Beyond Chris & Rihanna

TROUBLED LOVE
Stepping Away When Things Go Wrong
Plus: How Men Can Be Victims, Too

BO KNOWS
Obama Dog Has Run Of The House
Path To Healing: Walking Away From Troubled Relationships

By Margena A. Christian
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After 44 hours of surgery, a prosthetic nose and right eye, Carolyn Thomas says that she looks in the mirror with a new thought.

"I stand for something," said the 38-year-old Waco, Texas, resident. "I go to conferences, churches, schools and wherever they will have me tell my stories."

Her message for abused women is to do one thing: LEAVE!

On Dec. 5, 2003, Thomas and her mother, Janice Reeves, were attacked by Thomas’ abusive ex-boyfriend, Terrence Dewaine Kelly. Thomas was shot in the face. Eighty percent of it had to eventually be reconstructed. Reeves was fatally wounded. Kelly is currently serving time in prison.

"I would hope [women] would take one look at me and say, ‘I’m going to get
out of this.’ You have to get out,” said Thomas. “There are not too many ways out. Move on before you end up dead or have to go through facial reconstruction or something might happen to your kids. Have a plan and please get out.” (carolynthomas.org)

Nineteen-year-old singer Chris Brown’s
alleged attack in February on his
girlfriend, singer Rihanna, now 21, raised
awareness about the severity of teen dat-
ing violence.

Brown recently pleaded not guilty to
two felony counts of assault and criminal
threats in the alleged beating. He will
return to court April 29 for the next hear-
ing. The young couple reportedly has put
their relationship on hold.

Each year 1.5 million women are vic-
tims of domestic violence, according to
the National Institute of Justice.

The victims and the perpetrators
come from all walks of life, all ages and
sexes. Abuse does not discriminate.

Most recently, Soul Train creator Don
Cornelius was sentenced to three years’
probation after pleading no contest to
misdemeanor spousal battery.

Tina Turner walked away from her
marriage to Ike Turner and their leg-
endary career after years of abuse. Mary
J. Blige left an abusive relationship after
having a gun placed to her head.

Halle Berry lost 80 percent of her
hearing in one ear after suffering a blow
by a former boyfriend.

“I’ve never disclosed who it was, but

that guy hit me that one time and that
was the last time,” Berry told Redbook in
2008. “[The relationship] was done the
minute he did that. The one thing my
mother always told me, ‘If a man hits you,
you leave smoke. You get to getting.’ So
I got my stuff and got going.”

Since 2000, Berry has reached out to
help women and children deal with the
effects of domestic violence through her
work at Jenesse Center, Inc., the oldest
domestic violence intervention program
in South Central Los Angeles.

Criminal justice advocate Kemba
Smith travels the country encouraging
others not to make the same mistakes
that she made, which included remain-
ing in an abusive, four-year relationship
with a violent drug dealer, Peter Hall
(JET, May 26, 2008).

“In my young mind, I thought he real-
ly cared and loved me,” said Smith, then
a 19-year-old student at Hampton Uni-
versity. “There were certain signs. Him
being controlling and isolating me from
my family and friends.”

For a minor role in a drug ring with
Hall, who was found murdered before
he could be arrested and prosecuted,
Smith ended up being sentenced to 24.5
years with no chance for parole. She
served 6.5 years in federal prison and was
granted clemency by President Bill Clin-
ton in 2000.

Smith tells people “you have to accept
a person for who they are then and not
anticipate them changing or wanting
them to change...To other young ladies in similar circumstances, it took that isolation away from that person and counseling to recognize that getting out of that relationship was the healthiest thing for me to do at the time. It’s very traumatic to experience abuse. You have to take a moment and step away and hopefully leave for good.”

Many people perceive domestic violence to be a “woman’s issue.” Not so, according to statistics.

While 1.5 million women are victims of domestic violence each year, it has been reported that 835,000 men are abused by women, according to the National Institute of Justice.

“Women can be violent like men can be violent,” said victim advocate Philip Cook, author of Abused Men: The Hidden Side Of Domestic Violence (abusedmen.com). “It’s mutual combat. There are no rules. No referee. Men tend to strike with the most ready instrument available to them, which is their hand, closed or open. Women make up for [size and weight differential] by throwing things, using weapons and catching the man by surprise.”

Slain Carolina Panthers player Fred Lane, 24, reportedly endured an abusive relationship with his estranged wife, Diedra Lane, who eventually shot him in the chest and head in 2000. After serving eight years for voluntary manslaughter, she was released from prison this year.

In March, Tampa Bay Buccaneers linebacker Geno Hayes, 21, was stabbed in the head with scissors and then stabbed in the neck with a knife, allegedly by his 19-year-old girlfriend, Shevell Bagley, who was charged with aggravated battery with a deadly weapon.
Men, like abused women, keep it a secret, said Cook.

