

DIANE R. PAYLOR
Editor-in-Chief



intro

Heart to Heart

I have a confession. I LOVE love stories. I love the real ones, the fictional ones, romances that start off bad but then turn good, and I love the slow-burns. I blame my mother, who was an avid reader of romance novels, for my love affair with love stories. Her weekly trips to the bookstore usually resulted in a purchase of seven or eight books, with at least two earmarked for me.

In the early 1980s, when Harlequin teen love novels became a thing, my mother would bring home the latest releases for me. I was hardly a teenager when I started reading those books, but when I think about the stories, I can't help but laugh. They were purely puppy love. And I would eat it all up. Like my mother, my head was often buried in a romance novel. I'd read the stories into the night eager to find out how the lovers would make their way back to one another after something (or someone) tore them apart.

By the time I was an actual teenager, I'd written a few stories of my own. The most memorable was a play titled "Love is a Many Splendored Thing." The title didn't quite fit with the story, but it had the dramatic flair I wanted. The plot was also pretty intricate for a young writer, although my presentation was not. I wrote the entire play by hand on three-hole punched loose leaf paper. I was so proud of it. I urged my mother to take my masterpiece to her job and share it with her coworkers. And she did. She reported back that everyone was impressed and thought I had a "vivid imagination."

As I matured, my love for love stories expanded to love songs and movies. I have many faves, and depending on the day and time, my list is subject to change. But there is one song that drives me to tears every single listen. It's "Evergreen" by Barbra Streisand. From the moment the song begins, the waterworks stream down my face.

Unfortunately, my romantic life has not played out like the many books, songs and movies I love.

I'm still wondering why my Jake Ryan has not shown up to celebrate my birthday with me. A trench coat-wearing Lloyd Dobler has not stood outside my house with a boombox hoisted above his head blasting Peter Gabriel. Harry hasn't shown up to a New Year's Eve party to profess his love. And Jerry must have lost his key because he hasn't made it into the house to tell a room full of my girlfriends how I complete him.

Although my foray into love and romance has not evolved into a commitment of forever, I still believe in the ultimate power and beauty

of love. I find the stories of how people from all walks of life find one another and discover "this is it ... this is my person" charming and inspirational. There just isn't anything better. Okay, yes. Of course, self-love. But still, I LOVE love and get all mushy inside over stories of happily ever after and I'm not ashamed to admit it.

Because it's February and the editorial team and I couldn't help ourselves, the theme for the issue is "Love and Romance." On our cover are Antecia and Luke Whitehead, one of

the couples featured in the From "Meet Cute" to Forever article (page 22). It was an absolute pleasure to chat with the six couples profiled to learn when they met, how they became a couple and decided they wanted forever with one another.

There are other fantastic goodies in this issue including Caught in a Bad Romance (page 50). Coralie McEachron, our relational and sex therapist, explores the difficulty of being with a partner who sets your loins on fire but also destroys your spirit. The Health and Wellness Guide (page 52) is a primer on how to take care of your heart literally. Hypertension, or high blood pressure, is the leading risk factor for heart disease.

We literally put our hearts into this issue. I hope you enjoy taking this journey through love and romance with us. ■

Although my foray into love and romance has not evolved into a commitment of forever, I still believe in the ultimate power and beauty of love.

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Editor-in-Chief



intro

And So It Begins

Six years ago in January and a few days shy of my birthday, I checked myself in for a 10-day course in Vipassana meditation. As the booklet I was given upon my arrival said, Vipassana is “a method of purification which allows one to face life’s tensions in a calm, balanced way.” Those who are familiar with Vipassana know of it because of the vow of noble silence (no talking, reading, or communicating with others in any way) that is taken during the course.

For a motor mouth like myself, it would seem odd that I would want to do something like Vipassana. But this motor mouth was in need of help. Vipassana is a meditation technique that explores the connection between the mind and the body via the observance of physical sensations. I like to break it down more simply. To me, Vipassana is the art of learning how to deal with life for folks who aren’t too good at it (but make people think they are). Hello, I am folks. Folks is me.

Here’s what we all know to be true. Stuff happens. It’s always happening. But how do you get to a place where you are surrounded by stuff and not have it disturb your peace? As a chronic worrier and insomniac, it’s what I wanted/needed to learn.

