

# OUR FATHERS IN THEIR OWN WORDS

CONTRARY TO WHAT WE OFTEN SEE AND HEAR, **BLACK MEN ARE SOME OF THE COUNTRY'S MOST ACTIVE PARENTS.** HERE A FEW SHARE THEIR STORIES  
EDITED BY CHARREAH K. JACKSON AND LAUREN N. WILLIAMS



ARNALDO SILVA + VANESSA SILVA-WELCH

## Beating Breast Cancer

THE BRONX NATIVE OPENS UP ON HOW HIS DIAGNOSIS SAVED HIS DAUGHTER'S LIFE AS TOLD TO GINA ROBERTS-GREY

One morning about ten years ago, a shower changed my life. While washing, I felt a lump in my chest. I assumed it was an ingrown hair. A few months later, the lump had grown. My wife suggested I have it checked by our family doctor, who justified my nonchalance and said it was fatty tissue. The lump continued to grow. My gut told me something wasn't right. My daughter, Vanessa, urged me to get a second opinion. That doctor recommended a biopsy. "You have male breast cancer," my doctor said casually. The news was as scary as it was puzzling. My doctor explained I had joined the ranks of men who made up about 1 percent of all breast cancer cases. Breast cancer runs in my family. I lost a sister at age 47 and all five of my paternal

COURTESY OF SUSAN G. KOMEN

“It's not every day a father-daughter pair fights breast cancer together.” —ARNALDO SILVA

aunts to the disease. Still, I never thought I'd experience breast cancer firsthand.

I found myself sitting in a waiting room filled with women, waiting for my mammogram. Everyone's eyes were on me. The results indicated we needed to move fast. I had stage 2 cancer that spread to my lymph nodes. My doctor prescribed surgery to remove my right breast.

As part of my treatment, my doctor recommended genetic testing to see if I carried either of the BRCA gene mutations, which greatly increase a person's risk of breast, ovarian and other cancers. Learning I did carry the BRCA2 mutation helped me connect the dots between my health and the women in my family. My gene mutation came from my father's side. My father died of prostate cancer, of which the BRCA mutation also increases the chances.

Once I processed the fact that about 2,470 men will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year, I went into papa bear mode. I was determined to make sure my kids and nephews were screened, including for the mutation. I urged them to talk to their doctors about their risk, and to make sure they knew every lump, hair and mark on their bodies and have anything out of the ordinary checked.

For me, chemotherapy and radiation followed, but so did unimaginable heartache. Vanessa, one of my four children, was in her early

thirties, so her doctor recommended she have a mammogram due to my history and her BRCA gene mutation. The test revealed that my daughter had breast cancer, and we sought treatment simultaneously.

It's not every day a father-daughter pair fights breast cancer together. Unfortunately, we knew the side effects and fears the other might experience.

It was my genes that were the reason she was sick, but my doctors have stressed that getting my diagnosis and urging awareness among our family saved my daughter's life. Without it, she might not have been screened as early and her disease could have hit an incurable stage. She's had to fight breast cancer three times, has had both breasts removed and just completed her third course of chemotherapy this February.

A year and half after my initial diagnosis, a mammogram detected a lump on my left side. My doctor gave me choices of a lumpectomy or breast removal to treat my Stage 0 breast cancer. I chose removal again.

Every day I open my eyes, I look at it as a gift. I make the most of it by trying to help prevent one man—or woman—from dying of this disease.

*Arnaldo Silva is a Susan G. Komen More than Pink Hero, someone who has had a significant impact on the fight to end breast cancer.*

FATHER'S DAY SPECIAL



FARAJI + NAJYA HANNAH-JONES

# RAISING a Black Girl in Trump's America

HOW ONE DAD IS TEACHING HIS FIRST-GRADER TO LOVE HERSELF AND KNOW HER POWER

As told to Rebecca Carroll

**M**y 7-year-old daughter, Najya, has always known Barack Obama as the President. When Trump was elected, she had a lot of questions: "What about Barack Obama? Well, where is he? Is Donald Trump President? How did he get to be President? Daddy, did you vote for him?" I did sense that maybe she was panicked about it—I know she's worried that he doesn't want people from other countries to come into our country.

My anxiety for her is that some of the things my wife and I try to teach her will now be diminished. We tell Najya that there are no barriers for her—if she wants to try something, she should try. Look at what Hillary Clinton did. Even though she didn't win, she fought, and we all have the right to fight. There's something to learn from losing. It doesn't mean you stop. You keep going. If as parents we're educating our kids about slavery and how Black people are oppressed, we

can't teach that without telling them about the rebellions or without showing them what protest looks like. We want Najya to be able to feel it, to be in the atmosphere of what is happening.

