Context of COVID-19”, Responsible Investing (November 5, 2020)



FINANCIAL FORUM

# Financial Resiliency: Changes You Can Make to Take Back Your Power Financially

Jala Eaton, Esq.  
CTFA

Let me start by saying that the majority of my life, I ignored my money. I spent it. I hid it from myself. I obtained thousands of dollars in student loans for two degrees during a recession, expecting the best. However, I ended up in a field I never expected to work in. I worked as a trust officer protecting money left in trust funds. Seeing millions of dollars daily became a regular occurrence for me. It wasn't until I saw \$100,000,000 in one trust that my relationship with money changed forever. Maybe the shift occurred because I knew the money belonged to a person who still went into his local branch to do his banking. It made me want to build my own wealth and empower other Black women to do the same. If he could do it, why couldn't we? I did my research and I learned that there are three basic keys to obtaining and protecting wealth, which I want to share with you.

### 1. Financial Planning and Financial Literacy:

Even with millions in the bank, trust beneficiaries are expected to submit budgets and know their assets and liabilities. They must have a plan. Having a plan brings confidence. Therefore, we need to be financially confident. We have to know that we can handle any financial situation that comes our way. We can't afford to live feeling guilty and condemned by past mistakes. Instead, we need to act with the confidence that will enable us to make the right decisions for our lives. So, how do you build financial confidence? Start by taking a self-inventory to discover your money strengths and weaknesses. Forgive yourself and take time to learn how to fix any issues you see. If this step is difficult you can always ask for help.

### 2. Investing:

I have never seen a trust that didn't have marketable securities and other investments. Additionally, trusts that included a business were usually the larger trusts. Investing is one way to ensure that your money grows. When I went through the financial confidence inventory described above, I realized I needed to understand investing. I had an employer-sponsored retirement account that had a -15% return. I was losing money! I set out to learn the basics of investing. I read everything I could get my hands on, I asked questions, and I started having financial conversations. More importantly, I took action to implement what I was reading. I studied my investment options and created a retirement investment plan. My account quickly changed to a positive 9.45% return. In 2020 that return was 45%

(and I did not make any changes to the account). You have to be willing to learn what you are doing. No one cares about you and your success the way you do!

### 3. Estate Planning:

Generational wealth and trusts are not possible without an estate plan. Money may transfer to one generation, but rarely does money continue on to a second or third generation. Women have historically been left out of financial planning and estate planning, because it is a male-dominated industry, despite the fact that we often outlive our partners and women business owners account for more than 8.6 million businesses and control more than \$14 trillion in assets. We are capable of advocating for ourselves, but the majority of us shrink when we feel like we don't understand money/finance because it's "complex." When building your estate plan, consider who is capable of managing your money and where your money should go. If you believe the people you want to leave money to, can manage a lump sum make sure that is written in your estate plan. If you want your money to go to a minor, a pet, a friend, a charity, or you have a business to protect, then you should consider having a trust drafted as part of your plan. It is not enough to build wealth through saving and investing, we must also protect our wealth and control our legacies. Dying without an estate plan in place will turn your family's mourning period into a frenzy of fighting. Your family might not fight each other but your creditors and/or the Internal Revenue Service might come after your estate. Remember, estate planning is deeper than who gets



your money after you die. At some point, you will need help. An accident, old age, declining health, having a pet, or being out of the country could trigger the need for a proper estate plan while you are alive. If you have completed your estate planning, your plan will spring into action and your representative will be able to act on your behalf. If your goal during life is not to be taken advantage of, don't let it happen to you in death either. Update your estate-planning documents regularly!

The more work you do in these three areas the better off you will be. As an attorney and certified financial advisor, I have made it my mission to teach financial education and estate planning in hopes that if I teach someone, they will be self-sufficient, better prepared, and able to teach others what they have learned. Empowering a Black woman through financial education usually results in improved financial health and well-being for her entire family.

Jala Eaton, Esq., CTFA is an optimist, estate planning attorney, and certified financial advisor with a mission to help Black women build and protect their assets through learning to invest and creating an estate plan. The racial wealth gap is the problem and generational wealth is the goal and the solution. When not advising her clients or talking about money on Instagram (follow her @onmyownfinancial), she likes to attend the private dance parties her five-year-old daughter holds in their living room.



PANDEMIC REFLECTIONS

# Communication Plays A Key Role in the New Remote Work Environment

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Changing jobs, even in the best of times, can be a little scary. Although you may be excited about a new opportunity, there usually is a bit of fear of the unknown. Will this opportunity live up to my expectations? How will I get along with the partners? How will I fit in with my colleagues? Will I enjoy the work? Will I enjoy the work environment? Now, imagine changing jobs during the midst of a pandemic, where all interviews are conducted on-line, and you never step foot in the building where you will one day work until weeks after you begin. This became my reality.

In August 2020, an opportunity presented itself for me to interview for employment with another firm. Since this was during the period of the pandemic where cases were once again rising in California, my first introduction to my new firm was interviewing via Zoom (and again for my second round of interviews). Ultimately, I received the job offer and decided to accept, having not once stepped foot into my new office. This was the new reality.