A few years prior to signing up for the Vipassana course and after noticing how stressed, tired and worried I was, a dear friend who had taken the Vipassana course suggested I give it a try. I scoffed at the idea. I told her it wasn’t for me. I was a scripture kind of woman, although casting my burdens was not something I was good at. Anxiety was my game. But the more I struggled, the idea of doing the Vipassana course became more interesting. Perhaps it would teach me some tools? Maybe I’d learn how to finally enjoy my life instead of worrying about it all the time?

On January 4, 2017 I decided to give it a try. I surrendered the keys to my car, my phone, all of

my electronic devices and pens and paper (yes, everything), and promised to be open to learning Vipassana for 10 days. There was no talking to anyone. No emails. No check ins with the family. Nothing but total silence and meditation. The outcome? I absolutely loved it!

I will say that I had far more meditation breakthroughs when I wasn’t in the group setting. When we were allowed to meditate in our rooms, I found myself practicing the Vipassana technique much more successfully than I did

when I was in the meditation hall with the 60-90 other attendees. By the end of the 10-day course I was ready to be a monk. Okay, not really. But I did not want to leave. I was afraid I wouldn’t be able to sustain the daily meditation practice and I’d forget how to be equanimous when challenged. Truth bomb: It’s still a struggle.

As the editorial team and I worked on this issue which covers several “alternative wellness” topics, memories about my first meditation “sit” came to mind. While I was able to maintain a regular daily meditation practice for several weeks after returning from my Vipassana course in 2017, since then my meditation practice has waned. Inconsistent

is a good word to describe how it’s been going. But there’s something about the New Year (and working on this issue) that has inspired me to try in 2023 to be more consistent.

I’m not making any resolutions, but I am gonna try to follow the advice of the wise experts who have shared some stellar advice in this issue. I’m inspired to form good habits (page 46), get back into some of the practices I picked up during my pre-cancer yoga journey (page 42) and I’m definitely giving the action steps a go to manifest my best life (page 32). There’s plenty in this first issue of *Today’s Woman* for 2023 to help me and you kick the New Year off right. Let’s do this! ■

Those who are familiar with Vipassana know of it because of the vow of noble silence (no talking, reading, or communicating with others in any way) that is taken during the course.

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intro

My Year In Review

One of the things I am most proud of is that five years ago I obtained my yoga teacher certification. Prior to the pandemic and before my cancer diagnosis, I was teaching multiple, packed yoga classes per week at various locations. As someone whose fire for yoga had been burning strong since I first began to study the practice, in 2022 that fire dimmed significantly. It wasn't because I no longer wanted to teach or practice, but life circumstances made it impossible for me to continue.

Earlier this year, one of the managers at the YMCA location where I taught classes, reached out to me. He asked if I was ready and interested in coming back. I have not taught since March 2020. My last class was a few days before the COVID lockdown. Since that time my life went topsy turvy. My mother was diagnosed with breast cancer but then died of COVID. My oldest brother had a medical emergency that resulted in him losing a limb. And I was told I had cancer.

Though I am in remission, I wrote the manager of the YMCA back to advise him that I couldn't return. I refrained from telling him what I had been feeling and fearing about my future as a yoga teacher – that it was over. I am grateful to have won my cancer battle, but the journey left my mind and body in a place that made teaching impossible. Although my hair, eyebrows and eyelashes have returned, I spent the bulk of 2022 feeling like a stranger in my own skin.

Physically, I had gained an enormous amount of weight as a result of my surgery and treatment. Emotionally, I wasn't even sure I had the capacity to hold space for others as the weight of my own traumas (cancer, grief, fear of recurrence) were all too burdensome. There was no way I could teach.

As I shared in my Intro in the September 2022 issue of *Today's Woman*, I have been a writer and editor since my teens. My first job in the magazine industry was at the age of 21. But teaching yoga made me feel something I don't believe I ever truly experienced in my professional life – happiness.

I'm a go-getter. Achieving my goals is important to me. But there is a difference between the pride of achievement and happiness. For me, yoga became a much-needed refuge from work environments that were seemingly intent on destroying my spirit with daily microaggressions and other bad juju.