When I had a daughter, the first thing that came to my mind was, *I'm not just raising my daughter, I'm raising someone's wife, someone's mother.* She can be anything she wants to be, but I also understand what she's up against. And I know that I have to use my own adversities as a Black man to help her overcome whatever stands in her way. To other fathers of girls, I would say place your daughters on the highest pedestal that you possibly can. Keep instilling the values that you want for them. And for those who have sons, teach your sons to respect girls and women.

I take Najya to the skate park and point out the young girls who are out there skating. I want her to see them and talk to them, because that's part of teaching her about her own empowerment. No matter who is in office or what barriers are in your way, you have the tools to bring those barriers down and you don't have to do it alone, because there are other girls like you who are doing the same thing. That's what the Trump presidency should ignite—it shouldn't discourage young girls; it should encourage and empower them to fight.



**Rebecca Carroll** (@rebell9) is editor of special projects at WNYC public radio. Her writing has appeared in such publications as *The New York Times* and *Harper's Bazaar*, and she is the author of five nonfiction books about race in the U.S., including *Sugar in the Raw* and *Saving the Race*.

## HEAL YOUR HEART

Father's Day is not a happy time for every woman. **ESSENCE.com** columnist Dr. Sherry tells how to make peace with pain from your past

**Own your truth.** Be honest with your feelings and share them with your father. Let him know how his actions impacted you. If that is not possible, write him a letter.

**Manage your emotions.** Remember that Father's Day is only 24 hours. Don't look at triggers that remind you of what you are missing. Limit social media.

**Seek encouragement.** A lot of support is out there. We have friends who have fathers who will embrace us if we allow. If your dad is deceased, you can honor him by doing something that you enjoy.

**Reset your expectations.** Your father is one man and does not represent all men. Every relationship is different. Decide how you expect to be treated by men, because that is the type of person you will attract. Focus on being loved as you desire.

COURTESY OF FARAJI HANNAH-JONES

# Making Up for LOST TIME

STAN McCRARY + MARIE LEGGETTE

THIRTY-SIX YEARS AGO HE REFUSED TO BELIEVE THE BABY WAS HIS. NOW THIS FATHER IS TRYING TO MAKE THINGS RIGHT

**W**hen I was 19 years old, my daughter's mother told me she was pregnant. We'd been dating for a few months, but we'd broken up and it was a tumultuous situation. Because of the circumstances and the timing, I didn't believe the baby was mine. Back then, my ex and I were in the military, based in Virginia. Not long after she informed me of the pregnancy, she was transferred to San Diego and we lost touch.

Thirteen years later, when I was stationed in Hawaii, we passed each other at a military commissary. I was with my wife and our three children, and my ex was with her husband and their children. Later my ex approached me and said that one of the children was my daughter Marie. I didn't believe her. She asked me to take a paternity test. I agreed, but only if she paid for it. She refused; I never took one.

Ten years later, on Father's Day 2005, my phone rang. The woman on the other

end of the line said I was her father. I was still skeptical, but my sister and wife encouraged me to give it a chance. Eventually Marie and I started talking by phone a few times a month.

When Marie was 32, we finally met in person. It was a roller coaster of emotions.

There was excitement but also the sadness of realizing that I have a child I never knew existed and that I hadn't been there like I was with the rest of my children. Marie told me she'd felt unwanted. But had I known she was mine, I would have ensured she had everything she needed from her father—things that money can't buy. Now I ask her questions about her life so that I can provide fatherly input. We are working on building trust, understanding and communication.

What makes me feel the best is when we finish talking on the phone and I say, "I love you," and she says, "I love you" back. Hearing her call me Dad—that makes me feel alive too. And blessed.

As told to Jeannine Amber



JAMES JOHNSON + JASMINE POWELL + JESSICA JOHNSON

A YOUNG DAD THOUGHT HE WAS DOING RIGHT BY HIS KIDS, BUT HE HAD NO IDEA HOW MUCH THEY MISSED HIM

**I** got married at 20. My oldest daughter, Jasmine, was born the next year. By the time her sister, Jessica, came around two years later, the marriage had hit the rocks. At the time, I was in the Air Force, stationed in Delaware, where my parents lived. When I was ordered to the Philippines in 1987, my daughters, who were 1 and 3, went to live with my parents.

I was overseas for four years and my relationship with my daughters was reduced to phone calls. But when I moved back to the States and was stationed in Arizona, I still only saw my girls about once a year.

My mother told me I needed to build more of a bond with them or they would grow to resent me. But I didn't get it at the time. I kept telling myself, *They're okay.* But what I didn't realize was the emotional void my absence had created.

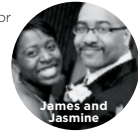
As a man, you think, *I'm in the military; I'm working.* I thought phone calls,

money, presents—stuff like that—would suffice. It wasn't until a couple of years ago, when Jessica told me she could count the number of times she had actually seen me when she was a child, that it hit me: Our relationship wasn't what I thought it was.