What we sometimes forget is that interviewing is a two-way street – the employer interviews the candidate and the candidate interviews the employer. It is important for candidates to ask questions during the interview process to get a clear picture (to the extent possible) of the environment that they are walking into, especially in the new remote work environment. This is particularly important for junior attorneys, such as myself, who still work under some level of guidance from partners or more senior attorneys.

Based on my experience, I believe that at a minimum, the following important questions should be asked by candidates during a virtual interview process:

- How has the firm handled the transition from office to remote work?
- How are partners maintaining communication with associates?

- How is the communication with other associates and support staff?
- What does the firm do to ensure employees stay connected?

These questions, in part, may give a candidate a glimpse of the firm's culture, at least in terms of how the firm is maintaining engagement with attorneys and staff remotely. During my interview with our partners, I inquired about how the firm remained engaged with associates and what the onboarding and development process was considering the new remote work environment. The response that sold me was, "Well, actually, I find I have more time to engage with associates. Since I don't have to spend hours in a car driving to a mediation, with everything online, I'm able to have associates sit in on mediations. I'm able to give them more exposure than I would otherwise." I was also pleased with how responsive the partners were.

Excuse me while I put on my former human resources hat for a moment – Believe it or not, little things matter to keeping employees engaged, loyal, and happy. At my firm, the partners really focus on being responsive. While a lot of communication is done via e-mail, phone calls are also a norm, and we usually have some laughs on those calls. They have been learning about me, and I have been learning about them. As a result, it has allowed me to feel a sense of connection to my firm in this new remote work environment.

My message to firm partners and management attempting to navigate this new remote work environment is to not underestimate the importance of how you are engaging newly hired associates, law clerks and summer associates. I recently participated in interviews with law students and the number one question was how the firm stayed connected remotely. On the other side of the spectrum, I've also heard fellow lawyers complain about Zoom fatigue. Here, I recommend that partners and management are conscientious to not

overdo the time spent on video calls (i.e., excessive Zoom happy hours). Instead, plan deliberate and meaningful activities for new hires to connect with others. Finally, be conscientious of not getting too comfortable with always responding via e-mail, particularly in the beginning of an employee's relationship with the firm. Scheduling phone calls or video calls with new employees is a good way to check in and gauge how they are doing, while also providing them with an opportunity to ask questions, resulting in both parties getting to know each other.

Bottom line, the remote work environment is the new reality for now (and likely for the immediate future), and a firm's communication channel is of utmost importance in this new reality. Review it, tweak it, and revisit it again and again.





PANDEMIC REFLECTIONS

# Feeling Anxious about Returning to the Office? Here are a Few Tips!

Jacquelyn Lewis, Esq.  
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**If you're feeling anxious about society reopening and returning to the office, you're not alone. Attorneys across the globe experienced an unprecedented amount of autonomy during the pandemic, and many are not looking forward to giving up their working-from-home ("WFH") lifestyle.**

Many attorneys received the same speech after taking the bar exam – "take full advantage of your post-bar trip, because it is the last real vacation you will ever take." However, the WFH model law firms were required to adopt as a result of the pandemic provided attorneys with an opportunity to travel and stay away for extended periods of time that was never even thought of as an option in our profession.

In addition to the ability to travel and spend more time with our families and friends, the WFH model also eliminated the unnecessary stressors that came with commuting to and from work, and generally cut back on the daily interruptions that came with working in the office.

If this sounds like you and you aren't too thrilled about returning to the office, I've provided the following four tips to help you manage your stress and set you up for as smooth of a transition as possible.

**1. Be mindful of your mental and emotional state:** As we prepare to ease back into the office, it's important to be conscious of our emotional and mental state and accept that it's okay to have qualms about your return. Resist the urge to suppress your emotions and acknowledge that not wanting to give up your WFH lifestyle is legitimate and more common than you think. Implementing a daily practice of meditation to manage your anxiety is a great place to start and there are a plethora of free apps available to you at no cost. Additionally, many law firms have adopted wellness programs that provide access to free mental-health benefits and reimbursement for a certain amount of out-of-pocket costs. It's ok to not be ok!

**2. Take preventative measures to prevent stress from peaking:** Stress management is a skill that most attorneys have had to practice since beginning law school. Stress internalizes in the body and manifests in headaches, the development of temporomandibular joint and muscle or "TMJ" disorders, panic attacks and body aches, among other symptoms we may experience. Paying attention to your stress signals will allow you to intervene as soon as possible. Conduct a body scan regularly and practice breathing techniques and mindfulness exercises to relax your body and calm your mind. Be in tune with your inner self!

**3. Don't be shy about setting boundaries to manage your space:** Don't let the anxieties of others become your own. Working from home has given us all the liberty to be ourselves throughout the workday without worrying about filtering to accommodate others. The return to the office may trigger social anxiety and create a need to emotionally dump on others, consciously or subconsciously. Don't be afraid to create boundaries and shift the conversation as necessary to protect your mental state and to manage the energy around you. Protect your space!