Working as a yoga teacher afforded me the freedom to prioritize my own wellness way while encouraging others to do the same. But COVID and cancer put the kibosh on it. After getting through 12 months of treatment, I spent a significant part of 2022 searching for the keys to the Delorean so I could press rewind and go back to who and where I was before everything happened.

But there is no going back to yesterday or teaching at the YMCA. I've cried about it... a lot. I could hear my mother's stern voice – the one she always had when I cried and felt powerless. "What are you going to do about it?" she'd say. So often I felt her gruff tone was not what I needed from her but always turned out to be exactly what I needed.

Having spent many months of this year lamenting how so many things have changed for me, I started to ask myself the same question that I know my mother would. "What are you going to do about it, Diane?" I'd say to myself.

I'll be honest. Coming up with the answer had been hard. While my heart is filled with tremendous gratitude to be able to get to the last month of the year cancer free and in good health, it was my therapist insisting that I find new ways to experience myself that finally resonated. Instead of reminiscing about what was, she encouraged me to find joy and happiness in what is.

I laugh now as I think about the significance of her words. She didn't know it (at least I don't think she did), but what she was telling me to do was yoga – the off the mat kind. Or as it is formally called in the Yoga sutras, "pratiksha bhavan." That is, when plagued by negative or troubling thoughts, counter them with positivity. You've heard this more colloquially in your day -to-day as "accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative." Or simply put: shift your perspective.

As we close out 2022 for *Today's Woman*, in celebration of the holidays and to cultivate a positive outlook for 2023, our theme for this issue is "health, wealth and happiness." I hope as you read through the pages you'll be reminded as I was that sometimes the only thing that has changed or needs to change for you to feel better about your life and be able to pursue your passions is your perspective. Happy Holidays! I'll see you next year! ■

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DIANE R. PAYLOR
Editor-in-Chief



intro

Baby Face?

There's a meme floating around the internet of a cute little Black girl who couldn't be more than five years old and the text on the picture says "Black women are like... I'll be 50 next month." The first time I saw the meme I think I laughed for a good 15 minutes, because that's been my life in a nutshell. I've always had a baby face.

As a height-challenged young girl who had Rodney Allen Rippey cheeks that folks couldn't resist pinching, my mother would tell the people at the movie theater that I was younger than I was so she could purchase the child's ticket instead of paying the regular admission price. I knew better than to announce my age otherwise I would get the mommy death stare.

As I got older and could no longer get away with passing for super-young thanks to puberty, I would complain to my mother about my baby face dilemma. Her response was that I'd appreciate looking younger when I was older.

The appreciation was slow coming, because I found myself fighting way too hard to get people to take me seriously. During my sophomore year in college while on a break between classes, a school administrator stopped me and chastised me for cutting classes. I couldn't figure out what he was talking about. Then it dawned on me. He thought I was one of the students from the campus high school. I meekly said to him, "I'm a college sophomore." Then walked away.

In my early 20s, after spending a few years as a staff writer a national magazine, I left the publication and decided to get my real estate salesperson license. A friend had gotten hers and was doing exceptionally well. She filled my head with stories of how much money I would be able to make from renting and selling properties all around New York City. Despite having what she said were the tools to excel, I didn't. There were countless times

I'd show up to take a prospective renter or buyer through a property and I would be met with strange looks and questions about what I really know about real estate. One client challenged who I said I was and asked for a business card to verify. He said I looked too young to be selling real estate and he was expecting someone more senior. I eventually let my real estate license expire because no one wanted to buy from the baby-faced agent.

In my early 30s during a night out with friends who were in their 40s, the doorman of a popular nightclub let my whole party into the venue except for me. He never bothered to check their IDs. As soon as I tried to enter the place, he put his hands out in front of my body and said, "We're not losing our liquor license because of you. You better show me some ID." I told him that once he looked at my ID, I wanted free drinks all night! I didn't even drink alcohol, but I felt that I needed something to validate that while I didn't look like one, I was an adult. I handed my license to the doorman and watched him inspect it closely. He looked at me as he handed my license back and shook his head in disbelief. As I walked by him to enter the venue, I heard him say under his breath, "Baby face!"

Throughout my life, age has been a huge issue for me. There has never been a time when I haven't felt the need to share how old I am because telling my age has been the only way I've felt I would be taken seriously. I've never had the luxury of being ageless, because I was too busy making sure others wouldn't dismiss me based on my youthful looks.