“They have the same effects and same type of incidents,” he said. “There is very little difference in how they respond. The only difference is in what services are available to men compared to women. They have no place to call. It’s called the women’s crisis line. What are they supposed to do if they can’t get help? When you practice discrimination, it hurts everyone.”

Stop Abuse For Everyone (SAFE) is a domestic violence organization that works with groups that are often overlooked, like abused men, gay, lesbian and transgendered victims, and the elderly (safe4all.org).

Quentin Walcott, director of CONNECT Training Institute and Community Empowerment Program in New York, began facilitating batterer’s intervention groups throughout New York 12 years ago.

“Ultimately, it is a choice to abuse,” he said. “The fact is the perpetrator will use a variety of reasons to rationalize that choice. Men who abuse abuse those closest to you.”

Fathers should take an active role in their daughters’ lives, said noted journalist Ed Gordon.

Last year he founded Daddy’s Promise, an initiative that places attention on the special relationship that a father and daughter should have (daddyspromise.com).

“We’ve called for men to get more involved in their daughters’ lives in the sense of helping curb domestic violence,” said Gordon. “A lot of this behavior that continues to grow in our community and manifest itself is because young ladies don’t know what to expect from young men. Fathers play an integral role as the guardian of the house, but also in nurturing and helping to teach this young lady how to grow into a strong and productive young woman.”

April R. Silver edited Be A Father To Your Child and works closely with the Masculinity Project, which uses media to explore issues affecting Black men and the Black community (masculinityproject.org).

“One thing I found with the 24 [book] contributors was the common thread of fatherlessness,” said Silver. “The impact of what it means to be a man and fathers not being in people’s lives I found to be really important.”

Dr. Grace Cornish Livingstone became a psychologist to find out why some people are so abusive.

At the age of 10, she watched her fashion model mother get shot in the head six times. A few years later, unbeknownst to her family, an aunt was silent-

“We’ve called for men to get more involved in their daughters’ lives in the sense of helping curb domestic violence.” — Ed Gordon
Why Women Don’t Walk Away

- **INSECURITY OR LOW SELF-ESTEEM**
  "If her self-worth is tied to having a man, she will figure out ways in her mind to justify ways to go back to him even if he has struck her," said author Kevin Powell, editor of *The Black Male Handbook*. "It’s real incredible the levels of low self-esteem where people believe you aren’t a woman if you don’t have a man in your life. That’s not healthy if you think like that."

- **FEAR**
  "Either being afraid of him and being afraid of leaving him because of what he might do to you, makes women stay," said Dr. Grace Cornish Livingstone. "Or they wonder what people will think. They stay because of embarrassment, which ties in with fear."

- **I CAN FIX OR CHANGE HIM**
  "She believes that she can eventually fix him or that she can change him," said Dr. Grace. "Or, he loves her and he's going to eventually change. She stays, thinking she can help to do that, but if she leaves him he won’t."

- **HE'S SORRY**
  "She thinks he's really sorry and just won't do it again," said Dr. Grace.

- **I'M IN LOVE AND CAN'T DO WITHOUT HIM OR MAKE IT ON MY OWN**
  "They want their children to have a father figure or they believe they can't make it financially," said Dr. Grace. "With younger teenagers, they really think they are in love. They think [abuse] happens more than not because they don’t see other people leaving. They think it’s OK."

How To Actually Walk Away

- **HAVE AN ESCAPE PLAN**
  "Study his pattern. Always have an extra set of keys hidden close by, because you never know when a person might strike and you might have to leave in the middle of the night," said Dr. Grace. "Have your cell phone, private personal papers where you can get hold of them. Make sure you have gas money. When you are running, you don’t have time to pick up your pocketbook."

- **SEEK HELP**
  "You have to get help from a counselor or therapist," said Powell, once a professed abuser who remains in continuous counseling.

- **HAVE A SUPPORTIVE NETWORK OF FRIENDS**
  "Make sure you have a positive circle of girlfriends and that you’re honest with each other," said Kemba Smith. "Sometimes people get together and know each other's situation, but don’t want to seem like you’re in her business."

- **LEARN TO LOVE YOURSELF**
  "Until you really know how to do that, you will allow any and all kinds of chaos in your life. I never gave up or lost hope of love and being in a healthy relationship," said Smith, who is now preparing for a July wedding.

- **FORGIVE**
  "I think I'm a better person because I was able to forgive," said abuse survivor Carolyn Thomas. "When I was able to forgive, I was able to move on. If I didn't forgive, I wouldn't be able to help others."