**4. Continue to prioritize your self-care routines:** A huge concern employees have expressed about returning to their offices is the inability to maintain the self-care routines they've established over the past year. Working from home not only freed up more time to take care of ourselves by working out and cooking more, it also gave us more time to self-reflect and make the necessary lifestyle adjustments to be our best selves. Continue to make these self-care routines a top priority to minimize the disruption in your mental and physical well-being. Remember, self-care is a right not a luxury!

Overall, lifestyle changes typically create emotional discomfort. I encourage you to take the inevitable head on and utilize the above tips to prioritize yourself as you adjust to your return to the office.



PANDEMIC REFLECTIONS

# COVID-19, School Closures, Distance Learning: Challenges Throughout the Pandemic

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**March 19, 2020, dramatically changed schools throughout the state of California in the blink of an eye. As part of the "Stay at Home" and "Safer at Home" orders issued at both the state and the local levels, all schools were forced to close. This resulted in school districts immediately having to get into action and create plans for how they would educate students outside of the physical classroom. With my daughters, ages 4 and 2, at my hip, due to daycare being shut down as well, I immediately got to work trying to help navigate the KIPP SoCal Public Schools (where I am the registered in-house counsel), during this unprecedented time.**

Distance learning is something that most brick-and-mortar schools had little or no experience administering pre-pandemic. However, our schools immediately rolled up their sleeves and got to action on numerous tasks to assist our students, including preparing paper packets of classwork, distributing thousands of Chromebooks and hotspots to access Google Classroom and Zoom to attend class virtually, and advancing the food distribution process to ensure needed meal and snack assistance would not be interrupted.

I immediately found myself trying to find answers to legal issues that emerged due to our school closures, from cybersecurity to protect our students, teachers, and staff in the virtual environment to a variety of human resources issues, such as leave and accommodations. I received a large volume of calls regarding almost every possible issue, where I was expected to have an answer right on the spot (because typically I do). However, I must admit that some of the legal issues that arose had me stumped. And when I reached out to our outside counsel for advice on the more difficult issues, I would often hear, "Good luck. We do not have a specific answer for you due to these unprecedented circumstances."

Despite the challenges, our schools were able to increase enrollment, connect with our students, offer assessments and services to our special education students, and serve thousands of meals to students. By far, the biggest achievements came from our teachers' efforts to make distance learning work by keeping it creative and engaging for students, despite there being no true replacement for in-person learning. Also, our parents were resilient in their efforts to assist their students while they held full-time jobs.

At the height of this madness, Los Angeles County became the epicenter of the pandemic. Simultaneously, the pressure began to mount to reopen schools, which resulted in Governor Gavin Newsom releasing the "Safe Schools for All Plan" to get children back to school. However, with the pandemic reaching catastrophic levels in Los Angeles County, and Black and Latinx communities that we served in South and East LA, Compton and San Diego being disproportionately impacted, our teachers, students, and families were among the most apprehensive about returning to school. Even with the availability of vaccines, especially with teachers being prioritized, this apprehension has not completely resolved,

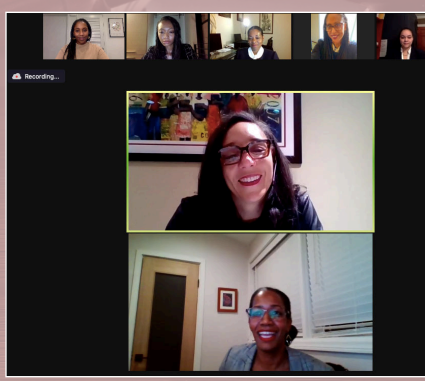
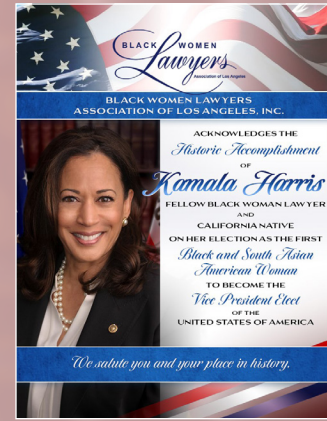
because of the large distrust for vaccines and the federal government in Black and Latinx communities due to incidents, such as the Tuskegee study, and the speed of development and approval of these vaccines.

Nonetheless, as I write this article, our schools announced a phased in-person return to campus schedule and by the time you read this article, we would have returned to hybrid in-person learning (with an option for children to remain in 100% distance learning). Despite the current circumstances, our schools and I have continuously prioritized the needs of our students, parents, teachers, and staff, and have navigated our schools' safe re-openings with an extreme level of caution, sensitivity and care, including vaccine availability, refining our health and safety operating procedures, and working through new learning protocols.

In-person learning is essential for all our students' education, mental health, and social well-being, and this past year has been a challenge. But we have learned so much and will continue to educate ourselves to be the best for our schools, our students, our parents and our communities.



# 2020-2021 At A Glance





HEALTH & WELLNESS

## Better Rest When You Are Feeling Restless

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Have you ever finally finished your day after long hours of stressful work and found it very difficult to fall asleep? Do you often feel like your body is ready to rest, but your mind is still going a million miles a minute? Perhaps, you finally manage to close your eyes and fall asleep, but you toss and turn all night and feel anxious upon waking? I have certainly been there on more occasions than I could count, but not anymore. Below are three tips that helped me – a Black, queer, femme, licensed clinical social worker, and pastor – experience more restful sleep that I want to share with you.