Now that I am in my 50s... (See? I did it again. Old habits die hard!) I often think about my mother's words that I'll appreciate my baby face more when I'm older. I wouldn't say I appreciate these looks more now. What I can say is that the one thing getting older has taught me is that I don't have to prove anything to anyone about who I am. If that ain't a blessing, I don't know what is. ■

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intro

With Loving Care

I've never been one to shy away from difficult conversations. I pride myself on my ability to form my thoughts and express my inner most feelings. But one of the most difficult conversations I ever had to have was with my oncologist after he informed me that he had removed a tumor over 4 inches in size during my radical hysterectomy with bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy surgery. (Fancy medical terms for my female organs were removed.)

Believe it or not, hearing that the tumor was malignant, ugly and that I was likely to have stage 3 cancer wasn't that hard for me. For months, I prepared myself for my diagnosis. My symptoms had gone off the rails, and by the way I was feeling, I knew what was going on in my body was no small deal. With each new medical test I would say, "just give me my cancer diagnosis so I can move to the next step." But when the formal diagnosis came down, I couldn't get to the next step without first having a talk with my doctor. The talk ended up being a plea for him to truly care about me.

I know how strange that seems, as it's supposed to be a doctor's duty to care for their patients, but implicit bias and structural racism in the medical industry, particularly for Black women, is all too real. The maternal mortality and morbidity rate for Black women in the United States is at crisis levels. Last December, Vice President Kamala Harris called for "pursuing systemic policies that provide comprehensive, holistic maternal health care free from bias and discrimination." To that end, a report by the National Academy of Medicine stated, "some people in the United States were more likely to die from cancer, heart disease, and diabetes simply because of their race or ethnicity, not just because they lack access to health care."

As a Black woman who knew she had cancer but finally had it confirmed, I wanted to go on record with my doctor to let him know my expectations. Hours after waking up from surgery, he stopped by my room and I

asked him to close the door so we could have a heart-to-heart. I proceeded to ask my doctor to help me survive. I boldly asked him to care enough about my life as a Black woman that I wouldn't become a statistic. I challenged him in planning the next stages of my care to do so as if I were a member of HIS family. I told him my life truly depended on whether he cared enough to make sure I lived.

I didn't know much about my oncologist except that he was Armenian, married, and a father of two daughters. That afternoon in my room, as I spoke, he listened. He also shared. He told me how he did his residency at a hospital in Philadelphia where his patients were largely Black and other people of color. He grabbed my hand and I knew by the tears in his eyes that he understood the significance of our conversation. He promised me that he would do everything he could to make sure I survived. I promised the same. I said I would do whatever he said I needed to do to be able to get to the finish line to say, "I am cancer free."

I did make it to the finish line. Of the many moments during my journey, that conversation with my doctor is forever etched in my memory. I am proud that I didn't choose silence and that I strongly advocated for myself and my life. I am also proud that my appeal to him for allyship, trust, care, and love were heard, received and acted upon.

I shared this story because this is our DEI, or "diversity, equity and inclusion," issue and to me there is no DEI without allyship. This issue means a lot to me. I suppose all the issues will have some significance, but the editorial team and I truly set out to build a table where everyone gets to sit and be a part of the conversation. At our table this month, we have a mom raising a transgender child, three extraordinary disabled women, the founder of Whitney/Strong, an inspiring story about the rebuilding of a house and a neighborhood, an insightful conversation about allyship, and so much more. We hope you'll pull up a chair, join us and chime in on the discussion. ■

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ALICE HOUSTON
WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP
PROGRAM

"Only 86 women are promoted to manager for every 100 men promoted to the same level, resulting in fewer women available for promotion at even higher levels."

GALLUP

"Firms with more women in senior positions are more profitable, more socially responsible, and provide safer, higher-quality customer experiences — among many other benefits..."

HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW

A women's leadership experience developed by the Leadership Louisville Center in order to **accelerate and sustain the growth of women into positions of influence.**

Organizations with greater gender diversity in management are more likely to have sustained profitable growth. Yet, women still lag behind men when it comes to promotions into management positions.

Research also shows that mid-level managers are critical in driving change, innovation, and results. This **half-year cohort experience** is designed to help mid-level women leaders master the dual role of leading others and managing up that can drive change and deliver results.