I've been apologizing to my daughters for years. I don't give them excuses. I just tell them I wish I had been a better man, the man I am now. Now when they call me and say they need me to be physically present, I go.

When Jasmine got married, I walked her down the aisle. We did the father-daughter dance, and it felt good. Jessica and I are still working on our relationship. When I talk to her, it's like I'm in school: I'm studying her, listening to what she is saying and really thinking about it. Reconnecting takes work. But now we're able to talk through things as they arise. At this point what we have is good.

As told to Jeannine Amber



KERN CARTER

# Daddy's HOME

A YOUNG FATHER GETS REAL ON ADJUSTING TO RAISING HIS DAUGHTER UNDER HIS ROOF

When I was 19, my daughter, Krystasia, was born. I dropped out of high school to get a job, thinking that's what a father should do. I didn't grow up with my father and wanted a different experience for my child. I also moved in with her mother and left my mother's home. My mother didn't speak to me for months after the decision. When I held my only child for the first time at 7 pounds, 11 ounces, it was a moment I will never forget and made everything worth it.

Now Krystasia is 14 and dreams of being a designer and modeling for Adidas. Over breakfast in our apartment in Toronto, we now joke about what we see in our Instagram feeds.

Things weren't always so calm. A year ago her mother and I were still in a custody battle, which can be emotionally, psychologically and financially draining for parents.

Within a year of Krystasia's birth, I had returned to school through a night program and then moved to New York to go to college so I could be in a better position to provide

for her. Her mother and I had ended our two-year relationship and worked out an arrangement in which Krystasia split her time between us about evenly.

As my daughter got closer to her teenage years, I could sense tension between her and her mother. I decided it was time for Krystasia to try living with me. For months my daughter's mother and I went back and forth in the courtroom.

In the end I was awarded full custody, but I didn't win. There are no real winners. I'm not proud that we weren't able to reach an agreement on raising our daughter without intervention, though I am grateful for the court's decision.

I'm absolutely in love with my daughter, and our living together full-time has been incredible for us both. We've found our favorite restaurants and I've learned to be a better shopper.

I encourage Krystasia to cultivate the relationship with her mother and two younger sisters. The custody ordeal was a little traumatic, so I constantly



Kern and Krystasia Carter



Stephen Curry and Riley Curry

# 2.5

million Black fathers live with their children, while around 1.7 million live apart, says *All In*, a book about our work-first culture.



Chris Rock and Lola Rock

Dads know you can't, won't get this love anywhere else. We are the chosen few. The responsibility is heavy, but the duty is an honor."

—Chance the Rapper

**“I am a young, Black single father raising a teenage daughter. It's meant asking her to adjust.”**

ask her, “Are you doing okay? Is this crazy for you? You know that you can call your mom anytime you want, right? Do you miss your sisters?”

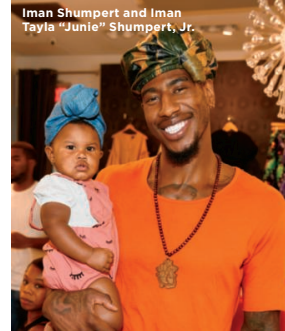
“Yes, no, I know, sometimes.” Those are her typical responses, like a typical teenager's. I get more details by studying her behavior, gauging her moods and speaking with her teachers. They say she is a gem and talks with other students.

My mother, the first person to know about the arrival of my daughter's monthly friend, is also an amazing support.

I am a young, Black single father raising a teenage daughter. It has meant asking her to adjust. It's about understanding she is already transitioning from a girl to a young woman.

I trust Krystasia will be all right. I hope our relationship will be the benchmark for how she expects to be treated by men in the future. She recently shared scripture with me from the Book of Matthew: “So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself.” And that's what we are doing—letting what's best for today be enough.

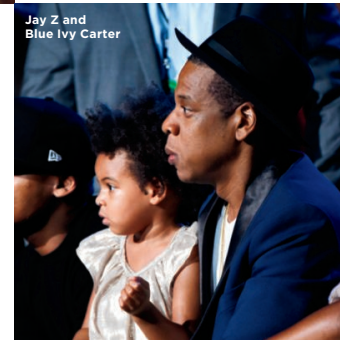
COURTESY OF SUBJECTS



Iman Shumpert and Iman Tayla “Junie” Shumpert, Jr.

# love >

Black fathers are the most involved with their kids on a daily basis of any other group of fathers, according to a CDC report.



Jay Z and Blue Ivy Carter

Our children don't need us to be superheroes. They don't need us to be perfect. They need us to be present. They need us to show up and give it our best shot.”

—Former President Barack Obama



Jamie Foxx and Annalise Bishop

# 67%

of Black dads who don't live with their children see them at least once a month, the Pew Research Center estimates. □