### 1. Before bed, write down (on paper/journal/notebook) what's on your mind.

What Black women and femmes experience on a day-to-day basis can often feel indescribable. However, stream of consciousness writing helps us to let it all out! The goal is not necessarily to understand in that very moment exactly what is bothering you, but to release your mind from holding on to too much. Writing down your thoughts before bed not only helps in achieving clarity and peace of mind, it can also help improve your quality of rest and sleep if you add it to your nightly routine. So, get your pen and paper and get to writing!

**2. Aromatherapy Candles and Essential Oils.** Another key to restful sleep is inhaling a smell that specifically make you feel good. Are there any scents you really love that make you feel calm, warm, comfortable and restful? It is important to note that this can feel different for different people. Once you have identified your scent(s), purchase some aromatherapy candles and/or essential oils with that scent(s) and have it next to your bed. With essential oils, you can use a diffuser or put it directly on your body. I love to combine scents and some of my favorite combinations for relaxations and sleep are the following: aloe & bergamot, lavender & vanilla, and cedar & rose. Don't be afraid to experiment.

**3. Plants in your bedroom.** Your sleeping environment is vital to your quality of sleep and rest. There are specific plants that can help you have more restful sleep by improving your environment. Snake plants are amazing for sleep, because they are natural air purifiers that emit oxygen at night and remove harmful chemicals. Pathos plants are also wonderful to have in your room near your bed, as they too are natural air purifiers. Go green!

Struggling with sleep is something many Black women and femmes experience, but don't feel like you have to manage it by yourself. You are not the only one suffering, and there is relief available when we bring our collective issues to the surface. I hope that you utilize my three tips as you embark on your better sleep journey.

The Nap Ministry says it best, "A Black woman in a rested state is a radical act" so let's take seriously our liberation to rest and sleep well!



HEALTH & WELLNESS

## Fall/Winter 2021 Preview Homme Coming

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Some of my favorite Black-owned or Black-helmed womenswear designers took their cues from menswear for their Fall/Winter 2021 collections, trading the soft, easy pieces that got us through the hard times in 2020 for a future that looks less fluid and feels more structured.

Hope For Flowers by Tracey Reese eases us into the trend by experimenting with softer tailoring on menswear silhouettes. Laquan Smith's eponymous label plays with contrast by pairing oversized, fluid pieces with more constructed ones. Other labels were inspired by more traditional tailoring like Sergio Hudson, Wales Bonner and Kevan Hall. A few played with new silhouettes like playful shoulder shapes and detailing at Aliette and sharp, oversized proportions at Sukeina. Thebe Magugu gave retro feels and Theophilio played with texture.

As you venture back to the office, don't be afraid to play with these bold and creative fashion inspirations. You deserve it!

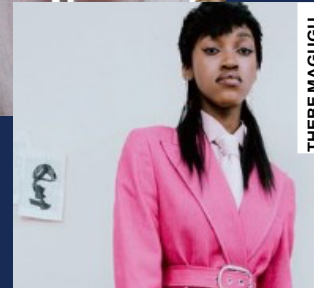
Khiaecia Key, Founder and Chief Curator of Love ABE, a platform that helps people discover Black owned luxury brands from around the world