In addition to building management capability, this program tackles the unique issues and opportunities that come with being a woman in the workplace. Through reflection, coaching, and experiential learning, women in this program will build greater self-awareness, leadership presence, and resilience.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Reach out to Aimee Jewell at ajewell@leadershiplouisville.org or visit: [LEADERSHILOUISVILLE.ORG/WOMENS-LEADERSHIP](https://leadershiplouisville.org/womens-leadership)

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Life is Beautiful

I have been having trouble remembering when I first read Langston Hughes' poem, *A Dream Deferred*. It's weird because I can recall a lot of things. I remember my kindergarten graduation. I remember the exact detail of conversations I had many years ago. Hell, I even remember outfits that other people wore. But the first time I discovered this legendary piece of writing? I've got nothing.

It's so strange because the poem has been on my mind for nearly two years now.

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore—

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over—

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

In 2020, while the whole world was sheltering in place from the coronavirus, I was on a medical test taking and fact-finding journey that culminated in February 2021 when I was finally diagnosed with a malignant neoplasm of the uterus or as it's commonly known -- uterine cancer. I don't know of a soul who faces a cancer diagnosis and doesn't think about their dreams deferred. I lamented that I had not traveled around the world. I had not danced casino-style salsa in Cuba. I had not had children. I had not sold a movie script. I had not learned to DJ. I had not finished my novel. And, I had not sat at the helm of a woman's magazine. The latter had been a career goal I'd wanted for myself since I was a teenager. I kid you not.

I was always a writer. I thought I would pursue a degree in business when I got accepted into college. But the school I attended had a magnificent journalism program with a magazine production concentration. I opted to go the j-school route and told everyone how I was going to run a magazine one day. Yep. I actively pursued this dream. I sought out internships, wrote pitch letters to editors for freelance assignments and worked my way up the magazine industry ladder until I landed my first, salaried position by the time I turned 21. I wasn't on the job long before I was promoted to a staff writer position. I just knew I was on track for that editor in chief role to be sure.

But the industry I so loved was beginning to show signs of

an imminent demise. A thing called the information highway was growing in popularity and ushering in the immediate access to news and all types of media. The internet's impact on the print publishing industry had been brutal. I watched friends lose jobs and magazines head to the publishing graveyard quick fast.

I am a smart chick. I know when it's time to pivot and so I did. I pivoted left, then right, then left again and right once more, all the while watching my editor dreams dry up like that raisin in the sun Langston described. With every direction I turned, I never stopped writing. I simply found new ways to use my gift and plenty of people to write for — although it was seldom under my actual name. Each time I sat in the chemo chair or laid on the radiation table, I lamented every single one of my dreams deferred. But none festered more than the editorship role I wanted.

I cried about many things during my cancer journey — the loss of my mother to COVID, the removal of my organs, my hair falling out, the changes in my body, and all the dreams I figured I would never get to see to fruition. How (insert expletive) unfair! I had worked hard my entire life as a creative. I even took jobs that weren't creative to keep the lights on and pay the bills. I didn't always love where I ended up, but I did everything I was asked to do and with excellence. Cause that's just how I do. Couldn't I have all the things I wanted out of life?

My treatment journey ended earlier this year. When my oncologist informed me that my tests were clear and there were no signs of cancer in my body, I was immobile. The roller coaster ride had come to an end. I was told I could get off the ride and go about my merry way, but I was disoriented. What do I do now? I asked. I'd spent the last few months thinking about my list and wondering how could I walk towards my dreams when the journey I'd been on barely left me with any energy to stand? What I learned is that sometimes even when you're standing still what you're looking for will find its way to you.

Being offered this opportunity to step into this role as editor in chief of *Today's Woman* is nothing short of miraculous. After many years and lots of experience doing many different things, I finally get to pursue the dream I have wanted for myself for over 30 years. I look forward to living out this dream with all of you. I am excited to tell your stories, share some of mine but also serve as a living reminder that the answer is a resounding yes! Yes, you can have the things you want.

As we explore the concept of beauty in this — my first issue with you — the fact that I am in the position to write these words at this time, on this page and for this particular magazine; I'm reminded that though it's been a long time coming, there's truly nothing more beautiful than the journey of life. ■



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