HOPE FOR FLOWERS



LAQUAN SMITH



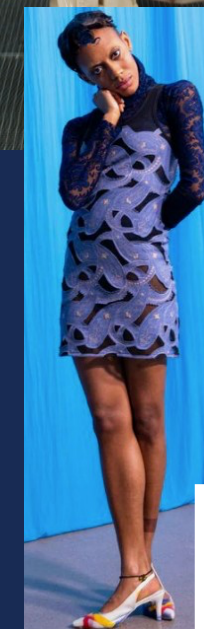
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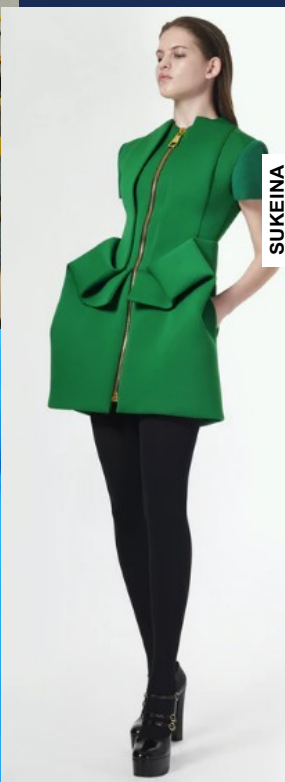
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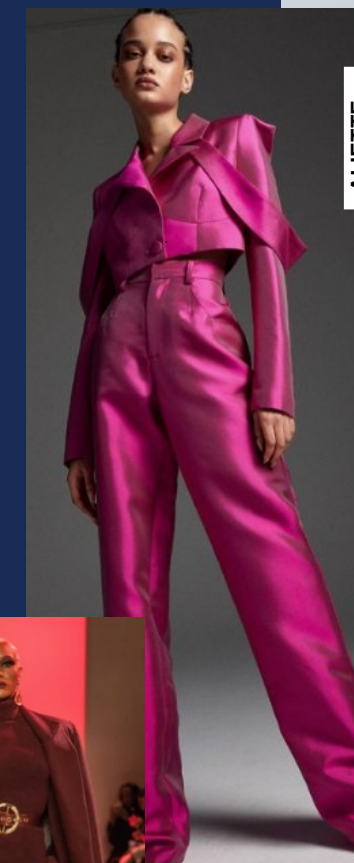
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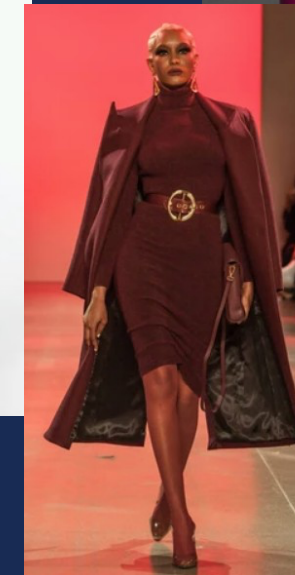
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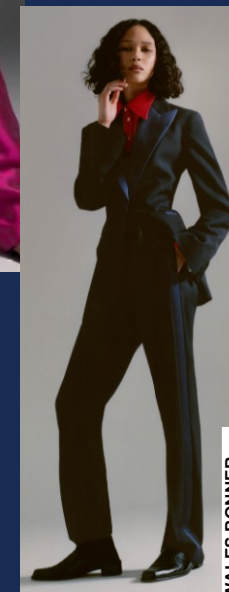
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HEALTH & WELLNESS

## Even “Black Girl Magic” Needs a Little Extra Magic Sometimes!

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**No one should ever have to design a “Missing Person” flyer for a loved one. And yet, in July 2020, that is exactly what I found myself doing one evening. Finding a loved one that has gone missing is, in an understated characterization, a challenge—and the challenge is exacerbated if the individual has a mental illness. It can be all too easy to cease caring for oneself when the wellbeing of a loved one is at stake.**

Historically, I have thrown self-care out of the window whenever my loved one started to experience severe symptoms of her illness. However, my outlook this past July was completely different. From the day I received news of her disappearance, to the day she was found and began treatment, I faced numerous moments when I had to consciously choose whether or not to care for myself. Nearly every time, I chose self-care. I want to share my thoughts and actions before and during this moment of crisis, for any of my fellow Black women lawyers who find themselves in a similar situation. Here are two tools that helped me maintain my “magic.”

### 1. The Importance of Therapy:

Shortly before the pandemic, I started participating in regular therapy sessions. At the time, things in my life felt relatively balanced, but I knew I needed to develop a game plan for future crises. For me, it was critical to find a therapist with whom I felt totally comfortable. My therapist fit all of my criteria, down to her therapy techniques—she practices Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). I enjoy the idea of “homework” in therapy, and having small tasks to work on between each session, so CBT appealed to me.

The search for a therapist can be daunting, but taking steps to find the right person for you is essential. I lean on my therapist during the moments when I need extra support, and our work together has helped me develop coping skills and strengthen relationships.

### 2. Daily Self-Care is Key:

I highly recommend engaging in daily self-care. I found motivation to start a daily practice after viewing the Corporate Minority Counsel Program webinar “Juggling in a Crisis: Don’t Drop the Self-Care Ball,” featuring our very own Black woman lawyer Nicole Hancock Husband.

Nicole’s webinar revolutionized my thinking: self-care can just be a few minutes each day, and can be any activity so long as it is something I choose and makes me feel good. At the beginning of each day, or the night before, I plan a self-care activity I will do for the day. It is so fulfilling to know that I have gone from taking care of myself sporadically, to making a commitment to myself every day. This practice was critical during my moments of anxiety and fear this past summer—I emerged from the situation without feeling totally broken down. Self-care reinforced my strength and resilience!

Oftentimes, we as Black women wonder where to start on our self-care journey, so I wanted to provide a short glimpse into what worked for me. I hope this article inspires you to invest in your mental health. Whether you are considering therapy and self-care, or have a well-established self-care and therapy regimen, we all can do more to take care of ourselves. Try as we might, we cannot pour from an empty cup. There is much we cannot control, but taking the steps to care for ourselves empowers us to be better sisters, daughters, mothers, wives, friends, and colleagues. Caring for ourselves is the difference between surviving and thriving, and is vital to preserving our magic.



SOCIAL COMMENTARY

## The Colder Ice Rhetoric In 2021

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**Recently, the leader and founder of the group the Not Fucking Around Coalition (the “NFAC”), John Fitzgerald Johnson aka “Grand Master Jay”, was arrested on state and federal charges alleging that he pointed a rifle at law enforcement officers at a September 2020 gathering in Kentucky. For those unfamiliar with the group, the NFAC was reportedly organized to foster self-sufficiency for Black Americans and to encourage Black Americans to exercise their Second Amendment rights. Grand Master Jay has held himself out as a champion of Black nationalism and Black autonomy. When charged with these offenses, however, he apparently selected a non-Black attorney to represent him, which prompted some to question his decision and in turn, prompted him to respond via a YouTube video.**

Grand Master Jay’s choice in representation, in and of itself, is not the issue. There are competent attorneys who can effectively represent Grand Master Jay, and others, regardless of race. The issue arose when Grand Master Jay took to YouTube to essentially throw Black attorneys (particularly those in the state of Kentucky) under the bus. He easily could have avoided the conflict by simply stating that he chose an attorney who came highly recommended or that he hired an attorney who he knew and/or felt comfortable with. Additionally, he could have remained silent about his decision. Instead, he went into a tirade about hiring a non-Black attorney, because he only wanted, “the best of the best [attorney] that money could buy” and only the “best” could represent him in this situation.

Unfortunately, this mentality is not an anomaly – I have all too often heard people who look like me brag about only hiring White or Jewish attorneys. I have even had Black clients ask for referrals to non-Black attorneys. Then, once at a networking group for Black-owned businesses, a Black person refused to take my business card saying in response,

“I only hire Jewish lawyers.” (Mind you, this individual supposedly owned a Black Vodka company!)

This article is in no way suggesting that every Black person should always hire a Black attorney. I believe people should always hire attorneys they are most comfortable with, who have a proven track record and who are experienced in the area in which they need assistance. However, when one is holding themselves out as a “champion” of Black empowerment and Black progress, such as Grand Master Jay, I do contend that at the very minimum, they should not disparage Black attorneys by suggesting that only non-Black attorneys are “the best” in the profession.

How do we progress as a society if this is the mentality that we choose to adopt about the legal professionals in our community? Why is there such disdain from some Black people about Black attorneys? Where does this notion come from that Black attorneys are somehow incompetent to handle “tough” cases, as if we did not go to the same law schools and

pass the same bar exams as our non-Black colleagues? How do we reach economic empowerment if we shun out Black lawyers and refuse to support them? How do we reach Black unity and Black autonomy if our proclaimed “pro-Black leaders” choose to foster this “White man’s ice is colder” rhetoric in 2021? I don’t profess to have all the answers. However, I do believe it is time for our community to have these difficult discussions and take steps towards true healing and change.

If you’re interested, here’s the link to Grand Master Jay’s video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfgYpM2yPyo>







AUTHOR'S CORNER

# STEMing From Blackness: A Children's Book Aimed at Encouraging Black Kids to Pursue STEM Careers

Sarah Higgins, Esq.

IG: @sehiggins5

About two years after graduating with a B.S. in Engineering, I drafted a manuscript for a children's book. At the time, I was reflecting on my undergraduate career. What I remembered was the disillusionment I felt in seeing only a few Black faces in my engineering classes. Representation and inclusion matters. So, I wrote *STEMing From Blackness* to inspire Black children to pursue careers in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM).

The book features a fictional young Black girl, Lisa, who finds herself struggling to complete her math homework. Because none of the scientists she learns about in school look like her, she thinks she will never be good at math or science. To encourage Lisa, her mother highlights the accomplishments of five Black women who have excelled in STEM. After hearing about these women, Lisa is inspired and realizes if they could achieve, then so could she.

In many ways, this book is loosely based on my own childhood experiences. Like Lisa, I had a teacher who told my fourth-grade class that boys were generally better at math than girls were. Like Lisa, I was—and still am—inspired by Black trailblazers and achievers. I knew I was not the only young Black girl who wanted to study STEM fields, but was discouraged by the narrative that girls were not suited for such careers. I wrote this book to benefit my younger-self, and to empower other Black children.

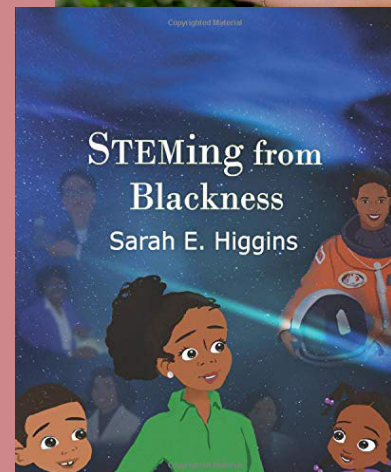
My journey to becoming a self-published author was anything but a straight line. The writing process itself took a few months, but I did not have the slightest idea how to turn my manuscript into a finished product. The thought of submitting

my manuscript to publishers seemed daunting, thus I talked myself out of it. Just as I was finishing my manuscript, I decided to go to law school. Studying for the LSAT seemed like a legitimate reason to put my book on the back burner. But as I matriculated through law school, I would occasionally open my manuscript on my computer. Even though I was no longer pursuing a career in STEM, I still found inspiration in the women I highlighted. I knew that someday, I had to get my book out of my computer, and into the hands of children everywhere.

After graduating from law school and passing the bar exam, I had run out of excuses for not finishing my book. However, I needed someone to hold me accountable and guide me in the self-publishing process. I found a Black female editor who helped me polish my manuscript and connected me with an illustrator to bring my story to life. Nearly seven years after first putting pen to paper, my book was live on Amazon.

I am grateful for all the positive feedback I have received from those who purchased my book. Writing and publishing it was truly a labor of love.

I sincerely hope it motivates countless children, and adults, to aim high, to pursue their dreams, and to face their challenges head on.



AUTHOR'S CORNER

# Living My Best Life Amid a Pandemic

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Recently, I was asked to lead a breakout session at a work conference, where I would share a bucket list item I undertook during the pandemic. The breakout session was called "Living My Best Life" and while I was excited to share my endeavors, I would hardly say that I was living my best life. At the time, I was staffed on a project where I'd been working insane hours (far from my definition of living my best life). But, as I prepared for the session and had an opportunity to reflect, I slowly arrived at a place where I felt more comfortable affirming that I was indeed living my best life.

I'll cut to the chase...I wrote a book series for children.

Oddly enough, I started down this path in the wake of George Floyd's murder when my then 8-year old son, Croix, asked me, "Why does the police keep killing black people?". In that moment I wanted him to know the sad truth about this country we live in, but at the same time, I felt he deserved to know a different and better narrative.

The vision for the "Inspired to Be" book series came to me a few nights later while I was reading a bedtime story to both of my sons. They were so into the story, that I started to wonder how the story was shaping their young minds in that very moment. I started to think about how books help children develop their own narratives and how important it is for children to see themselves in positive characters. Currently, representation in books is not only very important for Black children, but it's just as important for non-Black children to see Black characters being represented in a positive light.

So, I decided to write stories inspired by the culture, experiences, and dreams of Black people with the goal of using these stories to help change the narrative of Black people in the minds of ALL children. I decided to write stories filled with inspiration from real people so that young readers could be empowered to say, "If they can do it, then so can I."

The process of writing these stories and investing my time and resources into something I truly believe in has been so fulfilling. Not only am I doing something that will have a positive impact on the lives of young people,

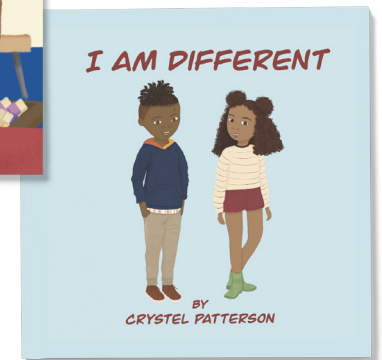
but I'm also creating a legacy. Given the demands of my job, my inclination should have been to step away from working on the series until things settled down at work, yet something in my soul told me I needed to push

through and stay committed. Imagine working 20 hours a day, 7 days a week, not spending time with your family, and barely having time to do things like eat or shower, but still making time to work on a side project? I discovered that writing and sharing these stories is my passion. I struggled all my life to truly pinpoint what my passion was and suddenly, my son asked me a pointed question, and I stumbled across my passion (life is so funny sometimes).

While my work-life balance isn't always ideal, being able to do something that I feel so passionate about allows me to feel like I'm living my best life. When I see videos of children reading and enjoying my first self-published book, I feel like I'm living my best life. When I visit classrooms and read my book to students, and they say that the story is "inspiring", I feel like I'm living my best life. When I read a review by someone I don't know, who sings high praises about my book and asserts that it's a must-read for every child, I feel like I'm living my best life. When I tell adults about my vision for the "Inspired to Be" series and they tell me that they can't wait to get all the books for the children in their lives, I feel like I'm living my best life. For me, there's no better feeling than to feel like you're living your best



life so I'm thankful to my son for helping me to find my passion and making it possible for me to live my best life.



With that, I'd like to leave you with this: my mission is to reach and inspire as many children possible with my books and I'd love your support. Here's how you can help:

1. Purchase my first book, *One Flip, Two Flip, Three Flip, Four*, for the children in your life. You can also pre-order my next book, *I Am Different*. Both books are available on my website: [www.crystelpatterson.com](http://www.crystelpatterson.com)
2. Share your thoughts about my book/series with your networks. A book review on Amazon also goes a long way.
3. Refer people to my website to learn more about the series and purchase books. Teachers, school administrators, or anyone else can request free author read aloud sessions for groups of children (Kindergarten through 2nd grade is ideal).

I hope that I can inspire you all – no matter where you are in life- to live your best life!



AUTHOR'S CORNER

# Mismatched Shoes: A Shift in Perspective

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**The day after I was released from the hospital, I scheduled an appointment with my hairstylist. I barely touched my hair during the thirty-one days I was hospitalized undergoing chemotherapy. A part of me was scared that it would fall out if I washed it. So, I kept it wrapped tightly in a scarf, only brushing or combing it when it became unbearably itchy.**

I scooted anxiously into a black leather styling chair as my hairstylist draped a black plastic cape over my shoulders. She unwrapped my long, straightened tresses from the scarf bondage and carefully combed through it. The familiarity of the hair dryers, the style magazines, and the smell of shampoo mixed with hot curling irons made me temporarily forget about the trauma of the cancer diagnosis that had flipped my life upside down just a short month ago. As my hairstylist, Kania, combed through my long strands, the hair shed quite a bit, so she recommended

cutting my mid-back length hair to a shoulder-length cut. I willingly agreed, feeling relieved that there was still a good amount of hair left even after the shedding.

After the cut, I leaned back into a large black basin for my hair to be washed. It felt so refreshing to feel the warm water rinse away the buildup of dirt and grime accumulated over the past month. After the shampoo application, I noticed Kania getting quieter and quieter, until after about five minutes she turned the water off and said, "Mel, it all came out."

She didn't have to explain what "it" was. I already knew that my long, flowing hair, my crowning glory, was gone. I had prayed, "Lord, if I have to go through cancer, please do not let me lose my hair." One of the most pervasive images associated with cancer is a stark, bald head, as hair loss is one of the most common side effects of chemotherapy. Grappling internally with my cancer diagnosis was difficult enough. I was not prepared for outward signs publicly broadcasting my battle. It took everything in me to not scream in anguish.

Through tears I asked softly, "Can you wrap my head in a drying towel before you lift me up from the washbowl. I do not want to see myself bald."

Kania took a white hair drying towel and wrapped it securely around my head as she lifted my head up slowly from the wash basin. She sat down across from me and offered the kindest words of compassion.

"You are beautiful with or without hair. I will not let this hold you back. If you want, I will make you a custom wig, fitted to your head. It will look more natural than a wig from the wig shop. Just know that you don't need it. Your inner beauty is what makes you beautiful on the outside."

I thanked her for the generous offer and apologized for reacting so emotionally. Thankfully, I was the only client in the salon. I left with my head still wrapped in the white salon towel. I'm sure I looked absolutely ridiculous, but I didn't care. I was devastated. I could not imagine what I looked like without hair, and I did not want to find out. The towel was staying on.

My dad had flown in earlier that day and I tried not to let the disappointment of my hair loss overshadow my excitement for his visit. He gave me a puzzled expression upon seeing the white salon towel wrapped around my head and I realized there was no way around the subject.

I explained, "I lost all of my hair and I am not ready to face what I look like without it. With the towel, I can at least imagine my hair is still under there." I gave the towel a reassuring pat as he looked at me quite perplexed.

"What if you get too hot? At some point you're going to have to take the towel off," he teased.

"I am not taking it off," I stubbornly declared. "I can always turn the air up."

Dad rubbed his own head, which was balding in the middle, and jokingly said, "I'm glad I'm not self-conscious about my bald head."

I shook my head and glared at him. "Really, Dad?" Leave it to my father to joke about something I was completely devastated about.

Yet, he was demonstrating a few valuable lessons that I had learned a few months earlier during an occasion I like to call "Mismatched Shoes." As the name suggests, I went to work one day wearing mismatched shoes. And I'm not talking about slightly different shoes, where one was navy and one was black. No, I am talking about one shoe was cream-colored and pointy-toed with a thin heel, while the other was brown with a square toe and thick heel. I had put on both shoes that morning to compare, and in my haste, forgot to look down at my feet and commit to one pair. I didn't realize I was wearing the mismatched shoes until I pulled into the parking lot at work. I looked at my feet as I was getting out of the car and had that "oh snap" moment. There wasn't enough time to go back home and change before my first meeting nor was there a store close enough for me to try and get a quick alternative. So, I had to roll with it.

Upon entering the building, I walked swiftly to my morning meeting, hoping no one would notice. I wasn't so lucky. I received quite a few stares and interesting comments. One person even turned around as I passed and said, "Umm, did you lose a bet?" All I could do was look at my shoes and laugh. When I ran into my manager, he told me, "Act like you did it on purpose. Do you know how many people start trends because they are confident wearing something wacky?"

I didn't start a trend for mismatched shoes and I now only try on one shoe at a time. But, his advice helped me get through what could have been an extremely embarrassing day and taught me three important things:

- 1) Everything can change with a small shift in perspective,
- 2) Confidence is the most important thing you can wear, and
- 3) Learn to laugh at and embrace life's little imperfections (just like my Dad who rubbed his bald head and made a joke out of it).

That evening I decided I would take the towel off. My Dad and I stood together in front of the mirror as I slowly unwrapped it. With my eyes closed, I pulled the loosened towel off my head and immediately felt cooler. Before I could open my eyes, my Dad blurted, "You have a pretty good-looking head." I opened my eyes to a perfectly round, smooth bald head. "It certainly doesn't look like a conehead," he mentioned with a smirk. My father and I locked eyes in the mirror and bellied over in a fit of laughter.

Finding humor in this situation helped me put things into perspective. I was blessed to still be alive. In the grand scheme of things, losing my hair was merely a temporary side effect rather than a monumental tragedy in my war on cancer. When I shifted my perspective, I realized that having no hair was actually one less thing I had to worry about. I certainly wouldn't be having any bad hair days.

(Excerpt taken from "Through It ALL, A Survivor's Memoir" written by the author. To read more or purchase the book, go to <https://melstrong.com>)



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